

# IITs now have to focus on R&D which can impact society: IIT-H Director

**Professor U B Desai said that the research and development should be similar to what institutions such as the MIT in the US are doing.**

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Research work underway at IIT (Representational Image. Source: Express Photo by Tashi Tobgyal)

Having carved a niche for itself through its academic excellence, the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) should now focus on research and development that impacts society, similar to what institutions such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the US is doing, says IIT Hyderabad Director Professor U B Desai.

“Now we (IITs) have to make our name in R&D,” he said. The world today recognises and people talk about institutions such as the MIT, Stanford and Berkeley because of their

technological contributions which have impacted society, and not because of their academic programmes, he said.

“The thrust in IITs should be technological innovations and scientific research which can impact society. We have become very good at education. We have done a great job. (Now) that (focus on R&D) has to be the primary goal,” Desai said.

To achieve that goal, some innovation in academics would be required, he said, adding that different universities in the US are doing so realising “pedagogy and paradigms that were there 40-50 years ago need an overhaul because of aspirations of the youth entering these institutions and universities”.

“They (students) are coming with a lot of technology at their fingertips. They have grown up with all kinds of technology, gadgets, not just laptops and tablets. When these kids enter (institutes like MIT and IITs), they come with different aspirations.

“We need to innovate pedagogy to make sure that the students’ aspirations and the challenges that they want to tackle are made available to him,” Desai said.

Six more IITs becoming operational would not “dilute” the brand of IITs, he said.

Pointing to the demand, Desai said that about 14 lakh students try to get into engineering graduation in India each year, with an overwhelming section dreaming to join IITs which have only around 10,000 seats.

Noting that old IITs took 20 to 25 years to get major recognition mainly through their alumni, he said that the new ones need a similar time-frame to earn a name. He emphasised that the new IITs should benchmark themselves against the old ones and focus relentlessly on quality.

On criticism in some quarters that entrance exams have become more of “memory tests”, and many students were enrolling in mushrooming coaching institutes to break into IITs, Desai said students who getting into IITs were very bright.

“It’s a supply and demand thing. There are 14 lakh people who want to get into 10,000 seats (in IITs); obviously there will be competition. It is an opportunity for someone (coaching

institutes) to say: I will teach you to get in. What do you do now? If there is a certain market-driven opportunity (for coaching institutes), how can you deny that?" he said.

"Current kids who get into IITs are very bright. Many people would say they have come through coaching and they only have memory, they don't understand...I have been practically in the IIT system all my life. Today, there are too many distractions for them. When you challenge them (those who get into IITs), these guys deliver," Desai added.