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Not the place for patriot games

JNU VC's remit is academics, not instilling nationalism

Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) has been in the news in recent months for all the wrong reasons. The main one is the charge of sedition against many of its students for allegedly raising anti-national issues. Now the vice chancellor has undertaken an exercise that is bound to draw more unfavourable attention to the university. He has asked Union ministers Dharmendra Pradhan and General VK Singh to help him procure a tank to be displayed in a prominent place on the campus to be a constant reminder of the sacrifices the Indian Army makes. He also celebrated Kargil Vijay Diwas on the campus for the first time.

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It is not the VC's job to inculcate nationalism in students and certainly not through installing a tank in the university. Of far greater import and relevance is the fact that given the recent turmoil, many students have suffered due to the inability to complete their courses. Seats for research have been drastically cut. The VC does not seem overly concerned about this. Celebrating military victories is best left to those who have expertise in the field and to politicians and the public if it so wishes, not to academics. Nationalism is something which must come from within and not through external militaristic displays. Attempts to foist nationalism through symbols are meaningless. Pride in one's country stems from the values and ethics that students witness in public life. The use of military hardware to instil patriotism is reminiscent of the worst of Soviet-style dictatorships where the State exerted its might through these. Educational institutions in any event are not the grounds for what is obviously a politically motivated drive to inculcate nationalism. The VC has eroded the credibility of both his office and the institution by doing this. A comprehensive and relevant education system could be a far greater value addition to nation-building and it is this that should be the VC's remit.

The HRD ministry should ask him to stick to his brief. The Army is more than competent to commemorate its achievements without such interventions from academics. It can only be hoped that this does not start a trend at competitive nationalism among universities, which would spell danger for higher education.

Pranab's warning on House debate is timely

By not discussing the laws properly, MPs are ceding space to babus and judiciary

The figures are impressive: 543 persons from the 543 territorial constituencies of this country representing the people in Lok Sabha and 245 persons elected by 29 states and 7 Union Territories make laws, scrutinise orders of the executive and enforce accountability to protect the interests of the people. Each of these 788 voices is important. This is what the outgoing President Pranab Mukherjee told lawmakers on Sunday. Cut to the chase and this is what he meant: Mr Mukherjee cautioned the lawmakers that they are not spending enough time to debate the laws and this is a disservice to the people. Mr Mukherjee added with the heightened complexity of administration, legislation must be preceded by scrutiny and adequate discussion.

This is not the first time the Mr Mukherjee has reminded MPs about the quality of debates in the House. In May, he asked MPs and MLAs to improve the quality of deliberations, discussions and debates in the House, saying people have vested power and privileges in them. "You cannot remain the role model to the world simply because of the size of your electorate," he warned them. According to data, 19.58% of the total time was lost due to interruptions/adjournments in the 14th Lok Sabha, 41.6% in the 15th Lok Sabha and about 16% in the 16th Lok Sabha (up to the 10th session). Other senior members including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress president Sonia Gandhi have also spoken on this challenge.

By not debating the laws properly, MPs and MLAs are not just doing a disservice to the people but also ceding ground to the bureaucracy and judiciary. Unfortunately, there seem to be no crusaders to change the state of play — only a select set who are talking about the crisis. It then becomes incumbent on this select set to be the force of change.

Respond to West Asia's call for peace

India must not share the US' hostility towards Iran, which is both a target and enemy of jihad



TALMIZ AHMAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's triumphant foray into West Asia nearly two years ago, that encompassed the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Qatar, now seems a distant dream. The four joint statements during these visits had identified India as a "strategic partner" of these disparate countries competing for regional influence with each other, and had laid the basis for a constructive and substantial Indian political, economic and security role in West Asia. The engagement in Tehran had been particularly dramatic: Then, the Indian, Iranian and Afghan leaders had signed the tripartite agreement that would link the Chabahar port, to be developed and managed by India, with Afghanistan, providing a direct political and strategic link to sustain India's interests in that country.

There are concerns that the momentum of these path-breaking initiatives has faltered, with limited progress being made in implementing many of the agreements concluded by Indian and West Asian leaders.

The regional scenario now presents new

challenges for Indian diplomacy. Conflicts continue in Syria and Yemen, while the Saudi Arabia-Iran confrontation displays acrimonious rhetoric and even dangerous sabre-rattling. The situation has got further complicated with Saudi Arabia mobilising the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain in imposing a comprehensive embargo on Qatar for questioning the confrontation with Iran and reliance on US President Donald Trump as a partner in shaping this posture.

Trump had made Riyadh his first foreign destination as president and, in return for lucrative defence contracts, firmly allied himself with the Saudi-led Sunni political and military alliance against Iran.

This reflects the visceral animosity that Trump and his security chiefs have for Iran, seeing it as a "malign force" that is responsible for terrorist activity across West Asia. The Trump presidency has committed itself to rolling back Iran's regional influence and even promoting regime change.

Towards this end, the US president has removed restrictions on weapons supplies to Saudi Arabia for use in Yemen, and has approved lethal US bombings in both Syria and Yemen. Talk of war against Iran is being promoted by Right-wing lobbies. This has found a happy echo in Saudi Arabia whose powerful crown prince views the confrontation with Iran in stark sectarian terms.

Some observers believe that India, by distancing itself from Iran and recently hosting the foreign minister of the Saudi-backed



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Iran's President Hassan Rouhani review a guard of honour, Tehran, Iran, May 2016 REUTERS

Hadi government in Yemen, Abdulmalik Abduljalil Al Mekhlafi, is pursuing positions in line with the US approach.

This assessment makes little sense. From the Indian perspective, conflict in West Asia would be a very dangerous development since it would jeopardise its interests in terms of its energy security, trade and investment prospects, and the welfare of its eight million-strong community in the region.

India has no reason to share the US' hostility towards Iran. The US position is largely a product of domestic US interest groups, particularly the neo-cons and politicians beholden to them. India, on the other hand, knows that Iran is both the target of and the enemy of jihad.

Iran is crucial for India's strategic interests. The Chabahar port enhances India's regional, economic and political presence, balancing as it does the Chinese at Gwadar, just 80 km away. Again, road and rail links from Chabahar will connect India with Afghanistan, Central Asia, and, through the International North-South Transport Corridor, even Russia and west Europe. These connectivities will balance China's Belt and Road Initiative and make India a role-player in Central Asian and Eurasian politics.

Saudi Arabia's confrontation against Qatar shows the futility of its aggressive posturing. It has encouraged Iran and Turkey to rush to Qatar's assistance, calling into question the entire basis of Riyadh's simplistic sectarian approach to regional competitions.

India's recent interaction with the Yemeni foreign minister has hardly any political significance, since the sponsors of the Hadi government, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, are pursuing a political settlement that will exclude Hadi and bring former president Ali Abdullah Saleh back into the national mainstream.

West Asia is a part of India's neighbourhood. India's ties with this region go back several millennia; it is also the region where its crucial interests are at stake.

What the region desperately needs is not more conflict, being encouraged by the Trump presidency, but the balm of diplomacy that would promote engagement and dialogue. India should re-visit the joint statements signed two years ago and shape a diplomatic initiative to respond to the desperate call for peace from the region.

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HOUSE CHAOS



It's a sense of entitlement that makes some of our leaders behave in a regrettable manner. They feel they can get away with it. This must stop (TV GRAB)

Parliamentary privilege is no shield for bad behaviour

Banning unruly flyers, parliamentarians or not, should be seen as a passenger-friendly move



VIJU CHERIAN

Last week Rajya Sabha MP and Samajwadi Party leader Naresh Agrawal raised the issue of airlines banning passengers, especially MPs, from flying. He was referring to the ban imposed by major airlines on two MPs — JC Diwakar Reddy of the TDP and Ravindra Gaikwad of the Shiv Sena. Both bans were recently lifted.

Responding to Agrawal, Rajya Sabha deputy chairman PJ Kurien said: "Airlines are not given the authority to punish anybody....MPs are also citizens... if they commit a crime or mistake, the law of the land should take recourse to it."

Kurien is spot on! The law of the land must take its course. The problem is that this "course" is a long-winded one which often takes years, if not decades. And this delay is one of the reasons that embolden our netas to behave the way they do.

Moreover, by banning a passenger for creating a ruckus at the ticketing counter, or is an nuisance on the flight, the airline is protecting the interests of its employees and other passengers — passengers who have the paid for good service, and follow DGCA and airline rules. More than a punishment, a ban here is a passenger-friendly move.

What happened in the Rajya Sabha is making convenient use of the 'parliamentary privilege' card to defend unacceptable conduct by some of its members — conduct that should have been unequivocally condemned.

Why is it that many politicians hit an air pocket or face turbulence when flying? A decade ago, a minister in Kerala's LDF government resigned after a woman accused him of misbehaving with her on the flight. Two years ago, an MP from Bihar was alleged to have threatened crew members and refused to comply with DGCA guidelines.

It's a sense of entitlement that makes these leaders behave in this manner. They feel they can get away with it. This must stop.

Rather than realising that they have been elected to serve the people, they lord it over them. It is this derision that is seen when netas refuse to stand in queues, demand that their luggage be carried for them, and even demand privileges they are not entitled to.

It's a pity that some of our representatives believe that they are a cut above the people. The next time an MP or MLA is flying, he/she should try standing in the queue, be patient and follow the drill like others. It could be a humbling experience for the leader and give him/her a new perspective. It could even work to improve public opinion about them.

Today, a politician, especially an MLA or MP, standing in a queue or following the rules like any ordinary citizen's news. This is unfortunate, and should change. For that, if banning unruly flyers, including parliamentarians, will work, it should be done.

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Kovind does not have to be NDA's rubber stamp

No constitutional provision obliges the president to act mandatorily on the 'aid and advice' of the Union Cabinet



FAIZAN MUSTAFA

YOGESH PRATAP SINGH

The 'executive power of the Union shall be vested in the President and shall be exercised by him either directly or through officers subordinate to him'. In spite of the expression 'directly' in Article 53 of the Constitution, India's president merely 'reigns and does not rule'.

This was the view of BN Rau, who played a key role in drafting the Constitution. But KM Munshi, a member of the Constituent Assembly (CA), former presidents Rajendra Prasad, Zail Singh and KR Narayanan challenged this interpretation. Munshi asserted that the president "was not only to the highest dignity of the realm, but the embodiment of the unity of the country. His principal role was to prevent a parliamentary government from becoming a parliamentary anarchy".

There is no constitutional provision that obliges the president to act on the 'aid and advice' of the Cabinet though BR Ambedkar wanted such a provision in the instrument of instructions. After the Constitution came into operation, Rajendra Prasad, in a note to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru expressed the desire to act solely on his own judgment, especially when it came to giving assent to Bills and sending messages to Parliament. His reason: Presidents have to act on the advice of the Cabinet only in 'executive matters' and not on 'legislative decisions'.

This view was based on the accurate reading of Articles 86 and 111, which deal with legislative businesses i.e. presidential address to Parliament and assent to the Bills. Understanding, the gravity of the request, Nehru appointed the then Attorney General MC Setalvad, who recommended that the president is indeed a rubber stamp. The disagreement came up again in 1960, when Prasad reasserted his position.

THROUGH THE USE OF POWER OF RECONSIDERATION OF THE CABINET'S ADVICE AND THE USE OF POCKET VETO LIKE ZAIL SINGH, RAM NATH KOVIND CAN FULFIL HIS OATH AND ENHANCE THE STATURE OF HIS OFFICE

While the true position of president is somewhat similar to that of the British monarch, there are differences. The queen is above party politics but the Indian president is not since he is nominated by political parties.

The authority and status of the president depends upon the powers he can exercise and the functions he can perform under the Constitution. Unlike the British monarch, the President is not a hereditary head of the State. In fact while the PM is the leader of one House, the President is the leader of both Houses and assemblies. Unlike the British monarch, the Indian president can be impeached. This is because his powers flow from the oath he takes under Article 60 to 'preserve, protect and defend the Constitution and submit himself to the service and well-being of people of India'.

While ordinarily he has to act on the advice of the Cabinet, the latter does not have the right to give him an advice contrary to the provisions of the Constitution.

If the president has no role to play then why should he be impeached? If the president is responsible for 'preserving, protecting and defending' the Constitution, how can he be obliged to sign an illegal Bill? Making the president part of the Parliament (Art. 79) was essentially to integrate an effective inter-organ control device to check the powers of a strong Parliament.

The president also has discretion in appointing and dismissing the PM, which will come into play when no party gets the clear mandate or several leaders stake the claim or the PM loses the confidence motion. In the Ram Jawaya Kapur And Ors. vs The State Of Punjab case, the court observed: "In the Indian Constitution, we have the same system of parliamentary executive as in England and the Council of Ministers consisting, as it does, of the members of the legislature is, like the British Cabinet, "a hyphen which joins, a buckle which fastens the legislative part of the State to the executive part." True, the president has no choice if after reconsideration, Cabinet reiterates its original advice.

One hopes that the new president, Ram Nath Kovind, will follow the footsteps of Rajendra Prasad, Zail Singh and KR Narayanan who refused to be a rubber stamp. Through the intelligent use of power of reconsideration of the Cabinet's advice (like Narayan did) and the use of pocket veto and right to be informed like Zail Singh, Kovind can fulfil his oath and enhance the stature of his office.

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WE NEED PATIENCE TO DEVELOP A POSITIVE AND HELPFUL ATTITUDE

PP Wangchuk

The other day when I was having my evening walk, I saw a neatly-folded paper on the way. I picked it up out of sheer curiosity. What a surprise! It had a beautiful quote in an 'impossible-to-read' handwriting, but somehow I could make it: "In life, two things define you: Your patience when you have nothing; and your attitude when you have everything."

After a little research, I found that it is attributed to GB Shaw, the Irish playwright

and critic. I immediately jotted it down in my diary, and wondered how these two attributes in a human being play a key role in leading one to success or failure.

Patience and attitude are two characteristics of a personality that can be used to develop habits that are not only progressive but fulfilling as well. One who has patience can always cultivate and exhibit good attitude for a good, purposeful life.

And, as someone had said, one must have a lot of patience to learn to have patience. In the words of Leo Tolstoy, "Patience is the

most powerful warrior." That is because one who can wait and have patience will have the means, the ways and the time to win any battle.

Patience teaches us how to wait eagerly with hope and joy. A woman shows the greatest patience when she is pregnant for nine months, and those months are greatly fulfilling and an indescribable source of joy.

(Innr Voice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal.)

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