

More is more

Let the IITs hike fees, so long as they can provide financial aid for those who need it

THE IITs have long been the pride and joy of Indian education, for embodying a rare meritocratic ideal — no matter where you're from, once you're past the ferociously competitive entrance test, the IIT experience ushers you into a different world. Or so the legend goes. In recent years, IITs have been torn over the question of greater autonomy from government fiat and stricture. Now, there's some movement in that direction. A committee set up by the human resources ministry and headed by the scientist Anil Kakodkar has recommended that IIT tuition be increased up to five times, for the B.Tech and postgraduate programmes, in proportion to the expected returns on an IIT education.

They aim to make the IITs financially independent in terms of operating expenditure, and leave only scholarships, infrastructure and capital expenditure to the government. This hike, extravagant as it seems, covers only 30 per cent of the full cost for a student — the rest will still be directly or indirectly covered

by state subsidies. What's more, to make sure that this does not deter any potential student, there will also be a special loan programme, one that will require no collateral or guarantee by a guardian.

Apart from all this, the committee suggests amping up the scholarship programme — so that a quarter of the undergraduate students are fully paid for, those whose family income is less than 4.5 lakh a year will have their tuitions covered, as well as a stipend for living expenses. This also stretches to Masters' and Ph.D. candidates, leaving them free to concentrate on research. Like the IIM model, this also leaves them free to make decisions, and not depend on the government for faculty salaries, etc. The panel also recommends that each IIT board will be given the flexibility to design its own fee structure, depending on its own special requirements. This seems like an eminently sensible plan, to ensure no one is priced out of the prestigious institutes, while giving the schools greater latitude to run their own show.