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CORRESPONDENCE

Erosion of funding

Some of us have been watching with consternation the erosion of public funding for the IITs and IISc. It appears that these premier institutions have been singled out for some sort of experiment in financial management without any public debate within these institutions or within the general scientific community. It is not even clear if there has been a discussion in the parliament.

Not all details of the experiment are clear but what has caused surprise to most scientists is a decision to charge a fairly high tuition fee – to the tune of Rs 500 per month – from all Ph D students. Of course all institutions in the country have been advised by the Government to

augment their income from non-Government sources to reduce the subsidy on higher education. In this context one can make a case for charging undergraduates in the IITs or the IIMs. These courses are stepping stones to richly paying jobs in India or abroad. That is not the case for doctoral students in science and engineering. Science at all levels and engineering at the doctoral level are increasingly unattractive options for the bright students in India. A huge tuition fee can only be a further deterrent.

It is also not clear why these premier institutes have been singled out for this experiment and why there has not been

a public debate over such an important and potentially damaging step.

I have enjoyed reading in your pages lively debates on science policy. Surely this merits both an investigative reporting by *Current Science* and a public discussion by scientists, directors of these institutes, and appropriate representatives of the Government. To watch helplessly cannot be right.

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Upper temperature limit of fungi

In their beautifully-illustrated article (*Curr. Sci.*, 1997, 72, 306–315), H. Y. Mohan Ram and Promila Gupta write, 'Unlike certain archaea... and fungi which have the unusual propensity to survive and function normally under temperatures in the range of 80–100°C, most flowering plants are unable to stand temperatures above 50°C'. Whereas the stated high temperature of growth is true for the archaea, I am unaware of any species of fungi which can grow at temperature above 60–62°C. We and others (Tansey, M. R. and Brock, T. D., *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci.*

USA, 1972, 69, 2426–2428) have searched for thermophilic fungi that are capable of growth above 60–62°C but have found no such species.

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*H. Y. Mohan Ram and Promila
Gupta reply:*

We wish to admit that the temperature limit mentioned by us is valid for

archaea and not for fungi. We have confirmed that the upper limit for fungi is 60–62°C by going through literature and by consulting experts. The error is regretted.

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