

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

SIXTEENTH ANNUAL CONVOCATION



Address

by

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RAJA RAMMOHUNPUR
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Mr. Chancellor, Professor Rao, Honourable Guests, Members of the University Council, Academic Committee, Ladies & Gentlemen.

I welcome you all to this 16th Annual Convocation of the University of North-Bengal which is incidentally the fifth Convocation that is being held during my tenure of office. We have just now listened to the educative and learned address of our Chief Guest, Professor B. Ramachandra Rao. Prof. Rao relinquished the office of Vice-Chairman, University Grants Commission, last month and is now Member of the Rajya Sabha. During the period that he was Vice-Chairman, University Grants Commission, Prof. Rao initiated many steps for the improvement of academic standards and development of research facilities in the Universities and Colleges particularly in the Department of Science and Technology. The idea of setting up Service and Instrumentation Centres in the Universities was originally pioneered by him and he continued to review the progress and further strengthen the functions of these Centres which have since been set up. Professor Rao has been well-known for his constructive role in the sphere of educational reforms which as a scientist, he put forward from time to time in precise operational terms. We are grateful to you, Professor Rao, for visiting this University to deliver the Convocation Address. We shall look forward to your continuing service in the cause of the nation and in the field of educational reforms as a Member of Parliament. I am grateful to our honoured Guests who have spared time to attend this Convocation. To the young graduates, awardees of degrees, distinctions and certificates, I would like to convey my best wishes for a successful career and happy life. May god bless you.

On this occasion every year I have an opportunity to place before the distinguished gathering a brief account of the progress of the University. More than two years have passed since we submitted to the University Grants Commission our development proposals for the Sixth Plan period. The Commission has so far responded positively to only some of our proposals. Besides approving the construction of a hostel for Research Scholars, the Commission has approved starting of M.Sc. courses in Botany and Zoology in the University. These courses will be offered at the Centre for Life Sciences, which has been recently shifted

to its newly constructed building in the Campus. Earlier it was temporarily located in a part of the North Bengal Medical College premises at Sushrutnagar. Regarding extension of buildings, the Commission has approved construction of the first floor of the Centre for Life Sciences and extension of Humanities teaching block covering (approximately) 2,000 Sq. feet of area. The sanctions accorded by the UGC so far is less than one third of the development assistance that we expect under the Sixth Plan period. Some important proposals which still remain to be considered by the Commission are—

- a) proposals relating to employment oriented courses including the diploma course in Business Management ;
- b) proposal for construction of additional residential quarters for teachers of the University ;
- c) proposals for extension of laboratory space in the Science Departments ;
- d) proposal for extension of the Library building, Health Centre and the University Press.

There is urgent need for additional space for the University Health Centre, without which the equipments for pathological investigation that we have procured with financial assistance from the UGC cannot be used properly. A separate building for the University Museum which is now housed in the Humanities Teaching block is also a must. The University Press needs additional space without which the two printing machines cannot be fully utilised. Indeed with the development of the University Press there can be considerable economy in our expenditure in printing. The Engineering Department is unable to maintain Stores properly on account of inadequate space. For all these purposes Capital Grants are essentially required. Moreover it was not possible for the University to construct any residential quarter for non-teaching employees and officers during the last several years. There are at present only 4 officers' flats. It is extremely necessary that additional staff quarters for non-teaching employees and officers of the University should be constructed without much delay.

Prices of chemicals, spare parts and other laboratory materials have continued to rise during the last few years. The subscription rates of

Journals have gone up several times in the recent past. Cost of books and scientific equipments have similarly undergone a steep rise. Govt. grants have not been raised to the extent necessary for meeting the additional expenditure on account of the rise in prices. As a result, academic activities of the University have been under severe strain during the last few years. Moreover, the repairs and maintenance costs and rates of all constructional materials having gone up, the University buildings including the existing staff quarters have suffered from inadequate repairs and maintenance. Existing Campus roads could not be maintained properly, while construction of new roads have been held up partly due to paucity of funds and partly due to the non-availability of tar.

Sanction of book and equipment grants by the UGC has been received only to a limited extent till now. Meanwhile prices have gone up, and it is apprehended that with the amount available, it would hardly be possible to meet the requirements which were envisaged at the beginning of the Sixth Plan period. Fortunately, the State Government has restored the revenue grants to a considerable extent and released Rs. 3 lakhs capital grant for books and equipment. I would like to mention that the sympathetic consideration of our Chancellor, the Chief Minister, Education Minister and Finance Minister have been largely responsible for the restoration of grants in February 1982.

I must mention here that the State Government has also sanctioned special grants for Library books and furniture for the University Law College besides sanctioning the post of Principal, one additional full-time lecturer, and some posts of library and office staff for the College. The UGC has now sanctioned two more teaching posts in law. We are hopeful that with the appointment of additional full-time teachers, the teaching programme in the Law College will further improve. Let me add that it has been possible for the University to provide temporary hostel facilities to a small number of Law College students as some buildings of the University which were previously occupied by the Construction Board Directorate of the Public Works Department, were vacated last year. This was possible essentially due to the good offices of the Minister-in-charge, Public Works Department, who helped us in many other ways in connection with the construction work entrusted to the PWD.

Limitation of resources notwithstanding, academic and research activities continued and improved in the Post-graduate Departments of the University with the initiative of the members of the teaching faculties. I am glad to report in this connection that the Planning Commission has recently decided to sponsor and provide financial assistance to this University over the next three years for undertaking integrated research projects for eco-development in the hill areas of Darjeeling district and Sikkim. These projects will be accompanied by action-oriented programmes of immediate benefit to the people of the hill areas. On the invitation of the teaching departments and Centres of Life Sciences and Himalayan Studies, many distinguished scholars and professors visited the University during the last year. To mention some, Prof. G. C. Chatterjee from the Department of Bio-Chemistry, Calcutta University, Prof. J. K. Choudhury from the Department of Electrical Engineering, Jadavpur University and Prof. S. P. Sen from the Department of Botany, Kalyani University, delivered special lectures at the Centre for Life Sciences. Prof. S. Chandrasekhar, the eminent Astrophysicist, now at Chicago University, visited the University and addressed members of the Science faculty, when he particularly mentioned the way in which teaching and research programmes could be improved.

Dr. S. Basu, Director, Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science, Jadavpur, delivered the 4th Annual H. N. Khastagir Memorial Lectures in the Department of Chemistry. Prof. K. K. Bagchi, Head of the Department of Geography, Calcutta University, visited the Department of Geography & Applied Geography and delivered two special lectures on the strategy for integrated area development and the geographical significance of the Himalayas. In the Centre for Himalayan Area Studies, we had Prof. R. K. Sprigg, Retd. Professor, University of London, and Dr. A. C. Banerjee, Director, Institute of Tibetology, Sikkim, as Guest Speakers. The Centre has also arranged special lectures by members of sister Departments.

The X all-India Accounting Conference of the Indian Accounting Association was held in this University under the auspices of the Department of Commerce. The Conference was inaugurated by H. E. Shri Homi J. H. Taleyarkhan, Governor of Sikkim. Dr. R. P. Aiyar, Director, Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta,

was special guest. The Conference was attended by about 100 delegates from all over India including University Professors, scholars and professional accountants. The Department also arranged a five-day workshop on "Price-level Accounting" with financial assistance from the University Grants Commission. The guest speakers in this workshop included Prof. L. S. Porwal from Delhi University, Dr. P. Chattopadhyay, formerly Director of Research, Institute of Cost and Works Accounts, and Prof. G. D. Roy from Calcutta University. Dr. R. L. Varshney, Joint Director, Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, New Delhi visited the Department of Commerce for an extension lecture on "Pricing of Services". Prof. Dhiresch Bhattacharyya, Head of the Department of Economics, Calcutta University, was invited by the Department of Economics for a special lecture on "Cancun Summit: The International Economic Issues". The Department of Political Science arranged special lectures by Dr. B. A. V. Sarma, Professor, Department of Political Science, Osmania University, and Justice A. Bhattacharyya of the High Court of Sikkim.

In the Department of Philosophy, extension lectures were delivered by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Professor of Philosophy, IIT, Kanpur, Prof. P. K. Sen of Jadavpur University, Dr. Pratima Bowes, Professor of Religious Studies, University of Sussex (England), and Dr. Asha Dubey of Visva-Bharati University. Special lectures were delivered in the Department of History by Dr. Panchanan Mandal from Visva-Bharati University, Dr. D. S. Trivedi, Research Professor, Prakrit Research Institute, Baishali (Bihar), and Dr. K. K. Ganguly, Retd. Bageswari Professor, Calcutta University. In the Department of Bengali, two special lectures were delivered by Dr. S. K. Das, Tagore Professor, Delhi University; Dr. Satyabrata De from the Burdwan University was Visiting Fellow for two months. Dr. R. K. Bansal, Central Institute of English, Hyderabad, and Dr. R. K. Sprigg, Retd. Professor of Linguistics, University of London, delivered special lectures in the Department of English. Shri Surya Bikram Gywali, ex-Chancellor of Royal Nepal Academy, Shri Lainsingh Bangdel, Chancellor of Royal Nepal Academy, and Mrs. Devkumari Thapa, well-known writer in Nepal, visited the Nepali Department and addressed members of the Faculty. I would like to add that many of our post-graduate teachers from different departments

participated in seminars and conferences held in other Universities and attended all-India Conferences including the Indian Science Congress.

Along with the academic and research activities, students of the University and colleges participated in several games and sports events which were organised in this and other Universities. I would like to specially mention that the Sports Board of this University organised Coaching Camps for University players participating in State and Inter-University Tournaments in Badminton, Table Tennis, Cricket and Volly Ball. Coaching was also arranged in atheletics with the assistance of State Council of Sports, West Bengal. Besides, coaching camps were organised in Table Tennis and Football for Junior players in the University Campus. The Sports Board hosted the third West Bengal Inter-University Badminton Championship Tournament besides organising Inter-College tournaments in Badminton, Football, Table Tennis, Cricket and Atheletics. I would like to congratulate the winners and runners-up of Inter-College Tournament in Badminton (Alipurduar College and St. Joseph's College), in Football (Siliguri College of Commerce and A.B.N. Seal College), in Table Tennis (Darjeeling Govt. College and Siliguri College of Commerce), in Cricket (Siliguri College and Siliguri College of Commerce), and in atheletics (Siliguri College of Commerce for the men's events and Malda Women's College for women's events). University teams participated in the Inter-University Badminton, Table Tennis, Cricket and Volly Ball Tournaments.

While dwelling on students' participation in sports and games, we have reasons to be happy also about the National Service Scheme (NSS) activities which started in 1970 and showed consistent improvement over the years. Nearly 2400 volunteers are now enrolled in the NSS units of colleges affiliated to this University. Of these, 1300 are male students and 1100 female students. Under the supervision of our Inspector of Colleges who is Programme Co-ordinator, the NSS units have undertaken and continued to implement social service programmes of different kinds including development of village roads, blood donation, adult education, family welfare and child care, distribution of free medicine, tree plantation, literacy programmes, motivating Basti children to attend Primary Schools, developing environment consciousness, and survey of physically handicapped persons in different parts of North

Bengal. There were 15 special camps for intensive programmes organised by the NSS units during the year. Around 1300 volunteers joined these special camps, which included around 900 male students and 400 female students. The special camps were also attended by 200 non-student youth, resource persons and teachers. There was one Central Camp organised during the year with volunteers drawn from all the five different districts of this region. The camp was visited by officials of the Govt. of India and the State Govt., who praised the volunteers for their continuing devotion to NSS activities.

The University Museum has been enriched from time to time with objects of art and antiquities, manuscripts and coins, donated by members of the University and other well-wishers. Last year a private collection of museum objects numbering more than 2000 were acquired from Shri S. P. Roychowdhury of Malda, for which the State Govt. sanctioned Rs. 35,000/-. The University has also received special grant from the Govt. of India, Department of Culture, for purchase of equipments for the Museum, and publication and preservation of manuscripts. A catalogue of the sculptures and coins in the Museum is likely to be published within the next month. We have also decided to publish an iconographic study by Dr. P. K. Bhattacharyya and some unpublished manuscripts of late A. K. Maitreya. A seminar on the "Early Historical Perspective of North Bengal" was organised by the Museum Committee at Balurghat. Besides the teachers and research scholars from the University and colleges of North Bengal, the seminar was attended by scholars from other parts of India and Bangladesh.

The post-graduate Students' Association of the University organised inter-class sports and drama competitions, besides arranging cultural functions for students of the University. A special symposium on the "Impact of IMF loan on the Indian economy" was organised by the Association. Among the Guest Speakers at this symposium were Dr. Ashoke Mitra, Finance Minister, Govt. of West Bengal, and Dr. B. Dasgupta, Vice-Chairman, CAD. The Research Scholars have also been active in organising games and sports. The University Women's Association arranged functions on the occasion of Tagore Birth anniversary, the Autumn Festival (Sarad Mela) and a "Sit-and-Draw" competition for the children of the Campus. It is gratifying to note that the Women's Association have decided to award two prizes to the best out-going

students of the Primary School of the Campus out of surplus funds of the "Sarad Mela".

Before concluding this report, let me come back again to some aspects of our academic activities. These may appear to be somewhat satisfying. But one cannot be complacent about it. It has been a matter of satisfaction for us that with the introduction of semester examination system during the last two years, the academic performance of post-graduate students has been more realistically reflected in the public examination results. However, there is still scope for improvement in respect of our syllabi and teaching standards. With regard to undergraduate courses, we are seriously concerned about the reported loss of teaching days during the academic session. The effective number of teaching days in the Colleges are expected to be 180 days in a year, but it is our unfortunate experience that the actual number of teaching days fell far short of this norm in some Colleges. To ensure at least 200 teaching days in a year, it is proposed to hold the examinations during the vacation and review the present University calender with respect to long vacation. I would like to seek fullest co-operation from my colleagues in the colleges so as to bring about substantial improvement in teaching work in the coming year.

The delay which has occurred in the publication of results of University examinations held last year has also been a cause of great worry and anxiety. We have been making efforts to hold examinations on time and publish the results within 90 to 100 days. Unfortunately, it was not possible to publish the results within target time last year. The University Council is seized of the problem. Factors responsible for the delay in publishing results are being looked into. We hope to remove the deficiencies in the administrative arrangements and initiate steps for simplification of examination system to ensure publication of results within the scheduled time.

It remains for me now to convey my thankfulness to all members of the University community, teachers, students, research scholars, officers and non-teaching staff, who have extended their co-operation to me in the discharge of my responsibilities. It is my fervent hope that we shall be able to overcome our problems and devote to all-round development with mutual co-operation in future as in the past.