

The “Institutes of Excellence” Sham

What is the issue?

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- The designation of universities as “Institute of Eminence” has been marred with controversies and irrationality in approach.

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- This has made the entire “higher education reform process” look like a big sham and has clearly eroded the credibility of the initiative.

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What does “Institutes of Eminence” (IoE) mean?

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- **What** - As part of the higher education reforms that is being advanced, “IoE” was proposed to be granted for some well performing universities.

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- The idea was to give these select institutions greater autonomy and support, which will enable them reach a world class status.

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- 74 public universities and 29 private universities applied for this converted status and a committee was constituted to consider the applications.

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- Three public and three private universities were ultimately awarded IoE status based on considerations like - financial stability, research excellence and good & independent governance.

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- **Fallouts** - Significantly, many deserving ‘established private institutions’ and ‘visionary Greenfield universities’ didn’t make the cut.

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- In this context, the grant of IoE status to the proposed Reliance’s Jio University even before its establishment has raised many eyebrows.

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- Among the many surprises, IIT Madras {ranked 2nd under HRD Ministry’s National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF)} also didn’t get the tag.

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What are the financial aspects related to the conferment of IoE tag?

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- For private universities, the IoE tag merely means greater autonomy for university boards and there is no promise of government's financial support.
- For the three public IoEs, the government plans to give Rs. 1000 crores over five years to help them upgrade their standards to world-class levels.
- This means, an annual budgetary allocation of Rs. 200 crores for each of these institutions, which is woefully inadequate for the task envisioned.
- Notably, the top 10 universities of the world spend about 6000 crores on an average for research work alone.
- Overall, top ten universities net an average endowment fund of over Rs. 1,24,000 crore each annually to sustain their operations.
- In this context, even our private universities are painfully underfunded with just about Rs. 5000 crores being

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What are the other concerns?

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- The committee for conferring IoE tag recommended 8 public universities for the same, but the government approved only 3.
- Notably, the government hasn't explained the rationale for this.
- Also, as there is no financial commitment for private universities, there is no reason for denying some deserving universities the coveted status.
- Hence, it can be said that the government's urge to control has overtaken the need to usher in excellence by granting more autonomy.

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Source: Indian Express

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