

Iron Lady, Irom Sharmila, visits IUST

Awantipora, June 5: Department of Journalism and Mass Communication (DJMC), Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) organised an interactive session for the students of Humanities with the 'Iron Lady', Irom Sharmila, here on Tuesday.

Irom, who has been the longest hunger striker and a civil rights activist, talked about her 16-year-long resistance. While interacting with university students and faculty, she said her fast was not accidental, but had a purpose behind. "The reason for my hunger strike was the hope of bringing justice to the society, for which I got arrested and re-arrested, while I was fasting, as a penalty for attempt to suicide," she said.

Responding to a question on why did she end the 16-year-old fast, she said, "I realised this is not the right way to mark your protest and that you cannot wait for justice while doing nothing."

On being asked about what made her fail in the elections for two constituencies of Manipur, she cited what she called the "trust deficit" of people. "A struggle cannot be won alone, especially when you don't know whether even your family and your own people are with you or not," she added.

Talking about the Kashmir issue, she empathized with Kashmiri people for their "resistance" of decades. "I consider Kashmiris as my own people and am keen to know about their issues, which I would like to highlight across India and beyond. I also want Kashmiri people to identify me as a human and not as an Iron Lady," said Irom, who has been bestowed with the lifetime achievement award by the Asian Human Rights Commission and Rabindranath Tagore Peace Prize by the Indian Institute of Planning and Management.

Irom, who was accompanied by her husband, Desmond Coutinho, further said, she intends to empower the women of Kashmir who have been suffering "and am eager to meet the half widows."

Welcoming the guests to the campus, Honourable Vice Chancellor, IUST, Prof Mushtaq A Siddiqi, said the interaction session was aimed to expose the students to the experiences of people living in other conflicts. "The two regions have several similar experiences to share. The aim of this event was to make students understand that positive individual efforts are always recognised by the world," the VC said, adding that the energies of youth should be invested in bringing peace in the world.

He added that the physiology of the human body is the best example of peace. "If mind and heart are not at peace, the body become the house of diseases."

Appreciating Irom's struggle, Head DJMC, Dr Ruheela Hassan, said woman in her twenties has various goals and aspirations. "But the way she dedicated her life for the revocation of draconian law Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) is exemplary," she said.

Speaking on the occasion, Sanjay Nahar, founder of the Sarhad—Pune-based NGO—said Irom is the symbol of tolerance, patience and perseverance, "which has given her the title 'Iron Lady' of Manipur." "The resistance, which she has shown is a rare case in the world," he added.