

Vishwajeet scheme a non-starter

Prakash Javadekar

V. Ramgopal Rao, Director of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi, on Tuesday expressed disappointment that the ambitious Vishwajeet scheme of the Union government had become a non-starter.

The scheme, which entailed the provision of Rs. 1,250 crore to each of the top seven IITs over a period of five years to upgrade infrastructure, hire foreign faculty, and collaborate with foreign institutions to break into the top league in global rankings, has reportedly been shot down by the Finance Ministry.

Director's complaint

Mr. Rao expressed his disappointment over the scheme's failure in the presence of Union Human Resource Development Minister Prakash Javadekar at a function in IIT Delhi.

"Since the Minister is here, I must also tell him that we are a little disappointed that the Vishwajeet proposal did not go through..." Mr. Rao said in his address.

"The Vishwajeet scheme was something we were desperately looking for — at least the older, top five or seven IITs were banking on it. We are already in the top 500. With a little bit of push from the government, we could make it to the top 100. The structures are there, the processes are there. All we need is an intervention in terms of financial resources."

He said he was confident that IIT Delhi would break into the top 100 in three or four years with schemes such as Vishwajeet. "I hope that we will want [this] to happen ... We would like to see the initiative taken up, and we are sure that it will happen under the current dispensation," he added.

None of the IITs are currently ranked in the world's top 350, as per the 14th edition of the Times Higher Education's World University Rankings.

More on the anvil

Responding to Mr. Rao's comment in his speech, Mr. Javadekar said the Higher Education Finance Agency (HEFA), the Uchcharat Avishkar Yojana, and the Prime Minister's proposed scholarships of Rs. 75,000 a month were schemes to be benefited from.

"You talked about Vishwajeet but we have already started three major things like Vishwajeet through other agencies. Higher Education Finance Agency is already operational. We are leveraging Rs. 2,000 crore of budgetary support in the debt market and creating Rs. 20,000 crore of funding. We are doing this to create the best research infrastructure in the higher education sector. Therefore you should be the first to demand money from HEFA. Yes, it has to be repaid but you repay it without interest. That's a great thing," Mr. Javadekar said.

The Minister added, "There is also the Uchcharat Avishkar Yojana. You must go to various industries and bring them to your campus. They will invest at least Rs. 2-3 crores annually in research excellence centres. Then there are the Prime Minister's proposed scholarships too."

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