**BIRLA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY AND SCIENCE, PILANI**

**Second Semester (2016-17)**

**GS F243: Current Affairs**

**Mid Semester Test (Open Source)**

**Time: 90 minutes 6 March 2017 Max Marks: 60**

**Q.1** Give your views on each of the followings in about 50 words. **(6x4)**

**a.** Tamilnadu government’s plan to display late J. Jayalalithaa’s portrait/photograph in all government offices.

**b.** Mr. Farooq Abdullah’s statement that youth picked up weapons for a cause.

**c.** Tamilnadu state trader union’s decision not to sell coke and pepsi in the state.

**d.** “Pakistan did not kill my father. War killed him.”

**Q.2** “Incidents at HCU, JNU, DU, BHU, Jamia Milia Islamia and Jadavpur University have evoked two kinds of reactions. One group feels that these are spontaneous reactions against the imposition of right wing thinking and suppression of freedom of speech whereas the other group feels that these are concerted efforts of left ideology group who feel threatened because of growing popularity of right ideology organizations. They say that since the present government at the centre cannot be challenged on policies and programmes, issues of freedom of speech, nationalism, patriotism are raised to create disturbances in the country.” How do you see the recent happenings in various central universities? Write your opinion in about 300 words. **(20)**

**Q.3** Read the following article written by a senior politician. Identify the issues raised in this article and make a critique of the views expressed in about 250 words. **(16)**

**Across the aisle: From university to mediocrity**

[**P Chidambaram**](http://indianexpress.com/profile/columnist/p-chidambaram/) | The Indian Express, February 27, 2017

Jawaharlal Nehru University faces an existential threat because its founding ideas are the diametric opposite of the founding ideas of the RSS-BJP dispensation.

There is an unwritten law that one space on this earth must be inviolate. That is the space occupied by a university.

A university is not a mere collection of buildings. It is also not a collection of colleges or centres of research. It is not constituted solely for the purpose of conferring degrees upon the young men and women who enter its portals, study subjects, and pass examinations. It is a space that is designed to nurture knowledge and freedom and beckon the children of the world to take from and give unto the reservoir of knowledge and freedom.

**None among the best**

Universities have achieved greatness not only because they had able and wise teachers, but also because they attracted intelligent and creative students. The President of Harvard University was once asked how Harvard remained a treasure house of knowledge. He replied, ‘Because the freshman class brings so much knowledge and the graduating class takes away so little!’

No university in India can match Harvard or Stanford, Oxford or Cambridge, McGill or Sorbonne or even the new — re-invented — universities in China (that have forged ahead and earned their places among the top ten or top fifty or top hundred universities). The best an Indian university has been able to achieve is to be ranked in the bracket 200 to 250. That alone should be a cause of concern.

Funding was identified as a constraint. I made what was then widely hailed as a bold move: I announced a grant of Rs 100 crore from the Union Budget to the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, with no conditions attached. You may say that it was announced on a whim. It was unprecedented. No one — not the director of IISc or the ministry concerned — had asked for the grant and, for several months, they did not know what to do with the money! In subsequent years, similar grants were made to several leading institutions. In their sesquicentennial year, the Universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras got a grant of Rs 100 crore each. I don’t know if the grants helped make a visible difference.

**A broken model**

The constraints, including funding, remain and have apparently become worse. The laws that apply to the universities are outdated. Appointments of vice-chancellors have been taken over by the state governments or the central government, and several appointments have been found to be atrocious. There is poor teaching and little or no research in most universities. The University Grants Commission has become one more controller or, actually, an incompetent dispenser of favours. Professional bodies (Medical Council of India, Bar Council of India etc) have a decisive say in granting permissions, recognition and affiliation. State governments or committees appointed by the courts have taken over the regulation of matters such as admission of students and fees. Unlike the great universities abroad, the university administration in India does not have, exclusively, the power to regulate all matters concerning the university. Power is divided among numerous authorities and the result is the collapse of the idea of an autonomous university. What we have is another broken institution.

In recent years, we have had examples of distinguished scholars resigning in disgust, protesting against the interference of government. We have also had examples of many dubious appointees being removed from office. Central universities, Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIM), that were once regarded as islands of comparative excellence, have become zones of conflict like any other State-run university. Even the inspiring idea of Nalanda University now lies in a shambles.

The University of Hyderabad could not handle a routine disagreement between two politically-affiliated groups of students. [Jawaharlal Nehru](http://indianexpress.com/about/jawaharlal-nehru) University faces an existential threat because its founding ideas are the diametric opposite of the founding ideas of the RSS-BJP dispensation. A student union leader (Mr Kanhaiya Kumar) was roughed up on the court’s premises and thrown into jail on charges of sedition, though there is not a shred of evidence for invoking that colonial-era law. An invitation to a student leader (Mr Umar Khalid) by another college (Ramjas College) led to an unprovoked attack on students by self-appointed commissars of national interest (the ABVP), with the police watching the mayhem.

**Cry for reform**

There is no substitute for State-funded public universities if we wish to provide access to affordable higher education to a socially diverse population. At the same time, there must be ample scope for private universities that are free from government control and interference. Both models can coexist. The only common rules that must apply to both models are:

1. There must be an independent Board of Governors with clear and transparent rules for selection and appointment of members of the Board;

2. The university cannot be a for-profit institution and must re-invest its surplus in the university; and

3. The university must abide by the laws governing reservation for the socially and educationally backward classes of citizens in appointments to the faculty and admission of students.

Today, no Indian university can escape the charge of mediocrity. It is a miracle that hundreds of students are still able to acquire the rudimentary knowledge that, combined with their native intelligence and penchant for hard work, will earn them a place in a reputed foreign university that will lead to a promising career. It is unfortunate but true that the best Indian student discovers his/her best not because of the current university system but despite the broken system.

Here is an area crying for reform.