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News

[Page one](#)[India](#)[World](#)[Editorial](#)[Perspective](#)[Business](#)[Sport](#)[Bengal](#)

Magazine

[Sports & Leisure](#)[Career & Campus](#)[Science & Technology](#)[Voices](#)[Lifestyle](#)[Unplugged](#)[Kolkata Plus](#)[Bengal Plus](#)[Viewpoint](#)[North East Page](#)[Orissa Plus](#)[Note Book](#)[N.B & Sikkim Plus](#)[Entertainment](#)[NB Extra](#)[World Focus](#)

[Orissa Plus]

Charges traded over NIS issue

Statesman News Service

BHUBANESWAR, Dec. 8. — The issue of shifting of the proposed National Institute of Sciences from Bhubaneswar to Kolkata cropped up in the Assembly again today, even as ruling BJD-BJP legislators staged a dharna outside the House as a mark of protest against the “step-motherly treatment” of the UPA government to Orissa.

More than 30 ruling BJD-BJP members sat on dharna near Mahatma Gandhi’s statue inside the Assembly premises and shouted slogans against the UPA government. They also held placards and raised slogans against Mrs Sonia Gandhi.

Inside the Assembly, the issue was discussed through a question. Higher education minister, Mr Samir Dey said that the affidavit filed by the Central government in the Orissa High Court stating there was no proposal at any point of time to set up National Institute of Sciences at Bhubaneswar was not true. He claimed that the UGC chairman had intimated the decision to set up four National Institute of Science at Bhubaneswar, Pune, Allahabad and Chennai to the then vice-chancellor of Utkal University on 23 July 2003. Allocation of funds had been made in the budget and the UGC had assured provision of Rs 50 crore per annum for each institute. The institutes were proposed to be set up within the 10th plan period.

In a prompt response to the UGC’s offer, the state government had allotted 75 acres of land near Bhubaneswar within five months, said the minister. However, with the change of guard at the Centre, the decision of the NDA government was altered by the UPA government apparently on political considerations, alleged Mr Dey. Meanwhile, the chief minister, Mr Naveen Patnaik, had met the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, and had written to him thrice on the matter. However, the Central government was apparently firm on its decision to shift the



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institute to Kolkata, he lamented.

Mr Dey, who belongs to the BJP, urged the Speaker to lead an all-party delegation to meet the Prime Minister and pressurize him not to shift the institute. Responding to it, Speaker, Mr Maheswar Mohanty assured that the House Committee, headed by him, would go to New Delhi shortly to take up the matter with the Prime Minister.

Countering the claim of the government that the NDA government had decided to set up the NIS at Bhubaneswar, Opposition members put a barrage of questions as to when the NDA government had communicated the decision to the government.

Mr Dey however, failed to give convincing reply to these questions. He only laid a copy of the letter of the then UGC chairman to the vice chancellor of the Utkal University.

Later during the zero hour, Chief Whip, Mr Kishor Mohanty drew the attention of the Chair to the dharna by the ruling members over the issue and requested him to call the members to call off their dharna in view of his announcement that the House Committee would go to New Delhi soon to take up the matter with the Centre.

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