

Editorial

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September - The month which reinstated our courage

September is important for the people of this region. This is the month when the then King of Manipur was forced to sign the merger agreement under duress at Shillong in 1949. This is also the month where our great leader Hijam Irabot was born (Sept 30, 1896) and he left for the heavenly abode on September 26, 1951).

The month we are suppose to remember in culture the sense of patriotism to the people is not left undisturbed with people engaging in game played by self proclaimed leaders. It is indeed a shame for the people of the state how we are putting ourselves on this month at which we are suppose to pay our highest regard.

A classless society with the proletariat in the forefront was the dream of our great Leader Hijam Irabot. For the cause the leader had waged a political war against the British colonial rule and then later against feudalistic nature of the Maharajah and the ruling capitalist class of Manipur. What makes different from this pioneer leader and the so call leaders of our days is that he was not lured by the prospect of the royal prerogatives and official facilities including the prestigious post of membership to the Sardar Panchayat Court that was being offered to him for having married princess Khomdonsana.

To Hijam Irabot, the war was not only against the external force which had colonized the nation state but it was rather against all forms of oppression and suppression committed under the feudalistic character of the system. He dreamt of a nation where every citizen has the right to live with dignity. His work for promotion of the culture, sports, literature and journalism is a reflection of his love towards this erstwhile nation state.

All his life the great leader had work for the cause of the people sacrificing every comfort of live. To convert his dream into reality he spearheaded various political movement starting from the grass hood level. He was the man behind the formation of students' federation, peasant union, women's organization and progressive party.

For his active role to bring about a reformed state, he was sent to prison many a times during the British colonial era. Later after the British left the nation state, Hijam Irabot was once again declared as a terrorist as his activities continued to be a threat to the Maharajah himself as well as the ruling capitalist.

In recognition to the activities of this all time leader, the state is celebrating his Birth Anniversary across the state. A political Party - Communist Party of India (CPI) is taking the main initiative in organizing the day to commemorate the leader's birthday.

But one think we in the Imphal Times would like to remind is that, would the person who had sacrifices every comfort of life would be happy to see us celebrating the day without fulfilling any of his dream. Will our leader be happy if he sees the conditions of the peasant community or the working class people of this state? It is an open secret for each and one of us that a government posts are being bought with money, Fertilizers which are meant to be distributed to the farmers are being traded by some pseudo social workers for their own benefit; many people are driven out from their home stead in the name of development.

This is the state of our state. There is no doubt that our great leader Hijam Irabot would certainly shed tears in heaven seeing the reality.

Courtesy : the National Herald

Can a single individual cause an entire institution to collapse? While this may appear far-fetched, a large number of teachers, staff and students in JNU believe that the present Vice-Chancellor, M Jagadesh Kumar, can easily corner that dubious distinction.

He will go down in history for destroying an institution of excellence that successive generations since its inception toiled to build, says an anguished veteran. Within a week of taking over charge, Kumar is accused of launching a campaign to discredit and defame the university. "Instead of siding strongly with the university community, he, in fact, added to its woes and defamation. This is unparalleled in our institutional history," says an old-timer.

When the RSS organised a group of retired army personnel to troop into JNU, the Vice Chancellor went one step ahead and demanded installation of battle tanks inside the campus. Instead of standing with the students who too were traumatised by the strong attack by the state and the media, the VC launched a tirade against them by cutting seats, instituting inquiries and finally bringing compulsory attendance, more as a punitive measure than with any measure of welfare of academia implicit in it. The design was to defame, disrupt and destroy.

The sudden and unprovoked reduction in research seats for 2016-17 admissions was his first major act of destruction of the morale within. This was done without any broad based discussion, and was implemented in an arbitrary manner.

There existed various reasons, say JNU watchers, for the skewed statistical data to show that there were more research students than the proportion fixed by the UGC, particularly due to the introduction of 27 per cent reservation with no decrease in general seats, with the result that the number of research students admitted was not commensurate with the fresh recruitment of faculty, which was natural, argue JNU veterans, as it takes time to recruit good teachers. The process of implementing this seat reduction made it clear that the intention was to spite the university and its teachers in front of the world, providing a misleading picture of excesses, where reduction was a punitive measure. The Vice-Chancellor himself led the blinkered charge of shaming and blaming the university in interviews and public statements on teachers guiding 20 to 30 students.

The second major act of the VC was to disrupt the statutory bodies so that arbitrary and draconian decisions are carried out. With the support of nominated members belonging to the BJP/RSS political dispensation, the VC presented himself as the leader of the pack. In the Academic Council, bouncers were deployed for the first time in JNU's history and several members were not allowed to speak despite repeated requests. They were instead heckled and threatened.

One of the VC's close lieutenants is accused of aggressively charging at the students' representative in an Academic Council meeting. But though the aggression was on the part of the VC's lieutenants, students were subjected to and punished by a proctorial inquiry. The Executive Council has been

Why the JNU VC must go

made to pass regressive acts, including one where three teachers duly appointed in permanent positions were threatened with dismissal on grounds of having foreign status: a travesty of the rules and the law of the land.

One of the victims, a woman faculty with a family to run suddenly found herself with notice of stopping her salary and thereby threat of loss of job, despite a valid initial recruitment and annual increment letters.

Leave applications of several faculty members, generally routinely passed if eligibility permits, have been rejected on various pretexts in the highest academic bodies, or withheld without any valid reasons cited at other levels. Numerous faculty members have had to cancel at the last minute prestigious invitations from Indian and foreign institutions, normally notched on the university ratings - a typical case of cutting off one's nose to spite the face.

On the recruitment front, it appears that most faculty appointments made by the Vice-Chancellor with the help of hand-picked selection committees had only one criterion: proximity to the current dispensation; while excellent scholars find themselves humiliated in interviews, notes of dissent by the internal experts have in many instances been recorded in the case of those selected.

On occasions the VC is accused of disallowing chairpersons and deans to speak up even at interview boards assembled to recruit candidates, forcing them to either sign on the decision taken by other members of the panel or give their notes of dissent. In some cases, specific lists or names, with no connection to qualifications, the CV or interview performance, have been fished out for finalisation. Intimidation have also been employed, where a chairperson was censured in public for expressing her concerns and dissent during a selection committee meeting. By his extreme partisanship, haughtiness and inability to enter into any academic and non-academic dialogue except with supplicants and RSS activists, the Vice Chancellor has forced almost all issues to go to the courts of justice, which is both time consuming and expensive.

The university routinely talks about lack of funds, but has been spending huge amounts on lawyers and the litigation process. In fact, this far, most of the judgments that have come appear to have vindicated the faculty and students' stand regarding the arbitrary, punitive and prejudicial attitudes and policies of the VC and his administration.

In normal circumstances, the VC would have resigned many times over. The referendum held by the JNU Teachers' Association was essentially the last straw in the increasing mood of disaffection - an overwhelming majority of teachers voted in favour of the VC stepping down. But the political motive and backing to disrupt the University and defame the JNU community completely keeps him and his lot going.

"The VC openly flaunts and supports coteries of faculty and staff, and disallows any dialogue on any issue particularly with those who are marked out as troublemakers - meaning, all the rest. He does not meet them, he

insults or gets the teachers insulted through his cronies, and even the staff now have begun to disregard basic office courtesies such as offering a seat to faculty members," grumbles a teacher.

One of the rare and feted traditions of JNU, where the scholars and non-teaching staff maintained not only collegial but also a loving and respectful relationship, is threatened. This deviation as the new normal is an indication of the new dispensation's attitudes percolating downwards.

Rooms of Professor Emeritus were vacated, and those retiring were given immediate marching orders; their rooms were double locked ostensibly to get the rooms urgently vacated. For those relocating outside Delhi, hardly any time was given to transit from active employment to retirement, to facilitate packing and moving from the office space.

Such haste, and the indignity meted out to retired faculty may be linked to the haste and haphazard planning of the new Engineering programme, which the whole university protested for being imposed with no serious deliberation or discussion. With the neighbouring institution of excellence in engineering, the IIT, as the benchmark, the rationale in terms of faculty recruitment, stream orientation and physical infrastructure needed clarity. The current website information that "BTech in an engineering discipline and Master's programme with specialisation in Social Science/Humanities/ Science/Technology" presents no coherence or clarity in this respect.

With no new faculty recruitment, and drawing upon the existing faculty from the Schools of Computer and Systems Sciences, Physical Sciences, Computational and Integrative Sciences, Environmental Sciences and Special Centre for Nano Sciences, what comes across is a 'jugaad' programme that is misleading potential candidates and the nation at large.

The destruction of the Social Science centres appears to have been high on the agenda, seen in the disregard for the transparent and democratic practices and norms such as rotating the administrative positions of dean and chairperson on the basis of the principle of seniority. Superseding of four well known scholars and senior professors for deanship, and appointment of a pliant votary of the VC is one such instance.

Further, the appointment of chairpersons, so long a routine affair with the senior most being appointed by the Vice-Chancellor, is now made an altogether humiliating experience with the VC and his rectors interviewing them regarding their future plans for the centre. Leading questions with regard to conformity/dissent and following/non-compliance with rules have been posed. The sense of being a supplicant and doing the bidding of the powers that be is the message being sent out loud and clear.

Two major institutions, developed with great care and responsibility by the JNU community, the GSCASH and the proctorial offices, have also been targeted in the past two years. The GSCASH, a well represented body of students, teachers, staff and members of civil society that was the harbinger for gender justice and sensitisation in campuses across India, was abolished. It was replaced by the Internal Complaints Committee, with members nominated by the VC, which has not acquitted itself well particularly in a recent case where a faculty member close to the VC was accused of sexual harassment by several women students. Similarly,

the proctorial office has lost all meaning as its enquiries have been castigated by the highest courts of the land as sham and illegal its partisan judgements and punitive action against students perceived as 'left' activists.

The different academic cum administrative posts in the university were generally given to senior respected academics, to raise the prestige and maintain the gravitas of these positions, and also convince the larger community of bonafide intent.

Today, the only criterion to sit in such offices is a person's RSS/BJP connection. Thus, a Sanskrit scholar, Heeraman Tiwari, who was appointed to teach Sanskrit to History students, has been appointed as the acting Finance Officer of the University; he also heads the Centre for Media Studies, and is concurrent professor of Sanskrit studies. He has just been appointed by the VC as the coordinator of the Centre for Advanced Studies of the History department, a flagship programme of UGC for identified centres of excellence.

Rupesh Chaturvedi, an associate professor in the School of Biotechnology, has been made the Director of JNU's Research and Development (since then he has been given a fast track promotion while dozens of others are still waiting for years for their legitimate promotions).

Pradipta Chowdhury holds the position of Dean of School of Social Sciences, acting Chairperson of Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, and Coordinator of the Centre for Advanced Study of that department. Similarly, Ajay Kumar Dubey is Chairperson of African Studies (SIS), Director of Energy Studies Programme (SIS), and also Director of Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Advanced Study.

Madhav Govind is Director of UGC - Human Resource Development Centre, he was also an Associate Dean (Students). Kausal Kumar Sharma is Chief Proctor, Hon. Director of ICSSR Northern Regional Centre, and also Warden of Brahmaputra hostel. Umesh Ashok Kadam is Dean of Students, Member of IQAC, Warden of Brahmaputra hostel, and Deputy Coordinator of Centre of Advanced Study of the History department.

As if all this was not enough to destroy the morale and dignity of the teachers, the Vice-Chancellor has successfully destroyed the University's training programme being run by its Human Resource Development Centre (earlier known as the Academic Staff College). The Centre since 2015 was headed by the now infamous Atul Johri, who had made the centre and its hostel a residential place for RSS and ABVP activists.

The quality of the programmes conducted, the arbitrary selection of coordinators of the various disciplinary and interdisciplinary month-long programmes by the Director, the invitation to some very dubious non-academic and political figures, the withdrawal of invitations to those perceived as trouble makers, the threats held out to teacher participants at the programmes, etc. have all become commonplace.

Despite being forced to resign from the posts of the Director of both HRDC and IQAC, the previous Director has carried on the activities from the same premises with the help of the new Director, apparently encouraged and patronised by the VC.

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