

But will the Centre respond? It is indeed ironical that Delhi itself came calling at Shibpur dangling the IIT carrot. The university opened its doors, presented its case for upgrade, underlined its thrust areas and demanded the funds. The central committee, in turn, made the appropriate noises and said the institute deserved the status. "And now it looks as if they are not so sure," says Bandopadhyay.

Arguments and counter arguments are flowing fast and thick. There is already an IIT in the state, does it really need another? The college was made a university last year; should it be upgraded again? It receives an annual grant of Rs 15 crore from the state; once it turns into an IIT, its control passes on to the Centre...



So near yet...

The role of the state government in the upgrade issue is being called into question. "Why doesn't the state government make its stand clear? Why doesn't it, like the Kerala government, make a strong case for our upgrade?" are the questions being asked on campus.

Of all the seven institutes being considered for the IIT/INI status, BESU's structure, administration and infrastructure closely resemble those of an IIT. Apart from technical engi-

neering courses, the university has a postgraduate science faculty and an MBA programme. It is also producing doctoral work. "Right now, we have only 12 government-funded research scholars. We would like to produce 100 Ph.Ds every year," says Bandopadhyay. The IITs have about 150 to 200 fellowships worth Rs 10,000 per month.

This is not the first time the institute is being considered for an IIT stamp. Back in 1945, the N.R. Sarkar Committee, formed for the development of higher engineering and tech-

nical education, had assessed the college for IIT status. Even then, the institute was left frustrated. The Sarkar Committee only upgraded it to a modern centre for postgraduate study and research.

For the people

Post-World War II, the college ably met the demand for trained manpower to build the "temples of modern India". The alumni of the college is a veritable list of who's who.

"Our former students have been associated with almost all major technological developments in India and are forerunners in Indian engineering industry, academia and research," stresses Hira.

The institute has a number of firsts to its credit. In 1949, postgraduate courses in civil, mechanical, electrical and metallurgy were introduced here for the first time in India. Since 1950, BESU has been interacting with foreign universities on faculty exchange programmes. University of Wisconsin was the first to send its faculty members to the Shibpur college. Since then, collaborations with foreign universities have been a regular feature.

The college was the first to introduce Ph.D programmes in engineering. Various schools of multi-disciplinary research in management science, information technology, materials science and community science and technology were created. Postgraduate courses in applied sciences were introduced in 2000. BESU also has centres and cells for inter-disciplinary studies like natural disaster mitigation, research and application of foundry technology and others.

a host of other new-age disciplines.

To realise all this, the university needs to acquire about 200 acres of land not just to expand its existing campus but also to create an additional one in Howrah west. "We need new hostels for students, residences for faculty members and staff, a central library, drinking water and hospital facilities," sums up Hira.

So what is it going to be? Will an institute of national heritage be allowed to continue its march of progress or is it destined to stagnate and suffer from a crippling cash crunch? The answer is still blowing in the wind somewhere on the west bank.

