

# Soon, rent-a-lab policy for researchers

*Government plans to lease out time on scientific instruments to raise revenue*

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The government has proposed a policy that could transform scientific instruments in government labs into lucrative assets generating a steady rental income. It plans to hire out to researchers all lab equipment that cost more than ₹10 lakh. This would also reduce the amount of time such expensive instruments remain idle.

“To promote ease of access, sharing and monitoring, the granting agencies will henceforth tabulate and put all equipment funded by it costing more than ₹10 lakh on the Internet, to be



**Opening up:** A DNA sequencer is seen in this file photo, at the Anthropological Survey of India in Mysuru. ■ M.A. SRIRAM

accessed by researchers,” says a note on the website of the Department of Science and Technology (DST).

The policy, called the Scientific Research Infrastructure Management and Networks (SRIMAN), wouldn’t, “for the present,”

apply to strategic sectors. The policy is open to public comments for a month.

Explaining the rationale, the government noted that it was “common” to find in Indian laboratories, expensive equipment lying idle. The new system,

according to the policy, envisages institutions declaring on a website how often their instruments would be available for use by those outside the department or university.

Currently, the practice of researchers bidding for time-slots to use lab instruments is typically seen more with very expensive equipment, such as radio telescopes and particle-accelerators. A biologist with a government lab, who didn’t want to be identified, said the policy had set a “low bar (₹10 lakh) for instruments” and that could mean that the government could potentially deny funds to buy equipment.