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Panjab University, Chandigarh and UH Plan a Dual-Degree Program

HOUSTON: Alumni Leaders from North America from Chemical engineering Department gathered in Houston, 16-19th May, 2025 to help transform Panjab University and its Chemical Engineering Department towards a higher ranking premium institution in India; with a slogan of "March to The Top".

The conference was a result of the vision and hard work of Dr. Arun Verma (and his team) who has been working tirelessly for past seven years to assist in this transformation; in addition to initiating Discussion between Panjab University and University of Houston, TX to collaborate in Joint research & Degree programs between their respective Chemical Engg. Departments.

The conference kicked off on the morning of Friday May 16th with an introductory meeting at Univ of Houston Campus where U of H Chemical Engineering Chairman Dr. Triantafillos J Mountziaris and about 12 faculty members met the PU team visiting from India.

Both teams presented their undergraduate and graduate programs, areas of research and also highlighted potential areas of co-operation. The teams agreed to encourage direct faculty to faculty interaction and joint research between them. This meeting was followed by a Campus tour for the visiting team including all the undergraduate and graduate labs of U of H.

Following this, a separate tour was given to the PU team by the Houston Alumni Leaders of the U of H Campus shop which assists with Branding, marketing and selling branded merchandise in the physical shop and its on-line shops



Panjab University team with University of Houston team at the UH campus



Dr. Arun Verma, introducing Doctor Renu Khator for the dinner keynote on May 16th

to students, Alumni and general public. PU Registrar agreed to implement a similar set up back in Chandigarh as soon as possible

with a target date of no later than December 2025.

The Alumni Leader's Conference component of the proceedings

kicked off on the evening of 16th May at the Hyatt, Houston West. An evening reception for more than 50 Alumni Leaders plus represen-

tatives from both universities welcomed the evening's special guest Dr Renu Khator, the Chancellor of the University of Houston System and president of its flagship University of Houston campus, over the last seventeen years. Post dinner Dr Khator shared her journey in transforming UofH from a struggling school system to upper echelons of the US Research Universities. She talked about four essential components of her strategy for this transformation :

- A bold Vision,
- Buy in from the community,
- Relentless change and
- Longevity for the new culture to take roots

These were highlighted by Dr. Khator as key ingredients to change the culture of any big organization. She talked about several instances from her tenure at UofH where these essential ingredients helped her focus on the intended goal, raise funds for the University and start new programs at the University that helped it break into the top tiers of US Higher education. She has been also invited by the honorable PM of India Narendra Modi to study how her experiences can help India Universities

In the Q&A session members of the PU community sought out her ideas on challenging the bureaucratic mindset, breaking through administrative barriers and implementing new ideas to help improve standards of education and student experiences. The evening concluded with a Vote of Thanks from the hosts and presentation of a memento from India to Dr. Khator.

MIT Class President Barred from Graduation after Speaking Out on Gaza

CAMBRIDGE, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) barred its 2025 class president from attending her graduation ceremony on Friday after she delivered a speech during a commencement event the day before condemning the war in Gaza and criticizing the university's ties to Israel.

The student, Megha Vemuri, spoke at MIT's OneMIT commencement on Thursday in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Wearing a keffiyeh over her graduation gown, she praised student protests against the war in Gaza and condemned MIT's ties to Israel.

"As scientists, engineers, academics and leaders, we have a commitment to support life, support aid efforts and call for an arms embargo and keep demanding now, as alumni, that MIT cuts the ties [to Israel]" Vemuri said during her speech.

The Boston Globe reported last year that between 2020 and 2024, MIT reported receiving \$2.8m in grants, gifts, and contracts from Israeli entities, based on data from

the US Department of Education. The Globe noted that the data did not clarify whether the funds came from academic, individual or public sources, or how they are spent.

On Friday, MIT issued a statement – without naming Vemuri – saying that the speech delivered on Thursday "was not the one that was provided by the speaker in advance".

The university said that the student had been informed that they would not be permitted at Friday's undergraduate degree ceremony, despite having a scheduled role.

"MIT supports free expression but stands by its decision, which was in response to the individual deliberately and repeatedly misleading Commencement organizers and leading a protest from



the stage, disrupting an important Institute ceremony," the statement read.

MIT said in a statement to the

Guardian that Vemuri would still receive her degree.

Vemuri did not immediately respond to a request from the Guardian, but told CNN that after her speech on Thursday, she was informed by university officials that she was not allowed to attend Friday's ceremony, and that she was barred from campus until the ceremony concluded.

Vemuri said that she was not disappointed about not getting to walk across the stage, and that she was grateful for her family's support.

"I see no need for me to walk across the stage of an institution that is complicit in this genocide," Vemuri told CNN.

"I am, however, disappointed that MIT's officials massively overstepped their roles to punish me without merit or due process, with no indication

of any specific policy broken," she added.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (Cair) condemned MIT's decision to ban Vemuri from the Friday ceremony.

"MIT must respect academic freedom and respect the voices of its students, not punish and intimidate those who speak out against genocide and in support of Palestinian humanity," Tahirah Amatul-Wadud, the executive director of Cair Massachusetts, said.

MIT's decision to bar Vemuri from the Friday ceremony comes several weeks after New York University announced that it was withholding a student's diploma after he used a graduation ceremony speech to condemn Israel's deadly war in Gaza.

At George Washington University, a graduating student was banned from the campus last month after she delivered a speech during a commencement ceremony criticizing the university's ties to Israel and expressing support for Palestinians. -- Guardian