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.
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- 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.
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- This means, an annual budgetary allocation of Rs. 200 crores for each of these institutions, which is woefully inadequate for the task envisioned.
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- Notably, the top 10 universities of the world spend about 6000 crores on an average for research work alone.
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- Overall, top ten universities net an average endowment fund of over Rs. 1,24,000 crore each annually to sustain their operations.
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- 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.
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- Notably, the government hasn't explained the rationale for this.
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- Also, as there is no financial commitment for private universities, there is no reason for denying some deserving universities the coveted status.
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- 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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