

## Pushing the wrong agenda

UNION environment minister Jairam Ramesh's criticism of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and his comment that "world class research cannot take place in a government set-up" is preposterous, particularly coming from a union minister.

This, rather crude, observation appears to be part of a larger strategy of deliberately running down public research institutions in order to promote private research.

In this case, Mr Ramesh cited the lack of quality research in government-funded institutions as a pretext for setting up the national centre for marine biology at Jamnagar — a joint venture between the environment ministry and Reliance Industries Limited.

It cannot be denied that the research taking place in the IITs leaves a lot to be desired, but much of the blame for this state of affairs lies with the government itself. There are as many as 3,000 vacancies — about one-third of the total number — in Centrally Funded Technical Institutions which include the IITs and IIMs.

Teachers in these institutions are overburdened with classroom teaching, evaluation and administrative work and have little time for research. IIT teachers also have the burden of 'mentoring' the newly created IITs.

The minister needs to get his facts right and help improve the state of public research instead of pursuing his private agendas.