

Our Universities are a Space of Debate “Anti-Nationalism” is a means of suppressing dissent



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Lead Essay

Our Universities are a Space of Debate “Anti-Nationalism” is a means of suppressing dissent

Jawaharlal Nehru University, one of India’s premier educational institutes, has been depicted by several mainstream news channels and the social media as anti-national. This depiction of an entire institution took place after a video of four-five persons shouting deeply contentious slogans calling for “*Bharat ki barbadi tak jung ladegi*” at a cultural event named after Agha Shahid Ali Khan’s beautifully tragic poem *The Country Without a Post Office*. The event was organized by a few students, not present in this contentious video, to deliberate over the various losses that Kashmir has seen under the implementation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. This event has been taking place every year on the anniversary of the hanging of Afzal Guru, the man the Supreme Court convicted, and sentenced to death in 2013, for the attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001. The organizers of this event claimed that Afzal Guru was hanged on grounds of “satisfying the collective conscience of the nation” without any substantive evidence, and called it a ‘judicial killing’ in a pamphlet and poster circulated for the event. Should such an event have been allowed, and are the organizers of this event responsible for the offensive sloganeering that took place at the event?

Once the video went viral on national television, The Home Minister, Rajnath Singh, and Minister for Human Resource Development, Smriti Irani, made statements saying that no one will be forgiven for making anti-India slogans. An FIR was launched against unidentified students who gave the slogans in JNU. The University Authorities instituted a High-Level Committee to investigate into who these students were but before the students could be identified, the Delhi Police entered the University Campus on February 12th and arrested the JNU Student’s Union President Kanhaiya Kumar. Kumar, belongs to the All India Student’s Federation (AISF), a Left student’s group affiliated with the Parliamentary Party, the Communist Party of India (CPI), a group which is publicly dedicated to the implementation of the tenets of the Indian Parliament. Kumar was also not present in the video containing students giving out offensive slogans, and the students of JNU claim that he intervened in the event only to stop the sloganeers from giving out unconstitutional slogans. Further, as the President of the JNU Student’s Union, Kumar also brought out a public notice categorically condemning the offensive slogans. The Police have also been raiding both Boys and Girls Hostels in JNU searching for a list of 20 students on campus, mostly elected representatives of the students, claiming them to be “anti-national”. On February 13th, they detained 7 of the students on this list (Sebastian and Sunny 2016). Now, the video, allegedly showing ABVP members shouting pro-Pakistan slogans is going viral (Press Trust of India 2016). Who really gave out these offensive slogans in JNU? Why have the Police arrested an elected representative who has publicly denounced the offensive slogans?

For over three days, more than 2000 students and teachers in the University have been gathering peacefully to protest the police action on campus, the arrest of the President of the Student’s Union, and the detention of students on campus. On the second day of the protest, Rahul Gandhi and other Congress leaders like Anand Sharma, along with other Left leaders like CPI’s D Raja and CPM’s Sitaram Yechury came to show solidarity with the student’s campaign against the arbitrary action of the Government. About 15 ABVP activists were holding lack flags and shouting slogans against Rahul Gandhi. However, the students organizing the meeting, teachers and other members in the gathering quickly formed a human chain to hold back these ABVP activists who were trying to drown out the voice of the Congress and Left leaders. While the ABVP continued to shout, they were pushed to the back of the meeting, which continued peacefully. Many have written about how this arrangement symbolized how debate, as well as dissent, have been part of JNU’s ethos without allowing violence to overshadow any voice (Menon 2016) (Parkar 2016). Why have so many students, teachers, alumnus and intellectuals physically come out in support of the arrested JNUSU President Kanhaiya Kumar when the mainstream visual media is portraying the institute as a hub of anti-national activities?

I

Arrest of Students: Witch-hunt or Implementation of the Rule of Law?

We raised several questions while narrating the events as they played out in JNU. This section of this document will seek to answer some of these questions:

1) Should such an event have been allowed, and are the organizers of this event responsible for the offensive sloganeering that took place at the event?

This is not the first time that an event looking into capital punishment, or ‘judicial killing’ as called by some students in JNU, has been called on the University campus. Questions over capital punishment, over the preemptive arrests of citizens of this country in terrorist attacks without substantial evidence of their involvement, over the killings of Dalit families and destruction of entire

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villages in incidents like Bathani Tola, over riots across different parts of the country like in Muzaffarpur, over the over the sustained implementation of AFSPA in Kashmir and parts of the North East, etc. have been raised through meetings within campus on several occasions. These questions have been raised by students in an informed manner, often to produce a range of arguments that are not necessarily in agreement with each other. They are rarely interrupted by students, and even when some students and research scholars, including those from the ABVP, have views that the larger student body does not agree with, their space to voice the same is respected and employed as an opportunity for deliberation. This sort of discussion is very much valued within the University as it is seen as the form of civic responsibility that scholars are meant to engage in as citizens of the country. By having these discussions, these debates within JNU have become a small triumph of Indian democracy: a meeting point for scholars, coming from different parts of the country and diverse backgrounds, to participate in a deliberative process on the serious problems that our democracy has to tackle and the possible ways of going about it. These debates do not push contentious questions such as the hanging of Afzal Guru to the side, but tackle them head-on. Our democracy guarantees Indian citizens the Right to do so, as long as they question the judgement without holding the court to contempt. At any rate, organizing such an event cannot be considered as an act of sedition.

The organizers of the event, who were NOT members of the JNUSU, were not those who were present in the video. Therefore, one cannot say if they were part of the anti-Indian sloganeering brigade. If they were, then ought the Home Minister intervene with an entire police force to enter the University? In a University space where intense debate takes place on many issues, the fear of imminent violence is very low. Further, University Administrations have their own mechanisms for dealing with those who make contentious statements in these debates. The University Administration in this case was barely allowed to carry ahead its investigation. Instead the Police Commissioner of Delhi, Mr. D. Bassi, has sent the Vice Chancellor of the University a notice asking him to produce a list of students, allegedly for anti-national activity, without having any proof of the same. This has slowed down the process of finding the unidentified persons who gave out the anti-national slogans at the event, and has led to the detainment of a number of students without any substantive charges against them. The autonomy of the University in dealing with violators of rules has been run over roughshod, and all processes of investigation, before leveling charges, have been skipped in an extraordinary manner in order to detain certain students who were not the organizers of the event. The Home Minister and Delhi Police have also announced, based on a reportedly fake account, that Hafeez Saeed, the head of the Lashkar-e-Taiba, a banned terrorist organization, has been behind the entire incident. Such unsubstantiated statements by the Home Minister will only compromise the independence and autonomy of any inquiry made by the University (Swami 2016)

2) Who really gave out these offensive slogans in JNU? Why have the Police arrested an elected representative who has publicly denounced the offensive slogans?

The actual sloganeers remained unidentified though there are now reports which suggest that the sloganeers might actually be ABVP activists. The logic of arresting the JNUSU president instead of the sloganeers, however, barely makes any legal sense. In order to elaborate this claim, let us use an analogy: If an unidentified person in Madhya Pradesh says something 'seditious' tomorrow and the police cannot find this unidentified person, will they arrest the elected representatives of the state? Further, would the media carry out a sustained campaign against the entire population of the state of Madhya Pradesh? The obvious answers to these questions would be no. Arresting an elected president of a University at the heart of the capital of India, and treating him like a terrorist smacks of state sponsored oppression of innocent civilians.

3) Why have so many students, teachers, alumnus and intellectuals physically come out in support of the arrested JNUSU President Kanhaiya Kumar when the mainstream visual media is portraying the institute as a hub of anti-national activities?

The teachers and students of JNU have prided themselves on the democratic culture of the University. As a University, JNU has stood in solidarity with various movements of the marginalized in the country, and held up the dictum of knowledge as virtue while doing so. The JNU Teachers Association and JNU Students Union have argued that one of the institutions' contributions to democratic rights discourse in India has been to assert the claim that rights are not just a privilege guaranteed to us by a Government, but a power and immunity, guaranteed by the Indian constitution, against those who seek to suppress the voices that do not agree with them. This doesn't amount to a waste of taxpayers money. It is what taxpayers money is supposed to do: enable the citizenry to think of how their state should be, and what their state should do.

By arresting the JNUSU president and searching for student activists without any proof of sedition against them, the police is violating their immunity-right against the undue use of force by the state against its citizens. In the last six months or so, as the students from JNU have been raising their voices against the scrapping of research fellowships, against WTO-GATTs agreements

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signed by the Government of India that may threaten the autonomy of educational institutions in India, and against the death of Rohith Vemula and other Dalit students in universities across India, the police has repeatedly lathi-charged, tear gassed and water-cannoned them. This prolonged attack on the voice of educational institutions as the shapers of intellectual life and policies of the Government has led not just students, but teachers and alumni to protest against the atrocities of the Government against the institution.

But behind the obvious politics that the Government is playing with the events that have taken place in the Central University's campus, there are several larger questions that are being raised. Is this Government trying to suppress the voices of all those who do not agree with them? To what extent will they go to do so?

II

RSS and its Parivar: The Protector of All Things “National”

ABVP: the stormtrooper of the RSS/BJP

The Akhil Bharatiya Vidhyarthi Parishad have been at the forefront of finding alleged ‘anti-nationals’ across campuses in India. Wherever democratic aspirations are expressed, or complaints against the policies of the government made, the ABVP has contacted their respective BJP MLA's or MP's to file FIR's against students in the name of ‘anti-national activity’. In Rohith Vemula's case in the University of Hyderabad, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) responded to the filing of complaints by BJP MP Dattatreya against Dalit students but not against the ABVP students who reportedly attacked them. The ABVP also physically threatened the president of the Student's Union in Allahabad University but all her letters of complaint to the MHRD have been ignored (Menon 2016). In JNU, the sloganeers shouting offensive slogans are allegedly from the ABVP but the Ministry of Home Affairs has defended the arrest of the JNUSU President from the Communist Party of India. Why have such few investigations taken place into the role of the ABVP across campuses in India, even though they have been present in almost all the large events of exploitation against students in the recent past? The answer seems to lie in the ABVP projecting themselves as defenders of nationalist sentiments against all those who do not adhere to their version of nationalism. The Ministries of the Government are taking strict action against those who disagree with this version, without making a basic distinction between cases in which the coercive power of the state can be exercised and cases of simple dissent against the policies of the state (Mehta 2016). The ABVP seems to be the stormtroopers of the Government on the ground, within Universities, informing the Government of all those who disagree with them. This is leading to a sense of fear among universities, otherwise spaces of debate and discussion, and smacks of a tyrannical link between student organizations on the ground and a Government intent on suppressing voices raised against it.

Unverified propaganda of the BJP-led Government: The Home Minister, Rajnath Singh, announced on February 14th, that the protests of students in JNU had the backing of Hafiz Saeed. This was after he received information of a “tweet” by an unidentified individual impersonating the Lashkar-e-Taiba chief. Intelligence agencies, however, have claimed that they have no evidence that the tweet was issued by any individual connected to Saeed. The account the tweet emerged from was not networked with any of the Jama'at's accounts for followed by other Islamist handles either. The account had also misspelt the English-language spelling Saeed has used for his name in the past. This tweet, inviting JNU students to Pakistan, to continue their “Pro-Kashmiri, Anti-India propaganda” was spread widely across social media reportedly by Hindutva activists (Swami 2016).

But a more serious question is this: Why is the Home Minister making hair-raising claims a terrorist group supporting the students of a University based on what is evidently a fake account? This is indicative of what Pratap Bhanu Mehta has called “a government that is both rabidly malign and politically incompetent”. Political decision-making at the highest level of the Government seems to have questionable substantive evidence, using the might of the state to spread propaganda and fear among dissenters. This propaganda is being used to “put on display this government's imperiously presumptuous claim that it has the monopoly on nationalism” (Mehta 2016).

But this is not merely about quelling dissent. JNU does not merely contain a group of rebel students but is a university of a high caliber carrying out serious research work on the policies of the Government. By sending investigating agencies and police into the university the Government is also going to interfere in the objective research that the University prides itself on. It is not just dissent towards the Government, but other ideologies, other ways of thinking about what is good for society and a diverse polity like ours that may come under investigation causing a great degree of state-sponsored harassment to the researchers within the University.

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Constitutional Patriotism versus Parivar Nationalism:

The mainstream media has largely reported the events in JNU as one taking place between nationals and anti-nationals. By framing the debate in terms of nationalism, it has obfuscated the manner in which the Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression as an immunity against the excessive use of force by the state has been trampled upon by the Government. A video of the arrested President of the JNU Student's Union, Kanhaiya Kumar, clearly states his condemnation of the offensive slogans given by a few students in the meeting against the integration of India. It also asserts various tenets of the Indian constitution, and a definition of patriotism and nationalism that arises from the values of the constitution: democracy, equality and rights (Kumar, JNUSU President Kanhaiya Kumar's speech before being arrested 2016). The JNU President and his Union have asserted their commitment towards a nationalism defined by constitutional tenets (Kumar, Shora and Naga 2016). The offensive slogans by the unidentified students may have been anti-national but the debate has not treated these students as its centre. This raises serious questions on the effectiveness of the RSS propaganda in terms of maligning those who are raising their voices against the Parivaar form of nationalism.

There have been some sections of the media who have been attacked for paying attention to the voices of the students and faculty in JNU as well. People dressed up in lawyers garb assaulted a number of journalists and JNU Faculty members on 15th February, outside the courtroom in which the JNU President was to be heard. Journalists were also threatened for being present outside the courtroom (Bhatt 2016).

III

Why target the students? The Student's Movement: a threat to the RSS?

Students in India have been at the helm of several movements of the country. JNU has been at the helm of these movements that have questioned various policies of the Government. When the Minister for Human Resource Development (MHRD), Smriti Irani, cut back Non-NET scholarships worth a small amount of 99.8 crore disbursed to research scholars across the country, the student's movement questioned this move, arguing that it would restrict research and scholarship by post-graduate students who, often, had no way to fund their education and research in the MPhil and PhD stages. This campaign built up into a movement against the signing of the WTO-GATTs agreement by the current Government which made Higher Education a tradeable commodity in India. The withdrawal of the Non-Net Scholarships by the MHRD was interpreted by the Student's Movement as a way of ushering in the WTO-GATT reforms that requires the Indian State to bring about a "level-playing field" to all educational institutions, both private and public. This "level-playing field" would have required the Government to fund research scholars in private institutions as well, putting a load on its own funds. Therefore, students argued, the Government was withdrawing the fellowships granted to the bulk of research scholars in Government Universities.

The Students Movement has also protested against the politics of Hindutva, the politics of the Cow, Moral Policing of young people and calculated communal violence. When Rohith Vemula committed suicide in the University of Hyderabad after being suspended from the University under directions from the MHRD, the students of JNU stood in solidarity with those who criticized the Government for his death. The Student's Movement, of which JNU is a strong part has proven to be a thorn in the politics that this Government endorses and propagates. Targeting students in this way has proved an effective strategy for this Government to silence the slowly growing voice that this movement seemed to be gaining.

Sedition: A convenient means of suppression?

Is there a need for a sedition law in this country? Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code defines a seditionist as someone who "by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, visible representation, or others, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the government established by law in India". Jawaharlal Nehru thought that this section was an unreasonable restriction, and argued that "the sooner we get rid of it the better" (Hegde 2015). Sedition, seen as a crime going back to Elizabethan England, and an import into India through colonialism was a useful tool for the colonial administration to suppress dissent against their rule in India. However, this law has remained even in the post-colonial state, being justified by the judiciary as required in order to maintain the balance between individual fundamental rights and the interest of public order. This law has consequently been used to start proceedings against critics of Governments in India. Recently, the Home Department of the Government of Maharashtra advised all policemen to invoke sedition charges against those who write words, signs or make representations 'against a person who is shown as representative of the government' (Hegde 2015).

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Further, there has been a great deal of hypocrisy over who is being titled as seditious and anti-national. Those glorifying Godse on the death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi have been allowed to do so without any attention from the Government, however, those questioning the hanging of Afzal Guru in a University debate have been hounded by the Government and the Police. As Rohan D'Souza points out: "We are in a bizarre crisis. It doesn't matter what is said as much as who says it." (D'Souza 2016).

There are many who have pointed out that the sedition charge brought out against JNUSU President Kanhaiya Kumar can actually amount to contempt of the Supreme Court, as the court has repeatedly said that only incitement to immediate violence acts as sedition. "Mere advocacy of projects inimical to the constitutional scheme of things, which is protected by the Constitution's guarantee of free speech" does not amount to sedition. In the case of Kanhaiya Kumar, who has already claimed his allegiance to the Indian constitution, his right to defend those who wanted to question the atrocities in Kashmir does not count as an attack on the nation's integrity or sovereignty (ET Edit 2016).

Sedition as a criminal offense has a chilling effect on the Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression, making the Act a weapon of oppression in the hands of a police officer, or the Government. Many have demanded that the Supreme Court must declare Section 124A as unconstitutional (Hegde 2015) (Achary 2015). At this point, when the Government is using this clause as a weapon against voices that disagree with it, the call to dismiss sedition has grown louder than ever (D'Souza 2016).

The Government's decision making in the recent weeks has been extra-constitutional and driven by a jingoistic idea of nationalism that only the ruling party and its affiliated organizations abide in. Nationalism cannot be the ultimate value in the life of a constitutional democracy like India, unless defined by the contours of constitutional patriotism where the values of democracy, equality and our fundamental rights are foundational. The Government has thought little of its image abroad with Amnesty International and other international organizations condemning this move of the Government. Neither has it thought of its credibility among the intelligentsia of its own country or its bureaucracy, a group of thinkers and civil servants, many of whom have studied and taught in JNU, a campus widely recognized for its critical temperament. Most importantly, it did not think of the capacity of such a move to unite several progressive forces against the Government. What will transpire in the days to come will be a test for the Government which will have to justify its draconian moves to the public in terms beyond its own ideas of nationalism.

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Headlines

‘Make in India Week’: Government unveils first-ever Policy on Capital Goods Sector

(Daily News and Analysis; February 16, 2016)

The government on Monday unveiled the first-ever policy for the country's capital goods sector which envisages the creation of 21 million additional jobs by 2025. The policy envisions increasing the share of capital goods in total manufacturing activity from 12% at present to 20% by 2025.

"The capital goods policy was cleared by Prime Minister Narendra Modi last week," Union Heavy Industries Minister Anant Geete told PTI.

Read more: <http://www.dnaindia.com/money/report-govt-unveils-first-ever-policy-for-capital-goods-sector-2178294>

Date accessed: 16.02.2016

Over 40% Living with HIV in India are Women

(Sushmi Dey, *The Times of India*, February 08, 2016)

In what could pose a significant challenge for India to meet its ambitious target of ending AIDS by 2030, women continue to account for more than 40% of people living with HIV infection in the country. The share of women is crucial because of risk of transmission from pregnant women, uneducated and unaware women as well as among vulnerable groups including sex workers.

According to Nochiketa Mohanty, country programme manager, AIDS Healthcare Foundation, while there are programmes to prevent parent-to-child transmission of the virus, there is greater need to focus on women. Experts also say HIV testing is not prevalent among women, especially in rural areas and even among the migrating population in both urban and rural settings. "Women do not really go out and get tested for HIV because there is social stigma and taboo attached to it. They fear getting identified socially," Mohanty said.

Read More: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/Over-40-living-with-HIV-in-India-are-women/articleshow/50893985.cms>

Date Accessed: 08.02.2016

Governance & Development

GOVERNMENT

States Prefer Subsidised Food Scheme Over DBT

(Free Press Journal, February 09, 2016)

Not a single state has accepted Modi government's 'Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)' in implementation of National Food Security Act (NFSA). According to the report even the BJP-ruled state and union territories sought distribution of the food grains to the poor at the Center's cost as per the original scheme under the Act enacted by the UPA government. "The rules were notified last August to give money instead of food grains with a view to check leakage of food grains from the ration shops under the public distribution system (PDS) and provide for cash transfer of food subsidy directly into the bank accounts of the beneficiaries."

Read more: <http://www.freepressjournal.in/states-prefer-subsidised-food-scheme-over-dbt/776399>

Date Accessed: 11.02.2016

When 'Average' Income is not Available to Average Individual

(Tadit Kundu, *The Livemint*, February 15, 2016)

It might be misleading to believe that mean incomes would capture the well-being of the average individual—those who are in the middle of the income distribution—in a country. A better way of finding out this is to use median income levels. In statistics, median is meant to capture the value of the middle item in a distribution. The median income statistic and the results its comparison with mean incomes gives advocate further sobriety in treating mean incomes as the only goal which policymakers should be chasing. At the same time, there is also a need to adopt a more multi-dimensional approach to analysing inequality, given the low correlation between mean-median gap and mean incomes.

Read more: <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/m7jTg7cLGz7f99XS83PF8J/When-average-income-is-not-available-to-average-individual.html>

Date Accessed: 16.2.2016

EDUCATION

Another Smriti Bid on Saffronisation?

(Free Press Journal, February 10, 2016)

Union Human Resource Development Minister Smriti Irani has pushed an idea of volunteer teacher to tackle the teachers' shortage in government and aided schools. According to the report of free press journal, the scheme for experimenting with the volunteers as teachers would be tried on a pilot basis in 18 states, including Gujarat, Goa, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Karnataka, Punjab, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Tripura. "Some said the shortage of teachers was a ploy to engage people with RSS sympathies to spread the Sangh ideology among children, while others accused the government of abdicating its responsibility and playing with the future of school-going children."

Read more: <http://www.freepressjournal.in/another-smriti-bid-on-saffronisation/776676>

Date Accessed: 11.02.2016

TECHNOLOGY

Disruptive Transformation

(*The Livemint*, February 16, 2016)

Very few technologies in the biology space have the ability to bring about disruptive transformation and capture the imagination of scientists, clinicians, policymakers and ordinary people equally. Gene editing is one such technology that has been in the news lately for its potential applications in the realms of basic biology, biomedical sciences and agriculture. This technology holds

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promise not only for treatment of human diseases through correction of gene defects in cells, but also has potential for improving agricultural yields, producing disease- and pest-resistant animals and crops, and for producing organisms that can synthesize specific products of commercial or medicinal importance.

Read more: <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/G7VqjMCyGUp31mics5iPvN/Disruptive-transformation.html>

Date Accessed: 16.2.2016

HEALTH

India's drug monitoring programme struggles to grow fast enough

(Livemint, February 16, 2016)

India's six-year-old pharmacovigilance programme, which collects and submits suspected adverse drug reactions to a World Health Organisation (WHO) database, is key to improving drug safety in a country where medicine consumption is high, experts say. But insufficient staff and equipment, and a lack of awareness among medical professionals mean many potentially dangerous drug reactions go unrecorded, hospital personnel across India told Reuters.

Read more: <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/7Db2zPHnaVU1oIVi1bRkHO/Indias-drug-monitoring-programme-struggles-to-grow-fast-eno.html>

Date accessed: 16.02.2016.

Battling Doctor Shortage, Indian Hospitals Offer Intensive Care from Afar

(Aditya Kalra, Reuters, February 08, 2016)

India's top private hospitals, seizing on a shortage of critical-care doctors, are expanding into the remote management of intensive care units around the country and, starting this month, in neighbouring Bangladesh too. India has seven doctors for every 10,000 people, half the global average, according to the World Health Organization. Data from the Indian Medical Association shows the country needs more than 50,000 critical care specialists, but has just 8,350. Such a shortage of doctors means small facilities in India's \$55 billion private hospital market are ill equipped to provide critical care even as numbers seeking private healthcare rise because the public health system is in even worse shape.

Hospitals charge between \$10 and \$30 a day to virtually monitor a patient from their eICUs, with revenues shared between hospitals and companies such as General Electric and Philips that have developed the tracking software. That comes on top of standard critical care costs of about \$200 a day in a small city hospital. At that price, eICUs do little to address concerns of millions of India's poor patients who often share beds or wait for days to gain admission to a public hospital.

Read More: <http://www.reuters.com/article/india-hospitals-doctors-shortage-idUSKCN0VH03P>

Date Accessed: 08.02.2016

Society

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Muslim Personal Law is Based on Quran, Courts Can't Question its Validity: Jamiat Ulama-e-Hind

(Prajakta Hebbar, *The Huffington Post*, February 06, 2016)

The Jamiat Ulama-e-Hind (JUH), which is a collective of Indian Islamic Scholars, asserted before the Supreme Court that courts could not test the validity of Muslim personal law in order to do away with prejudice against women as it was based on the Holy Quran.

"Mohammedan law is founded essentially on the Holy Quran and this cannot fall within the purview of the expression 'laws in force' as mentioned in Article 13 of the Constitution, and hence its validity cannot be tested on a challenge based on Part-III of the Constitution (guaranteeing fundamental rights, including right to equality)," said the JUH application. "Personal laws do not derive their validity on the ground that they have been passed or made by a legislature or other competent authority. The foundational sources of personal law are their respective scriptural texts," the application added.

A bench of Chief Justice TS Thakur and Justices AK Sikri and R Banumathi took up the petition titled 'Muslim Women's Quest for Equality' and agreed to make JUH a party to the proceedings. They have sought responses from the JUH, the attorney general and National Legal Services Authority on the questions posed by the SC in six weeks. Reports added that the All India Muslim Personal Law Board is also expected to request the SC to make it a party in the case.

Read More: http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2016/02/06/muslim-personal-law-judiciary_n_9174600.html?utm_hp_ref=in-news

Date Accessed: 08.02.2016

Women Cops Stay Thirsty for Hours, Face Privacy and Sanitation Issues at Work: Survey

(*The Asian Age*, February 07, 2016)

Even as the government plans to induct more women into police as part of its empowerment drive, a survey conducted among those serving has found they still grapple with lack of basic amenities like toilets, uncomfortable duty gear and want of privacy.

While on one hand these personnel have to go thirsty for long hours while on duty as there are hardly any toilets around, they say bullet proof or body protection vests provided to them are so tight and heavy that they cause breathlessness, as they are made as per the physical requirements of a male body.

The findings of the survey and its recommendations were presented during the 7th National Conference on Women in Police, jointly organised by the Bureau of Police Research and Development and CRPF in Gurgaon early this year.

One of the issues that the women officials said required improvement was privacy as the "concept of personal space is different for male and females". The survey found while women cops go on long spells of no water to avoid urination, it is also hard for them to find a proper place to wash their clothes and even to dry their undergarments while on job.

Read More: <http://www.asianage.com/india/women-cops-stay-thirsty-hours-face-privacy-and-sanitation-issues-work-survey-272>

Date Accessed: 08.02.2016

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Taking Pride in Prejudice

(Radhika Santhanam, *The Hindu*, February 08, 2016)

These statements reflect the serious nature of the problem of racism in India: a stubborn refusal to acknowledge something that is so obvious. Perhaps the fact that violent expressions of racism spring up only once in a while allows us to present the problem with

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other coordinates, such as law and order and road rage. When racism plays out in subtler, less physically damaging ways in everyday life, it doesn't provoke debate, as this form of racism is internalised. It is only when it takes a violent turn that we are forced to address it.

A survey conducted in 2012 by the North-East India Image Managers about the perception of people from other parts of the country about the Northeast found that 52 per cent of respondents had a negative perception about the region. They saw it as "riddled with insurgency and the most unsafe place in the country or that of people with mongoloid features and weird food habits and an alien culture." A whopping 87 per cent of working professionals spoken to couldn't even name the seven Northeast States. Despite chest-thumping about diversity and difference, displayed in Republic Day parades and other occasions that showcase nationalism, Indians seem to take pride in and demand some level of homogeneity. This sense of oneness stems from an imagined sense of "us" and excludes the different-looking "them".

Read More: <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/taking-pride-in-prejudice/article8206294.ece?homepage=true>

Date Accessed: 08.02.2016

DEMOGRAPHY

How India Retires

(*The Livemint*, February 16, 2016)

Census 2011 data shows that for every five persons aged above 60 years, more than two are still working. There is a significant gender gap on this count. While a lot more data is required to ascertain how economically secure our senior citizens are, it can be safely said that very few among them have access to a remunerative retired life. Also, increasing incidence of informal employment, which carries little in terms of social security or retirement benefits, would not contribute towards a future where retirement would be something to look forward to.

Read more: <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/QuyhOjkEhHrXFh3Vkl1nMzN/How-India-retires.html>

Date Accessed: 16.2.2016

India and World

EAST AND SOUTH EAST ASIA

Aung San Suu Kyi Could Become Myanmar President After 'Positive' Talks: Reports (The Guardian, February 08, 2016)

Two pro-government television channels in Myanmar have reported that “positive results” could come out of negotiations between the military chief and Aung San Suu Kyi on suspending a constitutional clause that prevents her from becoming the president.

Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy Party won a landslide victory in the 8 November general elections. However, she is barred from becoming president because of the Constitution’s Article 59 (f), which says anyone with a foreign spouse or children cannot hold the executive office. Suu Kyi’s late husband was British, as are her two sons.

Suu Kyi has been negotiating with commander-in-chief General Min Aung Hlaing on having the clause suspended, which can be legally removed only through a two-thirds vote in parliament. The military holds 25% of the nominated seats in parliament, which means the NLD cannot scrap the clause on its own.

Read More: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/08/aung-san-suu-kyi-myanmar-president-positive-talks>

Date Accessed: 08.02.2016

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