

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

TWENTIETH ANNUAL CONVOCATION



Address

by

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Vice-Chancellor

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Mr. Chancellor, Prof. Bose, Prof. Sinha, members of the Court, the Executive Council, Guests and students :

I extend to you all a cordial welcome to the 20th Convocation of your university. A special word of welcome is in order for our new Chancellor, truly a man for all seasons who made his mark in the disparate fields of scholarship, statecraft and diplomacy. We hope to find in him a perennial source of unerring counsel. I need not introduce to you our Chief Guest, Prof. Sufajit Sinha.* His address reveals the man, his vision and the depth of his understanding of the critical issues in higher education.

While conveying my best wishes to the students who won prizes, medals and other distinctions, I would urge them to establish in their thought and action that they have been well schooled and well equipped to meet the demands of a vibrant, democratic society.

The coming months would be for educationists and educational administrators a testing and also an exciting period to look forward to. For on them rests the task of giving a firm shape to the new national policy on education. The goal set for higher education is to make it as dynamic as never before so that it moves in step as the frontiers of knowledge are constantly pushed back. Among measures designed to take us to the goal are (i) consolidation of, and development of facilities

*Prof. Sinha was a fellow at the Stanford University, a Professor at the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, the Director, Anthropological Survey of India and was the Vice-Chancellor, Visva-Bharati. He also taught in the University of Chicago and the Calcutta University.

Prof. Sinha was the President of the Indian Science Congress (Archaeology Section). He has written more than 50 research articles in various professional journals and edited 6 books.

in, existing institutions ; (ii) setting up autonomous colleges ; (iii) design of courses ; (iv) training of teachers ; (v) setting up of a State Council of Higher Education.

Inadequate infrastructure holds the University in a tight leash which curbs its capacity to catch up with the older and more developed universities. We have been set a ceiling of Rs. 125 lakhs for our VIIth Plan proposals. After allowing for price escalation and spill over from VIth Plan outlay, one apprehends that in real terms, the VIIth Plan assistance may be marginally lower than what we received in the VIth Plan. With this order of assistance, there can be no respite from the critical shortages we are hemmed in. For us consolidation and development remain a chimera, unless, of course, the UGC responds favourably though selectively to some of our proposals for assistance outside the plan. We plead for a School for Environmental Studies, Master's Courses in Business Management, Computer Science and M. Phil Courses in a few areas.

The University will have little say on the issue of granting autonomy to a few selected colleges. Presumably, the responsibility will be shared between the UGC and the State Government. Personally, I welcome the innovation which concedes decentralisation of power and academic freedom to deserving institutions.

The area where the University with its Faculties can have a critical operational role is redesigning and restructuring of courses. Pruning dead wood which courses gather in a fast changing world, giving the scholars greater freedom in the combination of courses, defined in terms of units and modules, linking creative activities with learning are some of the primary considerations which demand a complete overhaul of the existing syllabuses. Reforms thrive when the ideas which inspire them infiltrate into receptive minds. Before the Boards of Studies, the Councils for Undergraduate Studies and the Post-graduate Faculty Councils are deep in curricular reform, Principals, teachers at all levels should have an adequate exposure through seminars and symposium to the new ideas and

concepts which shall guide the lay out and design of new courses.

An exciting possibility lies in the decision of the new policy on education to give primacy to the universities' role in research where it is more cost effective than in National laboratories and other research agencies. Costly and sophisticated equipments considered essential for research in frontier areas of science and technology do not figure in our equipment inventory. Our locational matrix rules out fruitful interaction with other centres of research and learning. These effectively bar the entry of our faculties into the newly emerging areas of research and deter budding scientists from joining our pay-roll.

To participate more fully in the march of science we must strengthen the University Service and Instrumentation Centre which UGC projects as a central facility for expensive instruments and their upkeep. Our USIC set up in the Fifth Plan period was denied any assistance in the VIth Plan for reasons left unclear. We shall put forward a proposal for upgrading the USIC to level II with acquisition of equipments like Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Spectro-meter, 100 MHZ oscilloscope and scanning Electron Microscope. This can bring a new spectrum of research possibilities within our reach. Hopefully, a change in the scenario which a vastly improved research facility can effect, coupled with our usually serene, tension free campus may induce some promising young scientists to build their career with us. Since no university can rise above the level of its teachers, a small step towards qualitative improvement of the faculty could be a big step forward in the long run.

Very welcome is the emphasis in the new policy on the training and motivation of teachers. Actions proposed consist of orientation programmes on teaching methodology and pedagogy for the new lecturers, refresher courses for teachers in position and opportunities for career and professional development.

I have mixed feelings about the idea of a State Council of Higher Education. In theory it is unexceptional. In practice there is a lurking danger that the autonomy of universities already watered down will be even more diluted. One senses a slight incongruity in the prescription of autonomy for individual departments and colleges and one more watchdog for universities.

Let me turn now to a review of our achievements and failures since the the last Convocation.

In the publication of examination results our performance is still below par. Failure on the examination front weakens our ability to hold on to a tight academic schedule. It is sad to reflect that the failure of the few spoils the good work of the many. On the positive side is the firm resolve of Faculty Councils and the Undergraduate Council to take positive actions for timely publication of results.

Under the statutes, the affiliated colleges are accountable to the university if they do not work at top gear. To play the advisory role effectively, we need profiles of individual colleges in all details. All colleges have to be covered by annual inspections.

I may mention in passing that under the VIIth Plan affiliated colleges have received a total basic grant of Rs. 43.04 lakhs on 100% basis from UGC against the VIth Plan assistance of Rs. 5.49 lakhs under the head.

There will 16 recipients of Ph. D. degree in this Convocation—3 in Commerce, 2 each in Mathematics, Chemistry and Life Science, 1 each in Bengali, English, Nepali, History, Sociology, Centre for Himalayan Studies and Physics. Six students qualified for Junior Research Fellowship through the National Level Test Conducted by the University Grants Commission—3 in Chemistry, one each Nepali, Philosophy and Life Science.

National Level Seminars were organised by the departments of Political Science, Geography and Applied Geography, Mathematics, Nepali and History.

Members of most of faculties read papers at national and international seminars, published papers at research journals. At the Centre for Himalayan Studies, faculty members published four books, two occasional papers, and seventeen articles in research journals. The teachers of the department of Chemistry have sixteen research projects in hand funded by different agencies. One faculty member in the department of Physics delivered invitation lectures at Banaras Hindu University and the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science. The Cosmic Ray Research Centre has won national and international recognition as an active centre of research. The department of Sociology and Social Anthropology after completing three research projects are at work on three more. The department of Philosophy started its own journal "Philosophical Papers". The faculty members in Economics have brought out six occasional papers. Faculty members of the department of Political Science published two books and have two research projects in hand. The Centre for Life Science tried manfully to cope with the triple responsibility of research on the ecological features of the region and running two modern, unconventional M. Sc. courses in Botany and Zoology in the face of severe resource constraint. Ten research papers were published by the faculty members in national/international journals of repute.

Most faculties organised special lectures by leading specialists on emerging areas of different disciplines.

The University Sports Board ran inter-collegiate tournaments in Football, Badminton, Table Tennis and Athletics. The North Bengal University teams participated in inter-University Tournaments in Basketball, Volleyball, Table Tennis and Football. The Sports Board organised coaching camps in a number of games and athletics.

The Campus hummed with a range of extra curricular activities which evoked lively response and display of many splendoured talents. The moving spirit was the North Bengal University Students' Association. The North Bengal University Employees' Association ran their own programme of games, drama and songs.

In spirit, the University is a residential institution and the members a well knit community. A Community Hall would help sustain the spirit of unity and loyalty to the institution we have the privilege to belong to.

Before I close, may I acknowledge my deep debt of gratitude to the University community, the members of the University Authorities for their unfailing support and active co-operation?