

Boston beginnings of the founder of a movement in India

► **DIPKE**

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take a test many had spent years preparing for. Protesters linked the crisis to dozens of student suicides.

Days later, India's chief justice, Surya Kant, compared some unemployed young people and activists to "cockroaches." Although he later clarified that he was referring to people with fraudulent degrees and did not intend to insult India's youth, the remark had already provoked nationwide outrage among a generation that makes up more than 40 percent of the country's 1.4 billion people and faces an unemployment rate nearly twice that of young people in the United States.

Dipke, who was living in Boston after recently graduating from his master's program, reclaimed the insult by launching the satirical Cockroach Janta Party on May 16, using an AI-generated campaign graphic and a mock sign-up form. The party released a five-point manifesto which called for political transparency and democratic representation.

The campaign quickly went viral, resonating with young Indians already frustrated by years of disenfranchisement. Within six days of launching its website and social media accounts, the CJP's Instagram page had amassed more than 15 million followers. By then, Dipke had gone from a BU graduate student preparing for hypothetical media crises to the spokesperson for a real-world movement demanding government accountability.

"Holding leadership accountable is a vital step toward restoring the faith of millions of students and parents in our educational framework," Dipke wrote in a letter posted on X on June 18 addressed to Modi.

Dipke's campaign sustained a 36-day protest encampment in New Delhi, starting on June 6, when Dipke returned to India. The encampment drew tens of thousands of demonstrators and millions of online supporters. It also helped secure the resignation of India's education minister, Dharmendra Pradhan, one of the movement's chief demands, along with sweeping exam reforms.

Dipke did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Michael Dowding, a master lecturer at BU, said he was one of Dipke's first instructors in the master's program.

"Abhijeet succeeded because Abhijeet has the talent and the motivation and put in the time and effort to do that," Dowding said.

Dipke, Dowding said, came across as quiet and thoughtful, not usually sitting up front in the classroom and staying measured in his contributions to

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MICHAEL DOWDING, *taught Abhijeet Dipke at BU*

the class.

The impact the CJP has can be explained in part by Dipke's ability to understand what a multitude of people are thinking and articulate it clearly, said Dowding.

Dipke reached out to Shanler to thank her for helping him prepare for the wave of media attention that followed the party's rise, Shanler said.

"He emailed me directly to thank me for helping him prepare for the onslaught of media inquiries he received," Shanler said.

Carla Kath, who taught Dipke at BU and is now an associate professor of practice at Simmons University, said he also reached out to thank her as the CJP made headlines.

"I think this whole lesson is that words are incredibly powerful," Kath said. "I hope that is what Abhijeet continues to do."

The Cockroach Janta Party announced Saturday that it was ending its "nationwide agitation" after saying the government accepted key demands for accountability over the examination crisis, compensation for affected families, and protections for protesters.

Shanler said she remembers Dipke's willingness to take on difficult challenges. During the course, students gradually moved from basic interview exercises to crisis simulations, where they practiced responding under pressure.

"Every week we layer on new challenges, new considerations, and it ultimately culminates in a crisis simulation," Shanler said. "Abhijeet volunteered to be the media spokesperson during the crisis simulation."

It was the hardest role in the exercise, she said, requiring students to respond to difficult questions while representing an organization under scrutiny.

"That says a lot about him in terms of not being afraid of the challenge," Shanler said.

For Shanler, Dipke's success was not just about communication skills. It was about authenticity, she said.

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