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# For IIT upgrade, an alternative roadmap

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**T**HE Prime minister has established a Knowledge Commission and it has a website listing its members and their e-mail addresses. If one looks hard, one can also find who the members of SAC-PM are, and write to them. But does anyone know who is in charge of plans to upgrade some existing institutes to IITs?

How does one gets in touch with them and point out the possible mistakes and make suggestions? Why are they doing things like the old days? Why the secrecy? Why the arrogance?

Can they explain why the seven institutes chosen initially to be upgraded to deemed IITs, IIT-likes, IIT-cousins—or whatever they are being called now—significantly add to the already terrible regional imbalance with respect to institutions of higher educations?

The answer is probably that they wanted to reward the best institutions in the country, regardless of where they are from. That is a fair answer. And I would accept it if it were true. Unfortunately, it is not. When the shortlist of seven were made, National Institute

of Technologies (NITs) were not considered.

So, if the idea was to pick the best institutes and upgrade them to deemed IITs, what is the logic of not considering the NITs?

The Dataquest ranking of 2005 shows that six of the handpicked seven are worse than many of the NITs.

I understand the Dataquest ranking is just another ranking, but it is clear that NITs were not considered when deciding on which institutions will be upgraded.

Apparently, the reason cited is that NITs are already Centrally funded.

But then, how fair is it that institutions inferior to NITs will now be given IIT-cousin status and possibly more funding and attention than NITs?

Moreover, there is actually one institution in India that really deserves IIT status—not that of its distant cousin. This is the IT-BHU, which has been taking students from IIT-JEE for over 25 years and ranks above a couple of existing IITs in many areas.

Perhaps someone feels that according IT-BHU a full IIT status will raise eyebrows across the country, as there will be two IITs in Uttar Pradesh.

(N.B. This writer is not an IT-BHU alumni and has no connections with IT-BHU).

Since the panel formed by the Human Resources Development Ministry does not appear able to make the right decisions (based on whatever is reported in the media) here are some suggestions for a regionally-balanced way out of this imbroglio.

■ Upgrade IT-BHU to an IIT immediately. Alongwith the planned additional 27 per cent OBC quota, this action will provide immediate relief.

■ Since it is probably too late to remove some of the institutes for deemed IIT status from the shortlist—and some of those are fine institutions—add 5-7 top NITs to the list. In the states from where these NITs are picked, upgrade another institution to be NIT-level. In the next 10 years, upgrade the rest of the existing NITs to deemed IIT status. Thus in 10 years, every major state will have an NIT and an IIT-cousin.

■ The new IITs should be built with care so as not to dilute the IIT brandname. That means they should not be made overnight. In this regard, the HRD panel is mostly right about giving the IIT-cousin sta-

tus (and not IIT-status) to the institutes that are being upgraded. The government should decide on 5-7 new IITs in states that are at the bottom of the HRD higher education funding computed per capita. As of now, Bihar, Rajasthan and Orissa are at the bottom of that list. A mini-IIT with 1-2 departments and with only MTech programmes should be established in these states in two years' time. Initially, these mini-IITs could be referred to as branch campus of an existing IIT. There should be a mandate and funding to make these mini-IITs to full-fledged IITs in 10-15 years by adding undergraduate programmes after 4-5 years and new departments every 1-2 years. In this regard a pilot programme can be immediately started at Bhubaneswar—where IIT Kharagpur has an extension center, where it already offers a PG Diploma in Information Technology and a 1.5-year part-time Diploma in intellectual property law.

These steps will not only correct the unfairness of the current proposal, but if taken, will address the regional balance in the distribution of higher education institution in a better way. Also, there will be more IITs without any dilution of the brandname or the associated quality.

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