

Edits

Setback at Besu

With the opportunity to prove a point

There is an uncanny coincidence in the appointment of an IIT professor as the next vice-chancellor of Bengal Engineering and Science University and the faculty's pitch for IIT status. Both developments also coincide with the HRD ministry denying the Institute of National Importance (INI) tag, a consummation devoutly wished by the institution in Shibpur, that was decidedly better off as long as it had that humble label of BE College. The recommendation for the INI status, on occasion buttressed by the Chief Minister, has been turned down for now and after four years of consideration, during which time the deemed university ought to have put its best foot forward. On the contrary, it allowed itself to drift to the level of virtual inconsequence. The nadir was reached when students submitted blank answer papers in protest against ragging, the frequent violence and the helplessness of an inert administration. Altogether the campus, hallowed once upon a time, was reduced to a streetfighters' turf. Which alone explains why prospective employers of the corporate segment have over the past two years virtually ignored Besu, once the favoured destination of campus recruitment.

If the cause-and-effect equation were to be applied, student violence is only partly responsible for the mess. The HRD ministry's memo to the Governor is a damning indictment of the authorities ~ "the university lacks a proper governance structure". The INI status isn't a lost cause yet; there may be hope in the Centre's assurance that "the status will be bestowed only after distinctive improvement in the university's governance". In effect, the authorities have been given the opportunity to prove a point. It devolves on the next Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Ajoy Kumar Ray, to put in place a revamped administration that must have the nerve to crack down hard on ragging and the bloody strife that as often as not marks the union elections. And this will have to be carried out irrespective of party affiliation. Besu's transformation must be dramatic enough for it to earn the Institute of National Importance embroidery. And the onus rests on the authorities as much as the engineers in the make. Yes, it can be done.