

On 9th December 2003, the then HRD minister Professor M. M. Joshi had announced that UGC had established steps to initiate four National Institute of Sciences at Bhubaneswar, Chennai, Pune and Allahabad. This is documented in the UGC web document by the Ministry of Human Resource Development and Science & Technology, dated 10th December, 2003. As of today both are available, directly or in archival sites, in the Internet [1,2]. A detailed project report on the 4 NISs, the need for them, the locations, and with other details including a planned date of start of classes (of the first batch of students) in July 2005 was published by the UGC, Department of Secondary and Higher education, ministry of HRD, Government of India [0]. This document is still available in the UGC website [0].

Recently, on September 28, 2005 the present PM Dr. Manmohan Singh announced the setting up of an Indian Institute of Science for Education and Research (IISER) at Pune and Kolkata, respectively [3].

The aim of the National Institute of Sciences that Professor Joshi had announced in December 2003 is the same as the proposed IISERs. There may be some minor differences that is due to natural evolution between conception and implementation. Thus, NIS and IISER, though they differ in their names; as proposed institutions, both refer to the same concept. In fact the CM of West Bengal has referred to it as National Institute of Sciences [4] and many newspapers [5,6] have referred to the proposed IISERs as National Institute of Sciences.

After press reports about proposed IISERs in Pune and Kolkata appeared [5, 7], the newspapers in Orissa [8-13] published articles mentioning the possibility of NIS shifting from Bhubaneswar to Kolkata. In response to that the Chief Minister of Orissa wrote letters to the PM about it. In response to criticisms in the newspapers he wrote another letter. A concerned organization in Cuttack filed a PIL suit [14, 28] in the Cuttack High Court.

Orissans, who view Dr. Singh as a fair impartial statesman, were hoping that after reading the CM's letter he would realize the unfairness associated with not having one of the IISERs in Bhubaneswar. Their hopes were shattered when Dr. Singh formally announced on September 28th the plan to establish two IISERs at Pune and Kolkata.

Immediately the word spread via email, mailing lists, email groups and phone calls and thousands of Orissans and people of Oriya origin all over the world wrote, emailed and faxed [15-19] to the Prime minister and the UPA Chairperson Smt. Gandhi about their disappointment and the gross injustice done to Orissa. They mentioned that Orissa does not have any centrally funded higher education institute such as an IIT, IIM, IISc, ISI, central universities etc. [20-23], and how despite that Orissa has on its own helped in the development of quality institutions like the Institute of Physics [24], Institute of Life Sciences [25] and the Xaviers Institute of Management [26]. They requested the PM to reconsider his announcements and at least add Bhubaneswar to the list of IISER cities.

The word of the letter writing reached the newspapers in Orissa (including national newspaper with Orissa editions such as TOI, Pioneers, and Statesman) and they wrote about it [16-19]. Since then a peaceful mass movement has begun in Orissa, and among Orissans and people of Oriya

origin all over the world and they have written to the PM, to the planning commission, to the SAC-PM (scientific advisory committee to the PM), and to various newspapers about it. There were letter writing campaigns in various cities across the world from New York, Phoenix (Arizona), Chicago, to New Delhi, and Bhubaneswar. Among these [28] was a group of eminent personalities (retired) of Bhubaneswar that included past vice chancellors and administrative officers of the Orissa and Indian government. There was a convention of intellectuals [29] in Bhubaneswar and then there was convention of student leaders [31] from various colleges across Orissa. This mass movement is continuing on. In the meanwhile the Orissa high court after a couple of changes of dates passed a temporary stay order [30] saying "We direct a stay on the shifting of the NIS from Bhubaneswar to any other place in the eastern region."

The mass movement of the people further pushed the Orissa government and the CM wrote one more time to the PM. The 2005 winter assembly of Orissa started off with a resolution [32] to form an assembly committee for this issue and to send a delegation to the PM. The 2005 winter parliament session in Delhi started off with a delegate of 15 Orissa MPs staging a demonstration [32] near the parliament.

So far the only communication from the central government is an affidavit [33-35] filed by the under secretary of the HRD ministry, as a response to the high court stay order, which according to newspaper reports says that "No policy decision was finalized by the central government for setting up any science institution in Bhubaneswar".

While the courts will sort the legal aspects, and figure out how far the decision regarding an NIS in Bhubaneswar was made, it is clear that it had gone to a high enough level for the then HRD minister to say in [1] "Four national-level institutes are also being established at Bhubaneswar, Chennai, Pune and Allahabad". He is also reported in a UGC document [2] to have said "... Dr. Joshi also informed the members about the steps initiated by the UGC for improving the relevance and quality of teaching and research, such as ...; to establish four National Institutes of Sciences at Bhubaneswar, Chennai, Pune and Allahabad; ..." Finally, there is the detailed project report [0] dated May 2004 which mentions the beginning of classes for the first batch starting in July 2005.

The fact remains that from that high level of decision; the current government made alterations to the plan and only announced two IISERs at Pune and Kolkata. Both are fine cities and deserve IISERs, except that the central government did not have to take away the only announced dream from a state (Orissa) and a city (Bhubaneswar) that does not have anything in terms of a centrally funded higher education institution.

It is ironic that on the day the PM said "This report also points to a grave regional imbalance in terms of educational institutions in different states. I trust our government as well the state governments will take note of these findings and evolve policies to remedy these regional imbalances," he also announced the establishment of IISERs in Pune and Kolkata, thus removing Bhubaneswar from the list.

If one analyzes the list of institute of national importance and central universities one can see the gross imbalance with respect to some states. States like West Bengal have an IIT, an IIM, an ISI,

a central university, while states like Orissa, Rajasthan, Chhatisgarh have none of them. Yet one of the new IISERs is announced in West Bengal, which was not even in the initial list, while removing an announced for NIS in Bhubaneswar; thus seemingly suggesting that an NIS was shifted from Bhubaneswar to Kolkata.

This absolutely makes no sense unless one assumes that the current government believes that only people of certain states deserve to be near such institutions while other states do not, or unless one perceives a connection between the current government needing and being allied to the West Bengal's contingent of close to 40 MP's support while not being allied with the smaller contingent of BJD-BJP MPs of Orissa, and the elimination of Bhubaneswar and introduction of Kolkata to the list of NIS/IISERs. Especially coming from a government with an economist at its helm who knows how quality institutions not only impact the nation but also have a significant impact in the development of the area, city, district and state where they are located, one can not help but wonder why such a decision was made.

Since the Indian constitution does not explicitly mention that resources and investments have to be regionally balanced the central government may be able to legally get away (and it has so far) with creating and reinforcing (instead of correcting) such imbalances, but in the court of Indian people's opinion, and with the RTI act and the availability of Internet search engines to the common man, the government can no longer act like a fief as it has done in the higher education domain of HRD.

In the references we have the citations of various documents and news items regarding the mass movement taking place in Orissa. Although the focus here is on the announced NIS in Bhubaneswar (Orissa) that was dropped, if not shifted, by the current government; it has a great significance to the country of India as a whole

(i) Because India has many other states and cities which have been also neglected by the HRD ministry over the years,

(ii) Because for all round growth of India, all of its parts need to develop simultaneously, not just some pockets,

(iii) because it seems institutions with mega investments like IITs and IISERs are being established mostly in states that have a bigger representation in the parliament or whose MPs are allied with the government at the center at the time the decisions are made or both, and

(iv) And most importantly because such grabbing and doling out of mega investments without regards to regional balance may further stress the fabric of mother India which already has gone through and is going through such forces in certain parts.

We hope the readers of this compilation, be it patriotic Indians from Orissa, or from other parts of India, will take this gross imbalance and the serious implication of its continuation (in terms of the current decision by the central government) and convey to the central government in no uncertain terms

## References:

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