



At the cost of quality

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The decision to provide financial rewards for publication in science journals and patents is fraught with problems

- A little more than four years after the last hike, the Ministry of Science and Technology increased the fellowship stipend for PhD students by nearly 25%.
- Since the increase is far less than the 80% hike that research fellows have been demanding for the last six months, they have decided to continue with their protests.
- The government is also planning to provide “financial and academic incentives to enhance and recognise the performance of research fellows”, for which an Inter-Ministerial Empowered Committee has been set up.
- While the modalities are yet to be worked out, offering financial rewards for publication is a bad idea.

Cause for concern

- Giving rewards based on papers published in journals, and determining the incentive based on whether the paper is published in an international or Indian journal, is fraught with problems.
- It is worth remembering that though the University Grants Commission's intent to introduce Academic Performance Indicators was good, APIs were largely responsible for the spike in predatory journals published from India.
- There is little guarantee that the reward system based on publication will not lead to further erosion in the quality of science research in India.
- In addition, giving greater rewards for publication in international journals makes no sense as international journals are not uniformly superior in quality to Indian ones.
- By giving 60% lower stipend to students publishing in Indian journals, the government will unwittingly be widening the gap between Indian

- and international journals, which will be self-destructive in the long run.
- With hundreds of papers being published each year, it is debatable whether the government will be able to provide incentives given that research labs have reportedly been facing a fund crunch of late.

Reward for patents

- While obtaining a patent is not difficult, it costs Rs.10,000-Rs.30,000 to file a patent in India.
- Drafting the patent costs an additional Rs.50,000 and there is also an annual renewal fee.
- Also, not all patents translate into products.
- The Science Ministry has not learnt from the mistakes of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).
- In late 2016, the CSIR instructed its 38 labs to stop indiscriminate filing of Indian and foreign patents.
- In such a scenario, a financial incentive for patent-filing will only exacerbate the problem.

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