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Status demand pitch peaks - Besu hunger strike from Tuesday

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MONEY MATTERS	
State grant	Rs 52 cr
UGC grant	Rs 3 cr (approx.)
Student fees	Rs 4 cr
Research projects, consultancy, etc	Rs 4 cr
Total	Rs 23 cr
Minimum expenditure	Rs 28 cr

Teachers at Bengal Engineering and Science University (Besu) will start a relay hunger strike on Tuesday to press for the upgrade of the Shibpur campus to the status of "institute of importance (INI)".

If the agitation fails to draw a favourable response, an indefinite hunger strike will be launched on February 23.

"Nothing short of upgrading Besu to INI will do... If we do not get any response to our demand, we will go on an indefinite hunger strike from February 23," said Sujay Mukherjee, secretary of Besu Teachers' Association (Besuta), which has been organising sit-ins daily on campus since February 13.

In support of the movement, the students' union of the university will take out a "peace rally" from MP Birla Planetarium to Esplanade on Tuesday, while non-academic staff members are planning a pen-down.

Centre-appointed Anandkrishnan Committee has recommended upgrade of the institute, but a number of administrative issues — at the central and state levels — have come in the way.

Besides academic and administrative freedom, INI status will ensure a steady stream of funds to the university, which will be used for augmenting the research and development facilities and the maintenance of the 121-acre campus.

Till 1993, Besu was a government college and its annual upkeep cost of over Rs 13 crore was borne by the public works department and other state government departments. After that, the institute was declared a deemed university and the state endowment was scaled down to Rs 12 crore.

Despite charging the highest tuition fee among all colleges in the state, Besu has failed to bridge the income-expense gap. "Look at the state of the campus. It looks like a derelict zamindar house," said Apurba Dutta, a Besuta executive member.

The teachers also added that an INI tag for Besu will be a befitting recognition of the achievements of this 150-year-old college. "The institute has been supplying quality technical manpower for so many years... But we are being deprived of our hard-earned honour," said Besuta executive member Partha Chatterjee.

