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## IITs fuel political passions

KV Lakshmana

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Indian Institutes of Technology seem to not only fuel student dreams but intense political passions as well. If students compete to secure a place in an IIT, politicians spearhead agitations to get them located in their areas of influence.

Orissa is objecting to an IIT, originally meant for it, being awarded to neighbouring Andhra Pradesh. In Andhra, on the other hand, two districts of Telangana — Adilabad and Medak — are squabbling for the institute.

The Chandrababu Naidu government had campaigned for an IIT at Basara in Adilabad, while Chief Minister YS Rajashekhar Reddy has plumped for Medak, from where late

Indira Gandhi had once secured passage to the Lok Sabha.

Telangana Rashtriya Samithi leader and former union minister A Narendra has alleged that Reddy is using the IIT card to divide and weaken the Telangana movement for a separate state.

Meanwhile, AP minister for marketing, Botsa Satyanarayana is advocating the cause of Vishakapatnam to house the IIT.

Amid all the churning in Andhra Pradesh, a "shocked" Orissa chief minister Naveen Patnaik wrote in protest to the prime minister last Wednesday. He pointed out that Orissa was promised an IIT in the 11th five-year plan. The Centre's reported decision to establish new IITs in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan was not cricket, Patnaik told Dr Manmohan Singh.

Human Resource Development Minister of State MM Fatmi had announced on August 28 in Patna that three IITs, including one in Orissa, were being set up.

Similar passions are in evidence in four Rajasthan cities — Jaipur, Udaipur, Kota and Jodhpur — for an IIT. Students of Ajmer consider their city too has a claim.

The rapidly expanding Pink City, with a sprinkling of engineering colleges, industrial units and infrastructure and proximity to Delhi, greater road, rail and air connectivity, seems to have the more aggressive campaign. The highest number of 200 IIT entrants per annum are from Jaipur.

The Pink City also has a more concrete proposal. It is ready to provide 400 acres and an administrative building free 25 kms from Jaipur. A Sambhar-based NGO, Sri Gopal Gowshala, will donate the land and building, said Suresh Kalani, the NGO office bearer. Delegations from the four cities have met Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje with their claims for the IIT. Raje's office confirmed the claims on Monday but said "no real progress was made on the ground".

The state has nominated additional chief secretary DC Samant to the HRD ministry committee that will finalise the location of the new IIT. While Udaipur has its strong points as tourism, business and trading, Kota said it already has 30,000 students preparing for the IITs at the various coaching institutes there.

Meanwhile, the demonstrations, sit-ins and signature campaigns continue to bring the IIT into the neighbourhood.

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