NATION

Academics seek Saarc help over prof axe

BASANT KUMAR MOHANTY

New Delhi: Over 300 academics and researchers from universities across the world have sought Saarc's intervention in the "unjust dismissal" of a faculty member by the South Asian University (SAU).

In a letter to Saarc secretary-general Md Golam Sarwar, the signatories have requested the revocation of the termination of Snehashish Bhattacharya, an associate professor of economics.

SAU had sacked Bhattacharya in September for opposing the university's decision to call police to the campus in October 2022 to quell a student protest. Bhattacharya and four other faculty members had criticised the university for expelling a few students for demanding a hike in stipend. While three other teachers apologised later, Bhattacharya did not relent.

SAU has said Bhattacharya's actions amounted to "incitement against the University". When Bhattacharya moved Delhi High Court, SAU pleaded that the Indian courts did not have jurisdiction over it as it was an international institution.

In their letter to Saarc, the academics argued that Bhattacharya stood by his professional principles, consistently denied all charges and refused to submit letters of regret demanded by the university.

"The University has acted without transparency, fairness, or credible evidence. It has also advanced the untenable claim that, as an international institution, it lies outside Indian court jurisdiction — even though SAU was created through The South Asian University Act, 2008 of the Indian Parliament," the letter stated.

The signatories said SAU had seen an exodus of international faculty members and repeated attempts to censor students and staff.

NE leaders pledge umbrella outfit

PHEROZE L. VINCENT

New Delhi: Two BJP allies have announced plans to merge with other parties and leaders of the Northeast for "a strong, unified, and indigenous political voice at the national level".

The announcement came during a joint news conference at the Constitution Club here on Tuesday by Meghalaya chief minister Conrad Sangma of the National People's Party, Pradyot Debbarma of Tipra Motha, Daniel Langthasa of the People's Party, Assam, and former BJP minister of Nagaland, Mmhonlumo Kikon.

Sangma said: "For too long, we, the young leaders in the Northeast, have spoken about the same issues and concerns of our people, but from different platforms and political spaces. We have realised that our strength lies in unity and that it is time to give our people one collective voice."

He announced the formation of a nine-member committee headed by former Meghalaya minister James Sangma.



Conrad Sangma. File picture

Chief minister Sangma said: "Today we are only announcing that we have decided that we will work together and the modalities of that are going to be worked out within the next 45 days.... We're not here to fight with anybody. We're not here to try to say that we are going to contest against anybody. We are only saying that the platform or entity that we're trying to create is something that the Northeast today needs."

When questioned, Debbarma spelt out at the end of the news conference that the "platform or entity" would be created by a complete merger. He said: "We are all going to come in and merge and become one political entity. One

name, one symbol, one flag." When asked about the party's ideology, Debbarma replied: "We are all bound by the Constitution of India and the Constitution of India clearly mentions... 'secular'... and we will always speak for those people whose constitutional rights, regardless of any religion or ethnicity, are being violated...

"Whether it is one community, one faith or another, whether it is atrocities in Bangladesh with regard to the minorities or whether it is within India, if we feel that there are unfair means being used, we will stand up for the voiceless people, the indigenous people of the Northeast."

He added: "We are fighting for the protection of the Sixth Schedule. There are common problems of illegal (im)migration happening from neighbouring countries, alienation of tribal land Some of the most intellectual and wise people do not know enough about the Northeast because it is not taught.... Curriculum does not have chapters on the Northeast.'

Uma takes up Ganga cudgels

PIYUSH SRIVASTAVA

Lucknow: Unwilling to directly blame the Narendra Modi government at the Centre and the Pushkar Singh Dhami and Yogi Adityanath dispensations in Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh for the unclean Ganga, BJP leader Uma Bharati has restarted her independent campaign to clean up the holy river.

The BJP national vice-president also expressed her wish to contest the 2029 Lok Sabha elections from Jhansi.

Ganga at Sangam in Allahabad on Tuesday along with over 2,000 people and pledged to clean it with the help of the common man.



Uma Bharti addresses the gathering in Allahabad on Tuesday. (PTI)

"I administered an oath to the people that they will work to make the Ganga clean and uninterrupted. It is not a one-She took a bath in the day programme. All those who attended today's (Tuesday) wherever they are," she said in Allahabad while claiming that she herself has decided not to

take up any assignment because she wanted to devote her time to the Ganga and cows.

The Modi government had launched the Namami Gange project soon after becoming Prime Minister. Since then, Modi and Adityanath have claimed on several occasions that they have cleaned the Ganga.

Bharati was the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh in 2003-04 and the Union minister of water resources, river development and Ganga refuvenation from 2014 to 2017. While she launched a massive campaign to clean the river, her portfolio was changed to drinking water headed the ministry till 2019, before she was dropped from the Modi cabinet.



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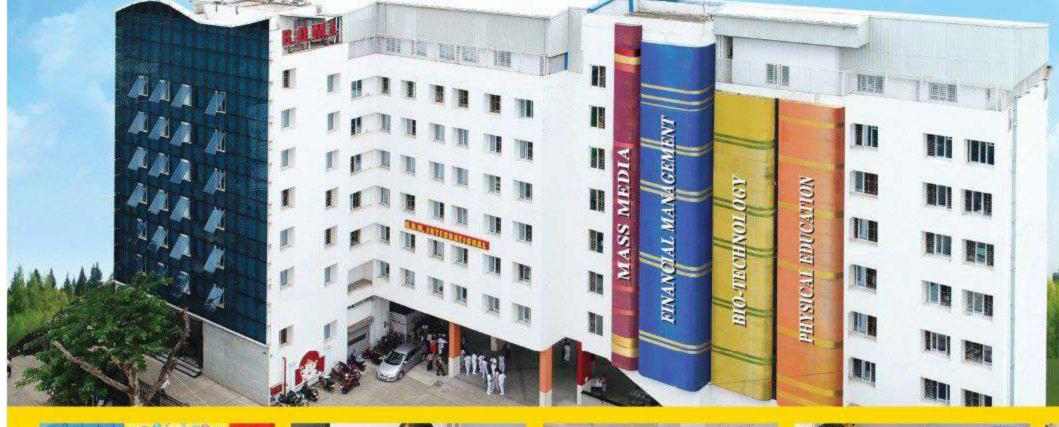
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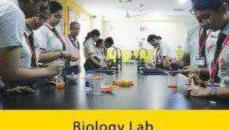
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