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NEWSMAKER / JAGADESH KUMAR/VICE-CHANCELLOR/JNU

A costly failure

Jagadesh Kumar is not a native of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) where he was appointed vice-chancellor in January 2016. He is an engineer by training who was last at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi, is keen as mustard on teaching and is a follower of the Shito-Ryu school of karate.

Kumar is a small-town boy who's made it. Born in Mamidala, in the Nalgonda district of Telangana, this son of a primary school teacher got into IIT Madras from where he got his MS and PhD degrees in electrical engineering.

His website is ornamented with wholesome sayings from thinkers and intellectuals: for instance, "When an idea exclusively occupies the mind, it is transformed into an actual physical or mental state (Swami Vivekananda); and rather inexplicably: "Life is unfair. Sensible persons take what they get and find a way to work around it. They don't sulk in a corner (Zhu Rongji, Chinese Premier)."

He says teaching is his pride and joy and more than once, it has been rated outstanding by the Faculty Appraisal Committee, IIT Delhi. He received the 2013 award for Excellence in Teaching (in large class category) from IIT Delhi. He has impressive academic credentials. He works around nano-electronic devices, nano-scale device modelling and simulation, innovative device design and power semiconductor devices. He has written chapters in four books, has 200 publications in refereed journals and six patent applications have been filed based on his research. That he cares a

lot for the growth of his students is clear from the fact that not just M Tech but even several undergraduate students are co-authors in his international publications.

He may well be a deeply committed teacher but has turned out to be a lamb for slaughter in a place like JNU

JNU faculty is among the best in the world. Teachers on that campus tend to be unimpressed with publications and academic work — their own work is nothing to sneeze at. To make the cut in JNU, you need to be a tough — and yet understanding — administrator, pro-student and have the capacity to stand up to external authority. You win respect if you prove that you will always and every time put the autonomy of the institution above everything else. Early on in his vice-chancellorship, Kumar appears to have failed that test.

Everyone, including the veteran Left teacher and linguistics expert, Noam Chomsky, is asking only one question: "Many of us remain very concerned about the crisis in JNU, which was apparently created and precipitated by the government and university administration with no credible evidence of any seditious activities on campus. Why did you allow the police on campus when it is clear that this was not legally required?" Chomsky asked in an email.

It is now becoming clear that despite his disavowals, the police got the permission from the university's highest administrator. The mystery is, despite being so obviously fond of students and teaching, what caused Kumar to take such precipitate action

when all he needed to have done is call the students home for a cup of tea and counsel wisdom? From unverified information that is trickling in, it would seem that the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, which has been struggling to put down roots in JNU, saw this incident as its chance. In which case, the case for the vice-chancellor becomes even weaker because he allowed himself to become a pawn in the hands of two squabbling groups of students.

On the other hand, if he acted under political duress and was guided by political forces, then he'd better forget about getting any respect from JNU. This is a pity. It is rare to find a person who likes administration, is a good teacher and enjoys guiding research.

ADITI PHADNIS



Placement graph goes up at IIT Ropar

Hindustan Times (Chandigarh)

RUPNAGAR: Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Ropar has witnessed improvement in the placement of students in various companies this year as compared to last year.

Training and placement cell head Dr Ravi Mohan Prasad said out of the total 88 students of BTech (computer science, electrical engineering and mechanical engineering) registered this year, 71 students had been placed so far.

“The placements of BTech students passing out in 2016 are very encouraging. The response from the industry has been overwhelming and we are glad that 80% of our students have already been placed as compared to 74.5% last year,” he said, adding that the average package was over ` 12 lakh per annum.

Budget disappoints IIT-K scientists

Hindustan Times (Lucknow)

KANPUR: Students and teachers of Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur (IITK) were left disappointed with the rail budget. Reason: It neither announced any new railway project for the IIT-K nor did it seek IIT's contribution in introducing new technologies for the development of Indian railways.

However, the students were satisfied with the announcement of six months' internship at the railways for engineering and management graduates. This facility would help the students get hands on experience of technical and administrative management of the Indian Railways.

Notably, scientists at IIT-K had been associated with the most ambitious projects like Satellite Imaging for Rail Navigation (SIMRAN) which aimed at improving the railway safety systems at various levels. It was suspended after completion of three years duration.

The scientists and research scholars associated with the project were expecting to get another project this time. The minister though assured of adopting new technologies for improving the railway systems and making the train journey more comfortable but it did not mention if the technological help from IIT-K or other IITs would be taken, said a senior scientists pleading anonymity.

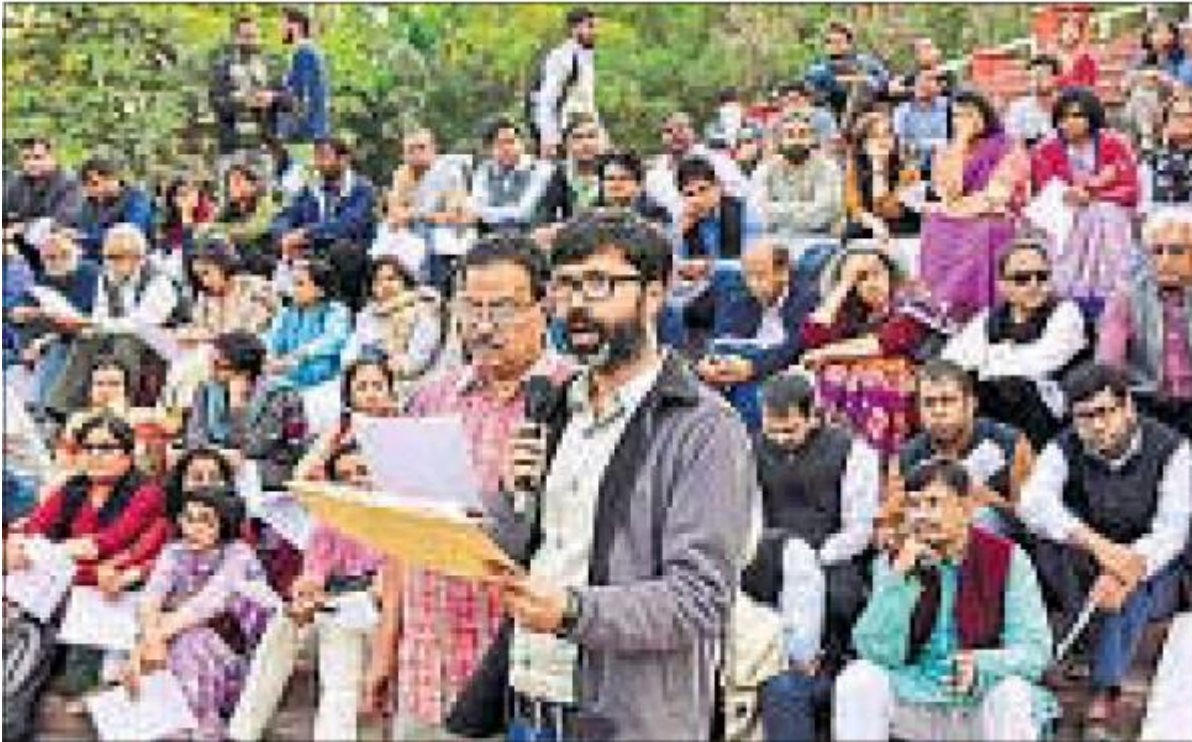
The minister referred to the recommendations of Kakodkar Committee in improving the accident free train navigation and said Korean companies would be given the task for developing the safe navigation. Similarly, Prabhu preferred Japan's help in introducing high speed train between Ahmedabad and Mumbai but did not involve the IIT-K or other IITs in any such project, the scientist said.

The minister also referred to green toilets but did not mention that the dry toilets were developed by the IITK. Besides, the minister did not speak about installing the safety system for un-manned level crossing developed by the IIT-K.

Smriti Irani gave wrong facts: JNU teachers

Hindustan Times (Delhi)

NEW DELHI: The Jawaharlal Nehru University Teachers Association (JNUTA) hit out at human resource development minister Smriti Irani on Thursday, saying she misrepresented facts about the university row in her address at the Lok Sabha.



VIPIN KUMAR/HT

Jawaharlal Nehru University Teachers' Association president Ajay Patnaik (in grey) on Thursday.

“The truth is that there is no material evidence so far that has established guilt. The high-level enquiry committee was reconstituted only yesterday, so there is no question about any report from the committee,” said JNUTA president Ajay Patnaik.

He highlighted that the footage which is the only evidence available was to be authenticated by first level of forensic examination.

Irani in her speech said the university panel already debarred Umar Khalid, Anirban from academic activities for being involved in “anti-national activities”.

The JNUTA demanded that the university should also include a representative of SC/ST in the inquiry panel, and revoke the “academic suspension” of the eight students.

“Now with the addition of the new members the inquiry should start afresh and all decisions of the previous committee must be deemed null and void,” said the JNUTA statement.

India, Cambridge sign MoU on crop science to enhance research programme

Hindustan Times (Mumbai)

LONDON: Tackling food shortage, increasing crop yield and improving disease and drought resistance are key areas in a MoU signed by India's department of biotechnology and a consortium led by the University of Cambridge.

The agreement inked on Wednesday seeks to establish a joint UK-India crop science programme. It wants to enhance collaborative research, promote knowledge exchange and support capacity building to develop resilience in food security, a university statement said.

Cambridge vice- chancellor Leszek Borysiewicz, K VijayRaghavan of India's science and technology ministry, and Research Councils UK India director Nafees Meah signed the deal.

Borysiewicz said: "This collaboration builds on the close links already established between leading researchers in the UK and India and is another great example of both countries' commitment to growing our partnerships in translational and applied research.

"This collaboration will create opportunities for leading experts in the UK and India to come together to tackle global challenges in the areas of food security, crop science and biotechnology."

The agreement foresees joint projects on the fundamental science underpinning yield enhancement, disease resistance and drought resistance; research into crop re-breeding; and the translation of fundamental research into sustainable agriculture practice.

It also Rajesh Mahapatra rajesh.mahapatra@hindustantimes.com

JNU row: Why India Inc must speak out

Hindustan Times (Ranchi)

The sanctity of the courts, the neutrality of the police and a robust education system are critical to sustained growth

he 'JNU row' is now an inflection point. What should and could have been resolved as a universitylevel disciplinary issue has been allowed to snowball into a media controversy, a challenge to the legitimacy of the courts, a dramatic loss of trust in policing and critically as well as a seemingly irreparable polarisation around what constitutes democracy, dissent and freedom. This full-blown crisis will now loudly ring through Parliament in the coming weeks with public money and time used over what need not have become a contentious issue in the first place.



HT PHOTO

More than half of JNU's students come from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. To brand them antinational is to open the flood gates for unstoppable and dangerous regionalism

The ruling political class is substantially to blame for bringing us to such a pass. There is an unmistakable pattern that is also emerging. India's much-recognised institutions of higher learning such as the FTII, University of Hyderabad, IIT (Chennai) and JNU have been subjected to almost diabolical pressure from the human resources ministry with the sole purpose, as it appears, to undermine autonomy and control the idea of learning itself.

A disturbing ideological game plan seems to be at the heart of such clumsy and highhanded efforts with strong links to the recent worries about intolerance, the killing of an innocent over the beef ban, the suicide of Dalit scholar Rohith Vemula and the aggressive 'love jihad' campaign in western UP.

Pointedly put, a social and cultural crisis has been recklessly generated and the flames are beginning to lap up at the feet of two of the important constituents of India's economic growth story. The middle class and India Inc. are now clearly anxious. For the middle class, a cosmopolitan nationalism helps them access and harness the potential of globalisation. Any narrow idea of the nation, especially the 'goonda nationalism' of Vijay Chauhan, who led last week's assault on journalists and students by lawyers at New Delhi's Patiala House court, will have severe repercussions over how brand India is represented and understood abroad. Cosmopolitanism, with its notions of patience, tolerance and acceptance of cultural diversity, is how global markets are defined and rigged around notions for travel, consumption, tastes and fashions.

For India Inc., on the other hand, social peace is linked to political stability and critical for economic growth. A seminal work by Harvard professor Alberto Alesina and three others in 1992 demonstrated the deep interconnections between political stability and economic growth through a study of 113 countries between 1950 and 1982. A similar work published in 2011 by two economists at the International Monetary Fund, Ari Aisen and Francisco Jose Veiga, showed how the adverse impacts are quickly transmitted through a decline in rates of productivity and slower physical and human capital accumulation.

We have seen evidence of this in South American countries such as Argentina, Bolivia and, closer home, in the ASEAN region during the 1970s and 1980s. Even in our case, the best periods of sustained growth, 2003-2010, for example, have come in years of relative social and political stability.

Anyone who knows their history and politics of the past decades will also tell you that South Africa had to abandon the idea of running a racist regime because, simply put, there was no other way to join the global economy.

Aisen and Veiga, who studied economic progress in 169 countries between 1960 and 2004, also found ethnic homogeneity beneficial for growth. If one were to flip that argument for India, a country of ethnic heterogeneity, it would mean our ability to ensure social harmony has a bearing on the economy's growth.

“Social cohesion determines the quality of institutions, which in turn has important impact on whether and how pro-growth policies are devised and implemented,” wrote William Easterly of New York University in a 2006 paper coauthored with Jozef Ritzen and Michael Woolcock. “A country's social cohesion is essential for generating the confidence and patience needed for reforms.”

And for both, the Indian middle class and India Inc., the sanctity of the courts, the neutrality of the police and a robust education system are critical ingredients to their aspirations and ambitions.

The intensification of the ‘JNU row’, moreover, is increasingly rubbing against another major fault-line. Much like the devastating Jat agitation in Haryana, this too has all the potential of exploding. More than half of JNU's students come from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. To brand them anti-national is to open the flood gates for unstoppable and dangerous regionalism. Migrants to Delhi from Bihar already nurse a degree of resentment over how they are treated, especially by Delhi's Punjabi population.

Small wonder then that Shatrughan Sinha's description of Kanhaiya Kumar as ‘our Bihari boy’ has already found resonance across the political spectrum in Bihar. JNU, it must be remembered, is one of the most important educational institutions for enabling small-town boys and girls from these relatively backward states to move into the ranks of the middle class growth story in India.

Incidents such as the ‘JNU row’ run the risk of bringing regionalism centre stage of politics. India Inc. certainly won't want that, for it comes in the way of harnessing the potential of a unified national market.

IIT green-lights E-W Dalhousie route

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/IIT-green-lights-E-W-Dalhousie-route/articleshow/51146212.cms>

Kolkata: Things seem to be moving ahead for the jinxed East-West Metro project. IIT-Kharagpur has said that construction of New Mahakaran station in Dalhousie won't cause any damage to Currency Building and two other nationally protected monuments - Beth El Synagogue on Pollock Street and Magen David Synagogue, a shout away on Biplabi Rashbehari Bose Road.

After objections were raised by the National Monument Authority (NMA) of the Archeological Survey of India (ASI), which ensures no new construction is done within 100m of a nationally-protected monument, Kolkata Metro Rail Corporation (KMRC), the implementing agency, had engaged IIT-Kharagpur to conduct an impact assessment study. New Mahakaran station has been proposed within 20 metres of the prohibitive zone and Currency Building stands 20 metres away.

An NMA no-objection certificate is important for any construction within the vicinity of a nationally-protected monument.

After conducting ground-penetration-radar analysis at the synagogues and Currency Building, IIT-Kharagpur has

recommended a non-invasive technology for the construction work, which won't cause much tilt or subsidence or affect the natural flow of groundwater around these structures.

KMRC, as advised by IIT Kharagpur, will adopted the architectural style of Currency Building for constructing the entry-exit gate to make it look integral with the heritage atmosphere of Dalhausie Square.

For construction of the tunnel and the platform, measured steps will be taken to monitor repercussions. A third party will audit the process.

KMRC managing director N K Garg sounded upbeat. "So far as the interim report of the IIT-Kharagpur study is concerned, the news is positive. But we must wait another 15 days for the final report," he said. A KMRC engineer added, "The study says it is possible to construct the tunnel without causing any damage to the monuments."

The nationally-protected monuments, according to KMRC officials, appear to be the biggest stumbling blocks for the Metro corridor in the central business district. Some routes of Delhi Metro also fell within heritage zones, but most of these works were carried out before the enactment of the stringent Ancient Monument and Archaeological Site and Remains, Administration and Validation Act.