

Reporting on the 144th Academic Council meeting

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The proceedings of the 144th Academic Council were conducted in the same undemocratic manner as the previous AC meetings. As usual, the selective permission to speak by the Chairperson ensured that most faculty colleagues were not afforded an opportunity to speak freely, and the Chair on more than one occasion thought it fit to make unbecoming observations about dissenting opinions. While the submissions and conduct of a certain (minority) group of faculty members (some of them special invitees whose presence did not seem warranted by the agenda) were usually welcomed by the Chair, the views of colleagues who were more guarded in their endorsements or raised troubling questions, were never allowed to frame the discussion on any agenda item. Indeed, as soon as the first such dissenting opinion, the sole effort thereafter was to close down the discussion on the issue right then and there.

Not one of the scores of objections given as responses to the minutes of the 143rd AC meeting were brought on record by the JNU administration. For the first time in several decades, discussion about the JNU admission statistics was not allowed. The Chair also ruled that no discussion of the university's admission policy could be taken up because the matter is "sub judice", which notion does not inexplicably

bar the JNU administration from continuing to pursue a policy that has resulted in the worst violations of reservation policy and the JNU Act and a general failure in fulfilment of intake. The fact that *only 2 SCs, 1 ST and 13 OBCs have joined the university in the research degree admissions, that M.Phil./PhD admissions are just 50% of the intake announced and Direct PhD admissions are just 35%, and that the all India character of JNU admissions for these degrees have been seriously compromised, with just three states countermanding 60% of the admissions,* was raised by several colleagues, JNUSU and JNUTA. These repeated interventions pointing out that the statistics call for a re-appraisal of the university's admission policy were ignored, a move that was actively welcomed, and even applauded, by various functionaries of the JNU administration.

Faculty and students' attempts to discuss the proposal of the Engineering and Management School were also more or less brushed aside as well , even though the majority of opinions have actually opposed it. The opinions placed before the AC were presented like this:

No details were presented as to what reservations each Centre that objected. The opinions of Deans as individuals was cited, CESP/SSS appears twice (22 and 29), with exactly the opposite conclusion. The opinion of CRCAS/SIS is not intelligible (though presumably the injunction 'to wait' is not one that CRCAS communicated), the opinion of SAA turned out to be a misrepresentation. **By JNUTA's reading of this rather elliptical and occasionally profoundly ungrammatical table, the opinions wholeheartedly in favour were 11, those with undisclosed**

reservations/ suggestions were 6, and those unambiguously against were 13. JNUTA's intervention that details of the reservations/suggestions must be placed before the AC was brushed aside and Schools/Centres that disagreed were termed as being "obstructionist". JNUTA's opinion that there was not enough in the document to justify the socially sensitive tag it had awarded itself, and that there should be a discussion of how different this programme was to be from the IITs were not answered. **Rather, the Chair announced that he has been promised 180 crore rupees by the UGC for this School and full support in terms of faculty positions. A decision to run the entrance exam, rather than through the IIT-JEE system was also announced. Along with engineering, the programme in management was also deemed to be passed, even though not one comment regarding this was placed as part of the agenda for discussion.**

The tabled agenda contained a contention that the Special Centre for Sanskrit Studies should be "upgraded" to a School for Sanskrit and Indic Studies, but no actual proposal was circulated. Members of the Committee assured the Academic Council that they had one in mind, but it was still under construction and would be circulated soon. Submissions that pending the proposal no approval even in principle could be possible were ignored.

Only one agenda item, tabled at the last minute, was allowed to have something resembling a discussion, but that too was with something of an ulterior motive. This was regarding the elevation of CGPA requirements for the integrated BA and MA programmes of SLLCS, a proposal that was vigorously contested by the students, but endorsed by

virtually all the Chairpersons of the foreign language teaching Centres. The Dean SLLCS made it clear that this elevation would only apply to students admitted in the next academic year, and that decision was approved despite the JNUSU's objections that this will lead to a further increase in dropouts in the undergraduate programmes. The debate which ensued on the existence and causes for dropouts, which has been one that the BoS of SLLCS has witnessed repeatedly, was one that was used by the Chair to announce that it was necessary for the School to reconsider the issue of the delinking of the BA/MA programmes. **This was immediately taken up by the Rector-I to make the suggestion that a Committee for delinking the M.Phil./PhD integrated programme is also needed, and this was later extended to include install compulsory attendance and a teacher 'feedback' (the Chair claimed to have knowledge of teacher absenteeism) system for the whole university. Protests from several colleague were ignored.**

The one item that did not make it to the agenda was the MSc Mathematics programme of the university. It should be recalled that this programme was sent to Schools and Centres, without even an approval in principle, for comments. **Despite Dean SPS's persistent efforts to get the agenda item included in the agenda for the 144th AC — 30 comments were received — the matter was not tabled,** and the Chair refused to listen to the House's pleas that it could be discussed so that the programme be offered by the university in 2019-20. The JNUTA can not fathom why a MSc Mathematics course deserves such a venomous rebuff from a purported man of science, but the aggressive put-downs delivered to other Science School Deans who protested this seem to indicate an animus that runs deep, and is certainly not becoming of a Vice Chancellor.

The JNUTA strongly condemns the authoritarian, undemocratic manner in which the 144th Academic Council meeting was conducted. It warns the Chair and his team that repression of democratically divergent opinion does not ever mean the elimination of dissent. The elision of the voices of the teaching community does not change its mind, and indeed makes us more committed to fight for this university even harder.

Ayesha Kidwai

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President

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