

INSV KAUNDINYA AT MUSCAT

The arrival of INSV Kaundinya at Muscat marks more than a port call by an Indian naval vessel; it symbolizes India's renewed engagement with its ancient maritime heritage and its contemporary strategic outreach in the Indian Ocean region. As a stitched-sail vessel inspired by ships that sailed the seas over two millennia ago, Kaundinya represents a rare convergence of history, culture, technology, and diplomacy.

Named after the legendary Indian mariner who is believed to have sailed to Southeast Asia in ancient times, INSV Kaundinya is a living tribute to India's long-standing seafaring traditions. Built using traditional shipbuilding techniques, including stitched planks instead of metal fastenings, the vessel embodies the ingenuity and navigational prowess of ancient Indian craftsmen. Its presence in Muscat - a historic maritime hub connecting India, Arabia, and East Africa - is deeply symbolic, recalling centuries of trade, cultural exchange, and people-to-people ties between the Indian subcontinent and Oman.

From a strategic perspective, Kaundinya's voyage reinforces India's vision of the Indian Ocean as a shared space of cooperation, dialogue, and mutual respect. Oman has long been one of India's closest partners in the Gulf, with robust defence cooperation, strong economic links, and a vibrant Indian diaspora. The docking of Kaundinya at Muscat adds a powerful cultural dimension to this partnership, complementing modern naval exercises and security cooperation with soft power rooted in shared history.

The editorial significance of this visit lies in how India is redefining maritime diplomacy. While advanced warships and submarines project strength and deterrence, vessels like Kaundinya project civilizational confidence. They tell a story of India not merely as a contemporary naval power, but as a civilisation that understood the seas as connectors rather than barriers. In an era of geopolitical contestation in the Indian Ocean, this narrative is both timely and strategic.

INSV Kaundinya also underscores India's broader cultural diplomacy initiatives, aligning with efforts to reclaim and showcase indigenous knowledge systems. By reviving ancient shipbuilding techniques and sailing routes, India sends a message that tradition and modernity are not opposites but complementary forces. This approach resonates strongly in regions like West Asia, where history, trade, and maritime exchange have shaped societies for centuries.

For the Indian Navy, Kaundinya is a reminder that naval power is not only about platforms and weaponry but also about heritage, identity, and outreach. The vessel serves as an educational and inspirational platform, particularly for younger generations, to understand India's maritime past and its relevance to the present. It strengthens the Navy's role as a custodian of both national security and national heritage.

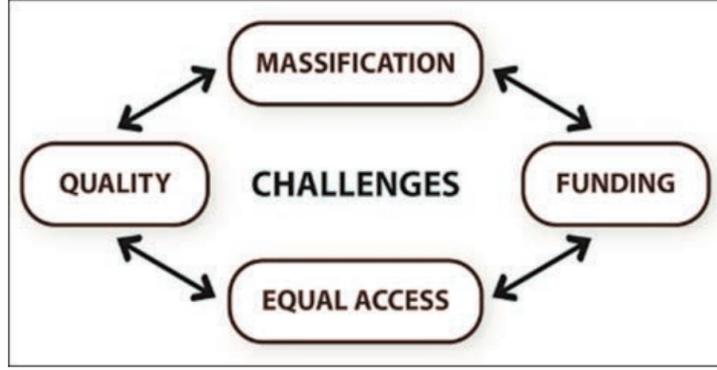
Higher Education challenges for 2026

PROF. K.S CHANDRASEKAR



Indian higher education is one of the fastest growing sectors in the World. The demand for higher education is constantly rising, likely to be 160 million by 2025, the state support in terms of funding per student as unit, is declining. India and China will be the two biggest countries seeking higher education. Demand is growing at the rate of 20 per cent per annum in India. India has over 56,000 institutions that cater to 40 million students, supported by 16 lakh teachers. India aims to add 26 million enrolments by 2035, which requires increased investments in staff, technology and infrastructure in order to reach the GER of 50%. Jammu and Kashmir has shown greater emphasis for the higher education and has been able to retain their aspiring higher education students to the state as they were earlier resorting to travel to Punjab, Himachal and Delhi. Those who were moving were primarily in the Science and Engineering programs. With the advent of more colleges and addressing more student community, the number of students opting for multiple fields have increased tremendously. It is worthwhile to note here that those seeking arts and humanities subjects are not interested in pursuing their studies in other states and want to study in the local environment. Here comes the importance of programs in this direction.

By implementing NEP across colleges and universities, J&K has shown to all states that it can be managed well in remote areas also. 2025 showed that the first batch of NEP students were getting into the fourth year of the Honors degree program. However only about 20% across the UT has availed this facility. The fourth year students from far flung areas of the UT had difficulty in accessing the institutions for the research and project. However, the Higher Education has prepared cluster of colleges to offer the same. Most of the students have exited in the third year and are



moving towards conventional two year Post graduate programs. Cluster University of Jammu conducted Mega Job Fair where more than 3700 candidates attended and about 270 offer letters and 510 wait lists were created by companies. There were more opportunities in various positions but however, the reluctance on the part of students to opt for employment outside the UT is one of the reasons why all the posts were not filled. There is a need for change in mindset among the students to look for employment. This upcoming New Year 2026, there are lot of expectations of the students in terms of moving towards one year PG programs, direct entry to Ph.D. programs and looking for meaningful placement opportunities. We at the Cluster University of Jammu will be with the students in ensuring offering one year PG programs in about 12 disciplines, planning for entrance and other options for students to focus on research. It has been planned to conduct another mega job fair during the month of March-April for the benefit of the students of Jammu region. The drug menace needs to be addressed seriously and I think all higher education institutions to plan various activities during the year to ensure strict compliance. Students need to be diverted to sports and co-curricular activities and given more attention as proposed by the Hon'ble LG Manoj Sinha who during the University

council meeting of CLUJ advised all universities to focus on Nasha Mukh J&K. The provision of dual degrees as proposed by UGC will be implemented in Cluster University of Jammu. A student who is registering for BBA can simultaneously opt for a distance mode graduate program or diploma or skill based program from another university like University of Jammu or University of Kashmir or Desh Bhagat University. This will enhance the opportunities for the student while looking for employment.

Higher education needs to be rationalized and ideally new programs need to be introduced by any university with 30% being new and innovative. Cluster University of Jammu will endeavor to offer industry based programs like B Sc in Renewable Energy, BBA with entrepreneurship, Diploma in Entrepreneurship, M Sc in Entrepreneurship with the support of EDII, Ahmedabad to open the doors for employment and entrepreneurship. Innovation needs to be driven for the students as they embark on new ideas and create startups. Cluster University of Jammu has already set up Section 8 Company by name Tawi CLUJ Foundation for fostering innovation and made MAM College the nodal institution. One major area now needs to be addressed is how to enable the students who will be completing 4 year research UG program to move towards Ph.D. in their relevant

areas. There is a need for bridge courses for these students to understand the nuances of research, research process, preparing research proposals, submitting their proposals to relevant agencies and also ensuring that they would be able to complete their research in time bound manner. Cluster University of Jammu has opened the doors to constituent college teachers having fulfilled the UGC norms to be research supervisors in about 12 disciplines to broaden the research offering.

Placement is another important area. After completing their respective degrees, many of the students instead of moving to post graduate program wish to opt for employment. Government alone cannot provide all employment and the students need to shift towards private companies for jobs. One aspect the author has seen during the mega placement drive conducted by the university that the students of Jammu region do not want to opt for employment even in nearby states. This attitude needs to be changed. Once more industries are set up in J&K, they could come over with the relevant experience. Kathua and Jammu are now working towards creating industry clusters that can provide more opportunities. Services sectors are growing in Jammu and Kashmir and the growth of Tourism can enable localized placements of students and more eco-tourism and responsible tourism centers can be created by providing eligible students to move towards entrepreneurship. There is a need for industry collaborations from other states that can usher in opportunities for the students of J&K. Some of the major companies like Infosys, TCS, Samsung, Deloitte etc., can have their research centers within the campuses of the universities in J&K. A concerted effort from the universities is needed in this direction in the dawn of 2026. This year will provide more opportunities for students and faculty as faculty needs to move more towards patenting and IPR. Faculty should be able to undertake live consultancies so that it is providing experience to the students and scholars.

(The author is Vice Chancellor, Cluster University of Jammu)

The Role of Mobile Phones in Shaping Today's Youth

BHARTI SHARMA



In today's modern society, mobile phones have become an essential part of daily life. For the younger generation, a mobile phone is not only a communication tool but also a source of learning, entertainment and social connection. Over the past few years, the role of mobile phones in the lives of young people has increased rapidly. While this technology has made life easier, its excessive use has created several challenges that cannot be ignored.

Young people today spend a significant amount of time on their mobile phones.

From social media platforms and online videos to games and messaging apps, mobile phones occupy a large part of their daily routine. Many youths feel incomplete without their phones and check them frequently, even during important activities. This growing dependence has slowly changed their lifestyle and priorities.

One of the most visible effects of mobile phone overuse is on personal relationships. Earlier, families used to spend quality time together, sharing thoughts and experiences. Now, it is common to see family members sitting together while being busy on their own phones. Young people prefer online conversations over face-to-face interaction, which reduces emotional bonding and

weakens communication skills.

Health issues related to excessive mobile phone use are also increasing among the youth. Long hours of screen exposure can cause eye strain, headaches and poor posture. The habit of using mobile phones late at night disturbs sleep patterns, leading to tiredness and lack of energy during the day. Moreover, reduced physical activity has resulted in several lifestyle-related problems, including obesity and poor fitness.

The influence of mobile phones is clearly seen in the field of education. Smartphones can be powerful learning tools when used properly. However, for many students, they become a major source of distraction. Constant notifications, social media updates and online

entertainment reduce concentration and productivity. As a result, students struggle to manage their time and maintain academic discipline.

Mental health is another area deeply affected by mobile phone overuse. Social media often presents a perfect picture of life, success, and happiness, which is far from reality. Continuous comparison with others creates feelings of stress, anxiety and dissatisfaction. Many young people begin to measure their self-worth based on likes, comments, and online attention, which can damage their confidence and emotional stability.

Despite these challenges, it is important to understand that mobile phones themselves are not the problem. When

used responsibly, they provide access to education, information, and global opportunities. Online learning platforms, digital awareness, and instant communication have opened new doors for young people. The key issue lies in maintaining balance and self-control.

Parents and teachers play a crucial role in guiding the youth toward responsible mobile phone use. Setting healthy boundaries, encouraging outdoor activities, promoting reading habits and strengthening family communication can help young people develop a balanced lifestyle. Awareness about the negative effects of excessive mobile phone usage should be spread at both home and school levels.

As mobile phones continue to play a major role in everyday life, it becomes important for young people to understand how their choices shape their future. Technology has the power to support learning, creativity and personal growth, but only when used with awareness and self-discipline. Finding a balance between digital life and real-life experiences can help the youth stay mentally strong, socially connected, and physically healthy. When mobile phones are used as a tool rather than a habit, they can truly contribute to building a responsible, confident and progressive generation.

(The writer is a student of Mass Communication & New Media at Central University of Jammu)

National Law University in Jammu and Kashmir: A Question of Fairness, Balance and Trust

PROF. VIRENDER KOUNDAL

The recent statement by the Chief Minister regarding the proposed National Law University (NLU) in Jammu and Kashmir has once again stirred a long-standing and deeply emotional debate in the Jammu region. When media persons asked about the controversy surrounding the decision to establish the NLU in the Kashmir province, the Chief Minister responded that there was no controversy at all. He further questioned why people did not raise their voices when institutions like the IIM and IIT were established in Jammu and not in Kashmir.

This response has not settled the matter. Instead, it has revived a strong sense of déjà vu in Jammu. For the people of this region, the issue is not about opposing Kashmir or questioning the development of one region over another. It is about fairness, balance, and equal treatment values that Jammu feels it has been denied repeatedly over decades.

Once again, a simple and genuine question is being asked: why are critical national-level institutions consistently located in one region without transparent studies, public consultation, or serious consideration of regional balance? Why does every such decision turn into a struggle for Jammu, forcing people onto the streets to demand what should have been ensured by policy itself?

The National Law University is not an ordinary college. It is a premier national institution, comparable in stature to IITs, IIMs, AIIMS, and NITs. Such institutions are meant to serve the entire state or Union Territory, not a single province. Their location carries not only academic importance but also deep symbolic meaning. It reflects the government's intent towards inclusion, equality, and justice.

The debate over the NLU cannot

be seen in isolation. It is part of a long and painful history of discrimination faced by the Jammu province. Time and again, Jammu has experienced neglect in key areas such as higher education, healthcare, industrial development, employment, and political representation. Each time, justice has come only after prolonged agitation and public pressure. The story goes back to 1982, when the government established the Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (SKUAST) in Kashmir. Jammu, with its entirely different agro-climatic condition-subtropical, dry, and semi-hilly was completely ignored. Farmers, students, and academics from Jammu raised their voices, pointing out that agricultural research meant for temperate Kashmir could not address the needs of Jammu's farmers. What followed was a 17-year-long struggle. Only in 1999 did the government finally establish SKUAST-Jammu. This was not just the creation of an institution; it was a hard-earned victory against structural marginalization. It exposed how policy decisions were routinely taken without considering Jammu's needs.

A similar situation arose in 2009 with the announcement of a Central University for Jammu and Kashmir. Initially, everything from planning to administration was Kashmir-centric. Jammu was again expected to remain on the margins. This time, students, civil society, and academicians in Jammu launched massive protests. The agitation continued for months. Only in 2011 did the government concede and establish a separate Central University of Jammu. Once again, parity came not by design, but by struggle. These episodes created a clear pattern: whenever a major institution is announced, Jammu is ignored first and accommodated later only after protest and pres-

sure.

Perhaps the most powerful reminder of this imbalance came in 2015 with the announcement of an All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) for Jammu and Kashmir. Initially, people believed it would be a single institute serving the entire state. When it became clear that the proposed location was in Kashmir, Jammu erupted. The region witnessed a 72-day-long agitation. Political parties, traders, students, doctors, and civil society came together. Daily life came to a standstill, but the people remained united in one simple demand: equal access to premier healthcare. Ultimately, the government announced two AIIMS one in Awantipora (Kashmir) and one in Vijaypur (Jammu). That decision restored some faith and should have become a guiding principle for future policy decisions. Unfortunately, the NLU controversy shows that the lesson may not have been fully learned.

The 2008 Amarnath land agitation remains one of the largest people's movements in Jammu's post-independence history. When the government revoked the decision to transfer land to the Amarnath Shrine Board after protests in Kashmir, Jammu saw it as a denial of religious and regional rights. For two months, Jammu remained paralyzed. The protests were not just about land; they were about dignity, respect, and equal decision-making power. The episode revealed deep emotional and political fault lines between the two regions and reinforced the belief that Jammu's concerns are often secondary.

Discrimination has not been limited to institutions alone. Recruitment to government posts, universities, and public services has often shown skewed results. Many Public Service Commission selections and departmental recruitments have reflected underrepresenta-

tion of candidates from Jammu, even in technical and administrative roles. Industrially, Jammu has enormous potential. Its strategic location as the gateway to the Union Territory, proximity to Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Delhi, and access to national highways make it a natural hub for logistics, manufacturing, and education. Yet, tourism projects, and major infrastructure schemes have largely remained concentrated in the Kashmir Valley. Politically, Jammu suffered for decades due to underrepresentation in the Legislative Assembly. Despite covering a larger geographical area and having a comparable population, the region had fewer seats. Only after the 2022 Delimitation Commission did some correction take place. However, structural reforms mean little if the mindset behind them remains unchanged.

The National Law University holds special importance. It is not just about legal education. NLUs across India such as NLSIU Bengaluru, NALSAR Hyderabad, and NLU Delhi have produced Supreme Court judges, senior advocates, civil servants, and policy experts. They shape national discourse on constitutional law, governance, federalism, and justice.

In Jammu and Kashmir, an NLU has even greater significance. The region has witnessed decades of political instability, constitutional debate, and security challenges. A strong legal institution can promote constitutional awareness, strengthen the rule of law, and encourage research on issues like federalism, human rights, national security, and conflict resolution. But if this institution is perceived as another example of regional bias, it will begin its journey burdened with controversy rather than inspiration.

The core issue is not whether the NLU should be in Kashmir or Jammu alone. The real question is:

should such an institution serve one province or the entire Union Territory?

Geography matters. Jammu province is better connected to the rest of India through rail and road networks. Kashmir remains dependent on the Jammu Srinagar highway, which is frequently closed due to weather conditions. Accessibility for students, faculty, and visiting scholars should be a key factor.

This is why many experts and citizens suggest a central location such as Udhampur, Baderwah (Doda district) or Ramban. Baderwah already hosts a campus of the University of Jammu and offers a peaceful, academic-friendly environment. Udhampur and Ramban lie directly on the Jammu Srinagar National Highway, making it equidistant from both regions. Establishing the NLU here would send a powerful message of unity and balanced development.

Another sensible solution is the establishment of two NLUs one in Jammu division and one in Kashmir division just as was done earlier in the case of AIIMS and central University. This would completely remove the sense of competition and grievance. It would also recognize the unique needs and diversity of both regions. In a Union Territory as sensitive and diverse as Jammu and Kashmir, such balanced decisions are not luxuries; they are necessities for long-term peace and trust.

Before finalizing the location of the NLU, the government must adopt a transparent and inclusive approach. This includes: 1. Constituting a feasibility and location assessment committee with academicians, legal experts, and representatives from both regions. 2. Conducting objective studies on connectivity, infrastructure, land availability, and accessibility. 3. Holding public consultations with students, teachers, lawyers, and

civil society. 4. Ensuring that regional balance is a guiding principle, not an afterthought.

Decisions taken behind closed doors only deepen mistrust. In a democracy, especially in a Union Territory striving for stability and peace, symbolic justice is as important as economic development.

The establishment of SKUAST-Jammu, the Central University of Jammu, and AIIMS Jammu did not happen automatically. Each came after prolonged struggle and public agitation. These movements taught a simple lesson: development built on imbalance cannot last. A healthy democracy works when every region feels respected and included. Jammu has never sought to take away from Kashmir. It has only asked for what is constitutionally and morally due, equal opportunity.

Post-Article 370, Jammu and Kashmir stands at a historic crossroads. There is a real opportunity to correct past mistakes and build a future based on fairness, inclusion, and trust. The National Law University can either become another chapter in Jammu's long history of discrimination or a landmark decision that symbolizes unity and justice. Choosing a central location like Udhampur, Baderwah or Ramban or establishing two NLUs would demonstrate the government's sincerity towards balanced regional development. The people of Jammu do not seek privilege. They seek parity. They do not demand dominance, only dignity. For decades, they have struggled not to deny others but to secure their rightful place in the development narrative. The decision on the NLU is more than an administrative choice. It is a test of intent. If fairness prevails, the NLU can emerge not only as a centre of legal excellence but also as a true monument to justice for both Jammu and Kashmir, and for the very idea of Jammu and Kashmir itself.