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IIT self-help for facility

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M Bypass: IIT Kharagpur will allot Rs 10 crore for building a centre of excellence on advanced manufacturing technologies for heavy industries, the move necessitated by the Centre's decision to scrap project that was supposed to partly fund the facility.

The institute on Wednesday signed a deal with the department of heavy industries to launch the centre. The union minister of state for heavy industries and public enterprises, Babul Supriyo, was present on the occasion.

Following objections from the finance ministry, the Centre had in early September linked Vishwajeet, a project that would have resulted in allocation of Rs 4,700 crore to seven top Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) as part of an ongoing effort to enhance their global standing.



Union minister of state for heavy industries and public enterprises, Babul Supriyo, and the director of IIT Kharagpur, Partha Pratim Chakrabarti, at a city hotel on Wednesday. Picture by Bishwajit Dutta

The finance ministry had rejected the human resource development ministry's request for in-principle approval of the project, arguing that the IITs should first address "fundamental issues" such as the autonomy to fix fees and raising resources from corporate houses.

IIT Kharagpur was supposed to get Rs 3,000 crore from the bouquet. From that pool, Rs 10 crore was to be allocated for the centre of excellence on advanced manufacturing technologies, which is being developed with the ministry of heavy industries at an estimated cost of Rs 65 crore.

"As news of the project being scrapped reached us, we decided to go ahead with the launch of the centre with our own funds," Partha Pratim Chakrabarti, the director of IIT Kharagpur, told Metro.

Chakrabarti said the scrapping of Vishwajeet was a "setback" for the institute as it had planned to launch some "ambitious" projects with the corpus it would have got under the project.

An IIT official said the centre would start functioning from labs on the campus. "Later, as funds start pouring in, we will build a permanent facility," he said.

Director Chakrabarti had told this newspaper on August 8 that they were in the process of creating centres of excellence in six domains of strategic importance and develop world-class laboratory infrastructure under these centres based on the core strength of the institute.