

23rd September 2019

STATEMENT BY Gopal Sankaranarayanan [Batch of 2001]

Dear Students and Alumni of NLSIU,

Over the past few days, as the student protest over the appointment of the Vice-Chancellor has been ongoing, I have received a few requests from the President & Vice-President of the SBA, certain present students of the college and members of the alumni to try and help address the issue by getting an appointment with the Chief Justice and Judges of the Supreme Court. I had accordingly made a request to the offices of both the Chief Justice [the Chancellor] and Justice Bobde to grant me an audience to seek clarity on the V-C appointment issue. They were kind enough to promptly allow me to meet them at 1pm today in the Chamber of the Chief Justice.

Although they were familiar with many aspects of the issue, including the protest by the students, I explained the concerns that the students had in the following terms:

- a. The Executive Council had delegated to a Sub-Committee the task of interacting with the 3 candidates and giving their recommendations regarding the appointment to be made. In view of the Sub-Committee's decision on 23rd July 2019 recording the approval of the appointment of Prof Krishnaswamy as the Vice-Chancellor, the formal appointment should have followed. However, it appears that the administration has misinterpreted the procedure and been delaying the formal process by claiming that Bar Council representatives wanted nothing short of a fresh Executive Council meeting.
- b. It was apprehended by the students that the composition of the Executive Council would be changed at the next meeting so that the delegated decisions of the previous meeting would be frustrated / reversed.
- c. The interim administration has been less than transparent with the students and adopted a fairly unsympathetic approach which has resulted in the students deciding to boycott the exams, the first of which are being held today.
- d. The SBA representatives have written to both the Chief Justice and Justice Bobde seeking an audience and they have received no response, which has left them with very little alternative to air their grievances.

The response of the Chief Justice and Justice Bobde was as follows:

- a. It appears that there has been a lot of misinformation that has done the rounds. All responses of the Executive Council members have been received and nothing is left on that front. Only a formal decision is to be taken by the CJI in exercise of the consultation power, which will be out shortly.
- b. It was the clear understanding of the Sub-Committee that they were taking the final decision as delegated, and this was merely to be communicated to the Executive Council.

- c. There were serious misgivings about the students of a premier institution going on a 'strike' for a matter like this. It was pointed out that the students really have no say in the appointment of the Vice Chancellor, and ought not to have adopted a measure that would browbeat the Executive Council. I mentioned that this was mainly due to the conduct of the administration which had been unhelpful.
- d. The students ought to call off the protest and take part in their examinations immediately – the protest appears to be based on an incomplete understanding of facts, and ought not to be continued.
- e. Several hundred letters and missives are received by their offices, and they had not seen the requests made by the SBA representatives. It was pointed out that an immediate audience had been granted when a request was made by me on behalf of the students.

The Convocation

Separately, a reservation was expressed about attending the forthcoming Convocation if the atmosphere were to be vitiated by student protests. They did not question the Constitutional right of students to protest issues, but were unsure of their participation in such an event. As judges holding office in the Supreme Court of India, it would not behove them to be subject to this. I have assured them that I will communicate this to the student body and if an assurance were not forthcoming, I would, in fairness, inform them in advance.

It is now over to the Student Bar Association to do what is appropriate and best in the interests of the students.
