



UGC wants students to sing Gandhi's bhajans

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Bengaluru: A University Grants Commission (UGC) directive to varsities and their affiliate-colleges to encourage students to sing Mahatma Gandhi's bhajans, like Vaisnava Jana To, on their campuses from October 2 to 9 has divided the academic community in the state. The occasion is commemoration of the Father of the Nation's 150th birth anniversary.

The UGC circular says bhajans can be sung in different languages on the lines of "mile sur mera tumhara". However, a section of academics and students has described the move as shallow.

Varadesh Hiregange, director, Gandhian and Peace

Studies, Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE), said this is a bureaucratised way of celebrating Gandhi Jayanti. "He and his thoughts need to be taken more seriously, than just being limited to plays and singing bhajans on his anniversary. There should have been an intellectual engagement of students. There is a booklet, where he listed out many useful constructive activities, like Swachh Bharat, that could bring about societal change. I would say much more could have been done to celebrate his birth anniversary," he said.

KR Venugopal, vice-chancellor, Bangalore University, Jnana Bharthi campus, who says he's a follower of Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts, howe-

The directive asks students to sing the bhajans on campus from October 2 to 9 to mark the Mahatma's birth anniversary. However, a section of academics and students has described the move as shallow

ver, felt the directive will have some benefits.

"We can't say whether this will help students or not, but it will surely calm them down and make them think about Mahatma Gandhi and his principles or about some good constructive activities. There might be an impact in the long run," he said.

The UGC circular said the-

re will be a nationwide competition of plays on Mahatma Gandhi. The best three plays adjudged at the university level will be sent to UGC and MHRD (ministry of human resource development) with YouTube recordings so that 10 of them can be selected for an international convention to be held on September 29 in Delhi. August 25 is the last date for sending the entries.

Very few colleges in the city seem to be taking the UGC circular seriously. "So far, no announcements have been made by our college, but I really don't know how this is going to motivate students," said Shailja M, final-year MA student, Bangalore University.

"We are holding our college fest on October 24, which is

dedicated to the flood victims and 150th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. We are not staging any play, but will have a message wall for students where they can write about Gandhi's thoughts. There will also be a festival of poetry on and by Mahatma Gandhi," said a spokesperson for St Joseph's College (Autonomous).

"Remembering great men on their birth and death anniversaries is important. Though I appreciate the initiative to observe the birth anniversary of Mahatmaji, it should be an occasion to remember his ideas and teachings. There should be no compulsion on students," said Ajay Kamath, secretary, All India Democratic Students' Organisation (AIDSO).

Generic drugs could've saved US \$1bn, says study

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The use of branded combination medicines instead of generic ones added almost a billion dollars in just one year to the cost of the US federal insurance programme, according to a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA). The study said promoting generic substitution by educating doctors on prescribing habits and through rational substitution policies could offer substantial savings to the drug benefit programme.

The revelation is significant for India since Indian pharma companies supply 40% of generic drugs consumed in the US.

In 2016, the difference between what the Medicare drug benefit program spent on branded combination drugs and the estimated amount it would have spent for the same number of doses of generics was \$925 million, concluded the study. The study conducted by doctors at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School analysed data from the prescription drug coverage programme in the 2011-16 period for 1,500 medications that accounted for the highest total spending reported by Medicare in 2015.

Medicare is a federal health insurance pro-

FINDING A BOOST FOR INDIAN COS

- > US has highest per capita spend on prescription medications among industrialised countries. **High drug costs** have been a cause for concern for patients, doctors & policymakers
- > The researchers pointed out that while **prices of branded drugs have increased considerably** in recent years, those of generic drugs have continued to decline
- > Revelation **significant for Indian pharma cos**, which supply 40% of US' generics



gramme for those over 65 and for certain others such as younger people with disabilities and those with end-stage renal disease.

"For the 10 most costly brand-name combination drugs, the cumulative potential reduction in spending between 2011 and 2016 was estimated at \$2.7 billion. Taking into account possible rebates from manufacturers at the average rate reported by Medicare, potential savings would have been estimated at \$2.1 billion in total," stated the study.

The study cited the case of the antihypertensive drug Exforge, a combination of amlodipine and valsartan, that cost \$8.21 per pill in 2016 compared to \$0.96 for its generic constituents. It noted that with 5,036 beneficiaries prescribed Exforge in 2016, the estimated potential reduction in reported spending on just this one drug could have been \$6.8 million.

Similarly, the Medicare-reported price in 2016 for Duexis was \$20.26 per pill compared to \$0.28 for its generic constituents, ibuprofen and famotidine. For the 5,907 beneficiaries prescribed Duexis in 2016, the estimated saving could have been \$23.4 million.

The researchers pointed out that while the prices of branded drugs have increased considerably in recent years, those of generic drugs has continued to decrease, which could explain the huge price difference and hence saving in cost.

The authors cited several studies to also point out that though combination products are said to reduce a patient's pill burden and improve adherence, no clear connection between combination products, improved adherence and improved clinical outcomes has been established.

UGC's 'no' to junk food

NEW DELHI, DHNS: The University Grants Commission has asked colleges and universities to stop serving junk food in their canteens.

In a recent advisory to Vice Chancellors of universities, the UGC sought strict adherence to an earlier missive highlighting the dangers of junk food high in fat, sugar and salt content. The VCs have also been asked to create awareness among students and tag the UGC on the steps taken.

"This is a reinforcement of an earlier advisory to sensitise students about the ill-effects of junk food and the importance of healthy food practices. Its not mandatory but we expect compliance," said Rajnish Jain, secretary, UGC.

In November 2016, the UGC first wrote to vice chancellors

to ban junk food in colleges to check the rising trend of obesity and lifestyle diseases. It was also advised to start wellness clusters in student welfare departments to inform the young learners about proper nutrition, healthy diet. The sensitisation drive by the UGC came on the heels of an 11-member expert panel set up by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India suggesting several steps to cut down on India's growing lifestyle disease burden.

The food regulator constituted the panel after the hearing of two cases in the Delhi High Court, which asked the FSSAI to suggest nutritious, healthy and wholesome food for school children. Before finalising the guidelines, FSSAI sought expert opinion.

Chaos at KEA medical counselling

Students allege seat blocking; police called to restore order

STAFF REPORTER
BENGALURU

Several candidates who attended the medical counselling mop up round on Thursday protested claiming that some of the candidates were guilty of blocking seats.

Officials with the Karnataka Examinations Authority (KEA) asked students to lodge a written complaint, but no details were submitted. The counselling process was finally conducted in the presence of police personnel who were called in to help maintain order.

Adding to the chaos, KEA officials refused to allow students who arrived late for the counselling.

What, however, is a matter of concern is that KEA does not have details of the medical seat allotment done by counselling agencies of other States. "The lack of a centralised database makes it difficult for us to cross-check if students have taken medical seats in other States as well. We, however have the details of seats chosen by



Students and parents at the counselling for medical seats, on Thursday. • V SREENIVASA MURTHY

candidates for the All-India quota. Students who have opted for seats in this round have been barred from counselling in the mop up round," a KEA official said.

Such a system would help the authorities keep a check on seat blocking. Himani Choudhary, a student from Uttar Pradesh, said that many students with high ranks were appearing for counselling. "When candidates be-

low 5,000 ranks are eligible to get government seats, why would they opt for private seats?" she said.

Aniket Tanwar from Haryana said that students protested as they alleged that some students were blocking seats in collusion with the college management. "These students have opted for seats in their respective States and are now coming for the mop up coun-

selling in Karnataka to obtain seats here as well," he said, adding that there was a need for the counselling agencies to collect the original documents of the students so that each student gets only one medical seat.

However, KEA authorities said that it was not possible to ask for documents as the counselling by different seat allotment agencies was taking place simultaneously.

"Many students would have blocked seats in a particular college, but will be hoping for an upgrade. We cannot insist that candidates produce the documents."

Vinoth Priya R., Executive Director of KEA, said they had tightened measures this year to avoid seat blocking. "Only one guardian along with the candidate is given an entry pass. Photos of the candidate and the guardian had to be uploaded prior to the counselling," she said.

Although several candidates were scouting the counselling centre to see if they could mutually swap seats, KEA authorities have warned against the same, and said they would complain to the police if they came across any such case.

As many as 958 medical seats were available for the mop up round and at the end of the day 740 seats remained to be taken.

The counselling was conducted for students who had obtained NEET ranks from 1 to 1 lakh.