

The first meeting of the advisory council of the UMCSAJ

September 7, 2017

Minutes

Present

Mr. Sashi Kumar
Mr. N. Ram
Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyar
Mr. Naveen Chawla
Ms. Nalini Rajan
Ms. Bindu Bhaskar
Ms. Malini K. N.
Mr. Surya Prakash

Absent

Ms. Sudha Umapathy – Registrar
(Medical Leave)

1) Systematising the selection procedure of SAF scholars

Mr. Sashi Kumar suggested that the method of choosing the SAF scholars could be improved so that better and more deserving candidates are drawn to the scholarships. He suggested that the ACJ online English entrance test paper suitably modified could be taken also by candidates applying for SAF scholarship. However, a parallel process of making the scholarship scheme widely known was necessary to attract the best possible talents to this handsome scholarship.

2) Issue of discontinuation or non-application in respect of a few scholars once they are selected and join the postgraduate diploma programme

The members noted with concern that some students, once they were awarded the SAF scholarship, tend to take it easy and not apply themselves, as well as they could and, in rare cases, discontinue mid-way.

3) Issue of inadequate working knowledge of English, which is the medium of instruction, in respect of some scholars and ways to cope with and compensate for it.

Mr. Sashi Kumar pointed out that this was a more serious problem with regard to students from Afghanistan, but also applied in varied degrees to the other SAF scholars. As a result they were not able to fully follow classes and instructions which

are delivered in English. Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyar suggested a joint ACJ-SAF-I proposal to MSF to consider funding an additional year for SAF scholars to take the English courses at the British Council, Chennai where such scholars (especially Afghans) have difficulty in expressing themselves in speech or writing. Simultaneously AC J-SAF-I could take up with the Afghan Embassy the possibility of these students receiving English language training in Afghanistan before coming out to India.

4) Supportive role of respective SAF chapters in selection of suitable candidates for the scholarship.

Mr. Sashi Kumar pointed out while some SAF chapters like Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh were prompt in responding to the call for applications and identifying suitable candidates, some other chapters like Sri Lanka, Maldives and sometimes Afghanistan have not been so responsive. Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyar suggested a Joint AC J-SAF-I circular to SAF chapters on the issues related to selection of candidates.

5) Linking SAF scholars to the ACJ alumni network and creating country-wise alumni cells. Schemes to enable SAF scholars to continue to be in touch with the college. Prospect of periodic alumni get-togethers.

Mr. Sashi Kumar said that ACJ will now make a serious effort to network with the ACJ SAF scholars from various countries and create a common interactive online platform where, their journalistic and literary work could be showcased. He also suggested that once the list has been made and the coordinates of ACJ SAF scholars have been compiled, the new network could be initiated by having a get together of ACJ SAF scholars in Chennai at a time which is most suitable for all of them. He wondered whether there could be some financial support for the get together and running the online platform. Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyar suggested a joint AC J-SAF-I proposal to MSF on funding and annual Alumina get-together in Chennai;

6) Looking at ways to bring scholars and subject experts including senior journalists from SAF countries to deliver lectures/ hold workshops at ACJ to enable better cross-cultural understanding among the constituents of SAARC

Mr. Sashi Kumar said it would be a good idea to have scholars and academics from the SAARC countries to come and take classes or hold workshops at the ACJ, so that there is a better understanding of the region. Mr. Naveen Chawla suggested that UMCSAJ and UMISARC could jointly meet the cost of visits of such scholars to

Chennai & Pondicherry. Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyar suggested joint ACJ-UMISARC events wherever possible for South Asian Scholars to deliver lectures, hold Workshops and symposiums/conferences, including the possibility of using Skype to cover all SAARC countries each year for the benefit of both the Indian and foreign students at both institutions, including, of course, SAF scholars

7) Financial management or accounting issues if any

There were no particular issues to discuss on this matter

8) Any other issue with the concurrence of the chair

a) Possibility of funding more SAF scholars for ACJ:

Mr. Naveen Chawla suggested that SAF India chapter could look at recommending more students for the ACJ program which could be possibly funded by the funds released from UMIKS program which has ended. Currently ACJ is able to accommodate a maximum of 10 SAF scholars. This could be increased if these funds are made available. Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyar endorsed this idea and said the matter could be taken up to MSF at the Governing Council meeting on December 4, 2017 in Delhi.

b) Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyar suggested that ACJ and SAF India chapter could send a Joint Memorandum to the Ministry of External Affairs for easing and expediting the procedure for visas for SAF scholars.

c) Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyar also suggested that ACJ and SAF India chapter jointly approach ICCR for prior information on scholars and other eminent personalities from the South Asian region or experts on the region visiting India who might deliver guest lectures at ACJ.

Mr. Sashi Kumar agreed to send draft of these letters to MEA and ICCR and to the SAF chapters for streamlining the selection process.