

HRD panel for more autonomy to IITs

- Wants govt to fund students, not the institutions
- Sticks by its proposal to raise fee structures
- Power to appoint their own directors, board of governors

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The government-appointed committee on autonomy for the premiere Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) has recommended a novel way of ensuring financial and governance autonomy for the institutes, struggling to break free of the government controls.

Currently, the government, through the Ministry of Human Resource Development, foots the non-plan expense of the IITs, providing them most of the funding. To that extent, the autonomy of the institutes gets compromised as they have to look back at the ministry for every little thing. Though the IITs have academic autonomy, they do not yet have the power to appoint their own directors and board of governors or determine their own fee structures and future investment plans.

But IIT Bombay chairman Anil Kakodkar-led committee on autonomy (which also has Infosys doyen Mohandas Pai

on rolls) seeks to provide some solutions. In its report to HRD Minister Kapil Sibal, it recommended on Thursday that the government should stop funding the institutes directly and instead fund students to help them pay the fees.

The panel is for two types of government funding to students. While a section of the students from weaker segments can be given fellowships, others can be given loans on soft terms to enable them to foot the fee and repay it later in easy instalments. Sibal has decided to present the report to the IIT Council and has not taken a view on it.

In a meeting with him on Thursday evening, Kakodkar explained the rationale behind the new proposals that seek to allow the IITs financial and governance autonomy, while enabling students with means to pay up. The committee's first report that had recommended a four-fold fee hike from Rs 50,000 to Rs 2.5 lakh annually for IITs had met

with resistance with the government asking the members to revisit it.

In the modified version, the panel says IITs should be allowed to work out different fee structures depending on their running costs and the government should, instead of funding the institutes, fund the students. "When the government pays for most of the IIT bills, it expects some compliance from them. But if the funding is diverted to students, the IITs can have the freedom to fix financial structures that would allow them to flourish, but will simultaneously have to be competitive to ensure that students come to one IIT and not go to the other. Some IITs may decide to charge Rs 2 lakh annually, some may charge less. Fees could vary depending on costs that will, in turn, depending on the level of the IIT faculty, research standards are infrastructure," said the ministry a source, adding that fee was not an issue, financial autonomy was.