

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

**THE SPECIAL CASE
OF IIT GUWAHATI**

*“The significant problems we face
cannot be solved at the same level of thinking
we were at when we created them”*

*Albert Einstein
(1879-1955)*

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Setting up of an IIT at Guwahati in the north-eastern region is an extremely well-intentioned move by the Government of India. During this Committee's visit to IITG, and during subsequent discussions with the Director, it has become clear that IITG deserves special attention.

16.1 DIFFICULTIES FACED

IIT Guwahati (IITG) is located in the north-eastern region of India and is thus removed from the major metro-cities. Consequently, this IIT suffers from certain locational disadvantages. These are listed below.

16.1.1 Faculty Recruitment

The biggest challenge for IITG is the recruitment and retention of faculty. The factors responsible for this difficulty are the following:

- a) Country-wide Shortage: There is a country-wide shortage of eligible persons for faculty positions in IITs and other leading technical institutions.
- b) Retirements at other IITs: The large scale retirements at other IITs has increased the demand on the eligible candidates. In this situation, IITG invariably loses out to the other IITs.
- c) Lack of Local Candidates: One of the major points of attraction of a person to a particular IIT is its proximity to his home town/or to where his family is. Due to the general under-development of this region, the number of eligible persons from this region, who can take up faculty positions in IITG, are very few.
- d) Fear of a Remote Location: The general perception is that the North-East of India is remote, and that it is unsafe.

16.1.2 Attracting Students

IITG is the last choice in any branch among all the IITs. This seems to be the trend even though IITG may have better facilities and other resources in a particular Department. This is basically a matter of perception related to the remoteness of the north-east, and the fear factor among parents and relatives. Here, too, the lack of eligible candidates from this region has worsened the problem. In 2004 JEE, only seven of the 4200 or so qualified candidates, listed Assamese as their mother-tongue. The small market in this region has not attracted a sufficient number of all-India coaching centers.

16.1.3 Transportation Bottlenecks

Although Guwahati is well connected by air to the other parts of India, the rail and road connections are poor. The single track rail link from Guwahati to New Jalpaiguri is prone to disruption by accidents, floods and other disturbances. Goods take time to be transported from Kolkata, the nearest international port of entry, and there have been cases of damage to equipment during transshipment.

16.1.4 Lack of Local Industry

One of the ways by which an IIT can be successful is through its interaction with the industry. If industrial houses are located locally or nearby, it is a big help. The low level of industrialisation of the NE region is a major handicap. There are a few big public sector industries in oil, but the lack of sunrise industries makes collaboration difficult.

16.2 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- i) The greatest problem is to attract and retain meritorious faculty. The Committee recommends a special NE allowance to be added to the salary of the faculty. The quantum of this additional compensation may be decided upon by the MHRD.
- ii) In a similar way, the students successful in JEE may be given a special stipend to study at IITG. The quantum of the stipend may be decided upon by the MHRD. Residence for teaching and non-teaching employees and student hostels may be suitably upgraded in order to make these particularly attractive to teachers, staff and students, respectively.
- iii) Yet another source of attraction that one can build into IITG is through installation of major experimental facilities. An interested engineering scientist would be prepared to go anywhere if he can have ready access to a unique/powerful experimental tool like high performance computing and such other facilities. IITG needs to take stock of such possibilities and come up with a request that MHRD and other Government funding agencies would be prepared to consider.
- iv) In view of its location, IITG could be given flexibility in regard to attracting faculty and research students from the neighbouring countries in the region.
- v) In regard to the other problems faced by IITG, the Director may be requested to provide a detailed note. The note may contain possible solutions that he and his colleagues may have thought of. The Committee requests MHRD to conceive of special measures to assist IITG as much as possible. Clearly, there is much to be examined and done to help IITG succeed in the same way the other IITs have succeeded.