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Cry to end higher education divide

MONOBINA GUPTA



IIM Lucknow and IIT
Kharagpur

Technology in Bihar and Rajasthan and Indian Institutes of Science for Education and Research (IISERs) in Pune and Calcutta.

The decision has angered residents of states that feel left out, particularly Orissa. Letters and petitions to the ministry are pouring in from individuals and groups in Orissa alleging discrimination.

Orissa doesn't have a single centre of excellence while the northern cities of Delhi, Kanpur and Roorkee have an IIT each.

The Manmohan Singh government has proposed three new IITs, 20 Indian Institutes of Information Technology, five Indian Institutes of Management, three IISERs and four Schools of Planning and Architecture in the 11th Five-Year-Plan.

But where will these be located if the Planning Commission clears them? In the past, decisions have been influenced by political factors, such as which parties have clout at the Centre and where the cabinet ministers come from.

The HRD ministry's allocations to states depend on the presence and size of central educational institutions. Delhi receives the largest share, followed by Bengal and Karnataka. On the lowest rungs are Bihar, Rajasthan and Orissa.

Those advocating more and better educational institutions in Orissa cite past promises that were not kept. For instance, in 2003, the Vajpayee government had announced a National Institute of Science (NIS) in the state. The Orissa government allocated 75 acres of prime land, but nothing has moved since then.

The Prime Minister recently announced two IISERs in Calcutta and Pune. The objectives of an NIS and an IISER are the same; so the new IISERs could seal the fate of the proposed NIS in Orissa.

Higher education experts point to a link between a dearth of "employable" technical manpower and an absence of quality institutions in large parts of the country.

New Delhi, Jan. 31: Pressure is building on the Centre to set up educational institutions of excellence in backward states.

As the government gears up to build a string of science, technology and management institutes, political parties and pressure groups fear these might go to certain "favoured" regions. They cite how states like Orissa and Madhya Pradesh have been denied their share.

The latest provocation is the Union human resource development ministry's decision to set up Indian Institutes of



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The south teems with private professional institutes but many of them are substandard. Experts say the government, either on its own or through private-public partnership, should create more high-quality institutes.

Industry claims that no more than 40 per cent of the nearly 300,000 engineering graduates are employable. The HRD ministry says that one way of bridging the gap is to upgrade eligible institutes to "IIT status".

Seven colleges — including Jadavpur University's engineering and technology department, Bengal Engineering and Science University and Aligarh Muslim University's Zakir Hussain College of Engineering and Technology — have been identified for the upgrade.

But some academics argue such upgrade would "dilute" the IIT brand. They suggest that these institutes be turned into National Institutes of Technology or Hindustan Institutes of Technology.



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