

## **Intolerance in the university**

### **A Prabakaran, Higher Education, 9 December 2005**

The University stands for humanism and tolerance, for reason, for adventure of ideas and for the search of truth. It stands for the forward march of the human race towards even higher objectives. If the universities discharge their duties adequately then it is well with the nation and the people." said Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Unfortunately the university established in his name practices against what he preached to the public. Disruption of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh's speech on 14th November in New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) shows the level of intolerance among certain group of students in the university.

India's vote against Iran in the International Atomic Energy Agency's meeting; neo liberal policies of the government, P.M's Oxbridge speech and many broader issues were the reasons for the interruption according to the protestors.

Although majority members of JNU are engaged in performing what India's first Prime Minister visualized, a miniscule minority is trying to tarnish the image of this prestigious institution. On the eve of 36th foundation day celebrations of the university, Dr. Manmohan Singh was invited to unveil the statue of Pandit Nehru and address the mammoth gathering. Venue for the two occasions was different. Anticipating some trouble from few sections of the student community, university administration separated the two functions. While the statue unveiling saw only dignitaries like P.M, HRD minister, Arjun Singh, Chancellor Dr. Karan Singh, former vice chancellors and selected members of faculty and administration, P.M's speech ceremony was free for all JNU community.

Knowing well in advance about this programme, few student outfits planned a protest demo against P.M's visit to the campus. They were in their creative best to convince the campus community to support their efforts. Slogans like 'apologist for colonialism, architect of neo-colonialism, Manmohan Singh go back' were printed with provocative cartoons. Mainly the groups which shouted slogans against P.M's visit were radical Left organizations. Around 30 students managed to carry black shawls and clothes to the P.M's speech venue and waived at him. Above all, they stood up and constantly disrupted his speech by shouting hurty slogans against Dr. Manmohan Singh. P.M was unmoved; administration was ashamed. Majority of the students and teachers who were listening to the P.M asked the protesters to calm down. But the young radicals were excited in shouting slogans. So they were ready to face the lathis of police. Finally there were clashes between the protesters and some other student organizations which gave little hassle free time for P.M to deliver his address. Dr. Singh showered praises on JNU. He paid rich tributes for its landmark achievements and promotion of liberty. Voltaire came handy to him in talking about the need for free speech. Ironically he was not allowed to speak without any noise from the audience gallery. Dr. Manmohan Singh is not the only one who had problem in JNU. There is long history of protests against the visiting dignitaries.

Bhupendra Singh Hooda, the Chief Minister of Haryana had a tough time few days back in answering the red crowd about Gohana riots and Gurgaon violence on his visit to JNU. He was ghearod for more than half an hour and was not allowed to leave. Chairs were thrown on air and stones were pelted from the crowd.