

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

TWENTYFIRST ANNUAL CONVOCATION



Address

by

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Vice-Chancellor

RAJA-RAMMOHUNPUR

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Mr. Chancellor, Professor Bhattacharyya, members of the Court, the Executive Council, Guests and students :

I have the pleasure and privilege of extending to you all a very warm and cordial welcome to the 21st Convocation of the University of North Bengal. We in this University are particularly happy that our esteemed Chancellor has graciously braved the long distance and the arduous journey to be with us once again this morning. His wise counsel has inspired and encouraged us in all our efforts. We are conscious of his deep concern for education of quality within our colleges and universities and his emotional involvement in our problems. We are grateful to our distinguished Chief Guest, Professor Debipada Bhattacharyya, a rare example of scholar-administrator par excellence and an eminent literateur in his own right who demonstrated his abiding love for university education by responding to our invitation. His address is a rich blend of scholarship and perception.

I offer my warm congratulations to all students and scholars who have received their degrees, diplomas, prizes and medals and won distinctions on merit. May they prove their worth in the fiercely competitive world of work. This year about 9219 students shall receive their diplomas, 520 of them at the Master's level, and 8682 at the first degree level in Medicine, Engineering, Education, Law, Science, Commerce and Humanities. 16 (Sixteen) scholars will get their Ph. D. degree, 9 of them in Science and 7 in the Humanities. To all of them I offer my best wishes.

*Professor Debipada Bhattacharyya is widely known as a scholar, a critic of Bengali literature and as educationist. He was Professor of Bengali, Jadavpur University. He served the Rabindra Bharati University as Vice-Chancellor and came back to the Jadavpur University from where he retired in 1987. He is the author and editor of six books and many other research papers. He is a member of many academic committees.

The academic world is passing through a challenging time when the National Policy on Education is in the process of implementation. If past experience is any guide, the programme of action that follows shall ultimately determine the fate of the new policy. The University system and its management assume a crucial role. The University system in our country has to cope with two major but critical dimensions which are interrelated and mutually interdependent—its interaction with the external environment and the dynamics of its internal environment. How the University system will respond and adapt itself to the external socio-political and socio-economic reality will determine its internal dynamics of interaction among the components of the system. Basic changes in the structure and management of the University system are being contemplated so that the prevailing elitist and exclusive character of the University system, its unchanged and inflexible curricular structure, its quantitative expansion beyond the competence of its limited infrastructure and its highly centralised governing process could be remodelled in a meaningful manner. There is, therefore, an urgent need today to pay attention to the management of the University system. Of the four critical variables that call for remedial action, namely, financial management, organisational structure, academic management and the management of human resources, the last two are by far the most important. There is need for an integrated strategy and a participative style of management of human resources comprising the students, the faculty, the administrators and the ministerial supportive staff. Happily, the experience of this University, so far, in this process of participative management and consultative decision making in the elected bodies of the court, the Executive Council, the Faculty Councils and the Councils of Undergraduate Studies, etc. has been quite satisfying and augurs well for the future. Occasional irritants apart, the constructive participation of the students, the non-teaching staff, the scholars, the officers and the teachers in these elected bodies leaves little to be desired.

None can deny that the country woefully lags behind in

meeting the academic challenges thrown up by the agenda of social transformation. We must be alive to the changing social reality and stop plodding along the beaten track. It is hoped that the teachers would transcend the confined atmosphere in which they are working to provide leadership in overcoming the crisis that faces us. For the rising tide of mediocrity threatens the very *raison d'être* of academic existence. While we have been talking of revolutionary changes in our educational system in the endless stream of committee, seminars and conference, we have practised only a 'moderate reformism'. At all levels, expansion has been accompanied by a dilution or neglect of quality. The two exercises in which the University Grants Commission and other bodies are presently engaged in all seriousness, the Curricular Development Centres for the re-designing of courses and the concept of Academic Staff College throughout the country for teachers' training, will hopefully end this stagnation and show the way to real qualitative changes in the content of education. The Faculty Councils of this University have been alive to the changing scenario and have accepted the responsibility of identifying areas for inter-disciplinary research cutting across frontiers of discipline-based knowledge and redesigning courses along these lines. I am sure the Committee that is looking into this matter will keep in mind the potentials and the possibilities of this region while recommending the agenda of such inter-disciplinary and multidisciplinary research.

Several departments of this University are now poised to open the M. Phil course in the coming academic session. The M. Phil. Committees of departments concerned have been constituted; the preparatory tasks for the syllabi are under way. These courses have to be administered within the constraints of space and other resources which seriously affect even the normal working of existing departments. We can not meet the needs of the expanding social science departments, leave alone the new Centre of Adult and Continuing Education that has started functioning. Construction of new building or extension of space for the departments of Sociology and Social

Anthropology and Political Science, the Centre for Himalayan Studies and the Law College, when completed, might relieve the acute pressure for sometime. The University expressed its unhappiness and frustration at the very meagre allocation by the University Grants Commission during the VIIth Plan. Retrenchment of 57.14 lakhs as spill-over has cut us to the quick. Dialogue is under way with the UGC for upward revision of the number of sanctioned posts to 18 within the allotted amount. Regarding expansion outside the Plan, we have high hopes of being able to introduce the Master's Course in Computer Science with UGC assistance. Our proposal for the introduction of B. Lib. Science Course is under the active consideration of the State Government. It is indeed heartening to find our Chief Minister responding so promptly and sympathetically to our request for grant for the construction of an auditorium for the University. Despite escalating estimates for such a construction, I believe it will be possible to sort out the formalities for this project. If and when completed, it will indeed be a milestone in the progress of this University, I must admit that a yawning gap still exists between requirements and availability in respect of residential accommodation of teachers, officers and the non-teaching staff of the University.

The higher education profile of the University must take into consideration the problems and difficulties of undergraduate education imparted through 50 affiliated colleges in the undergraduate faculties of Arts, Commerce, Science, Education, Physical Education, Law, Engineering & Technology and Medicine. Quite a few of these affiliated colleges offer instruction only at the Pass Course level and that too in Humanities and Social Sciences only. Opening of new courses of study, particularly in Science and Commerce streams, and upgrading colleges through honours subjects, must be given top priority in policy alternatives for meaningful improvement in collegiate education. Our expectations for examination reform, especially expeditious publication of results, have remained unfulfilled as yet. The Council for Undergraduate Studies has recently decided to introduce Question Banks for

various undergraduate examinations and has appointed a High Power Committee to do all that is necessary for early publication of results. We wish these ventures success for a gradual reordering of things.

A brief account of the academic activities and accomplishments of the departments and Centres of the University may be presented. As stated earlier, 16 candidates will obtain their Ph. D. degrees this year, 9 of them belonging to the Science Faculty and 7 to the Arts & Commerce Faculty. 63 research scholars and 2 Research Associates are presently engaged in various types of research, 17 of them enjoying UGC Junior Fellowship, 19 University Scholarship and 17 other scholars working in Projects financed by various funding agencies. About 376 students have been registered for Ph. D. research. As for other academic activities in the Faculty of Arts & Commerce, the Department of Bengali organised a University-cum-UGC sponsored four-day seminar to celebrate the 125th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore, one exhibition of Tagore's painting and art on that occasion and seminars to celebrate the birth anniversary of poets Jatindranath Sengupta and Mohitlal Majumdar. Special lecture was delivered by Dr. Bratindranath Mukherjee, Carmichael Professor of Ancient Indian History, Calcutta University. The Commerce Department arranged three extension lectures during the year. The Department of Economics earned a good name for itself by organising the 47th Annual Conference of the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics in September 1987. The Department proposes to organise the annual conference of the Bangiya Arthaniti Parishad in March in the Campus. Faculty members delivered lectures and addressed seminars in learned forums in other parts of India and published eight research papers in journals; Dr. Gopal Tribedy was invited to deliver two seminar lectures. Special lectures were also organised by the Department of English by inviting Dr. Jasodhara Bagchi and Dr. Benode Sena from Jadavpur and Delhi Universities respectively. The Department of History organised a UGC National Seminar, besides arranging special lectures by such

eminent scholars as Prof. Ashok Rudra, Prof. Barun De and Prof. Benoy Chowdhury. In the Department of Nepali two special lectures were delivered by Dr. Basudeb Tripathi of Tribhuvan University and Dr. D. R. Timsina of Banaras Hindu University while one Faculty member participated in Seminar and Workshop outside. Apart from organising a seminar on "Art and Society" sponsored by the ICPR, the Department of Philosophy held a series of special and extension lectures by eminent Indian and foreign scholars including Prof. Sundara Rajan, Prof. A. K. Majumdar, Shri M. P. Pandit, Prof. Fraser, Prof. J. Stone, and Prof. V. Foti. Faculty members continued their research projects and attended national and international seminars. One UGC National Seminar on "Reforming the Administrative System: the Challenge and the Response" was organised by the Department of Political Science in November, attended by eminent scholars, administrators and political elites from all over the country and a good number of teachers from the affiliated colleges. The Department also held a special lecture by the late Prof. S. K. Sharma of the Punjab University, Chandigarh. Some faculty members continued their research projects funded by the UGC and ICSSR. The Department of Sociology & Social Anthropology also organised a UGC National Seminar in March, while teachers of the Department participated and contributed papers in several national seminars and conferences. Two major research projects funded by the ICMR and the UGC are currently undertaken by the Faculty members. The North Bengal University Law college organised a two-day seminar on "Law in Contemporary Society".

In the Faculty of Science, the Department of Chemistry organised two national seminars in March and December, one on "Organometallic Chemistry in India: Present and Future" sponsored by the UGC, the other on "Research on Pesticide Chemistry in India: Present and Future", and arranged two special lectures by Dr. J. Sestak of the Institute of Physics, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. Two teachers of this Department are presently doing their post-doctoral research in the U. S. A. Special lectures by Prof. A. B. Roy and Prof. T. S.

Sankara were also organised by the Department of Mathematics. The Department of Physics arranged two visiting lectures. Faculty members published 24 research papers in learned national and international journals and attended as many as 22 conferences, symposia and workshops in Physics at the national and international levels. The UGC recently sanctioned a Regional Research Laboratory in Cosmic Ray and High Energy Physics for this Department. In the Department of Zoology, Dr. A. Dutta Gupta of Calcutta University presented special lectures on Genetic Engineering. Two major inter-disciplinary research projects sponsored by the Planning Commission and the Department of Environment, Govt. of India, are in the process of implementation. Of these, the Eco-Development Projects for the Mirik-Sukna region in the Darjeeling District are almost complete, while the River Valley Project in the hill areas of the District is continuing. The Computer Centre of the University organised three evening courses on Fortran Programming and Cobol Programming with a view to spreading Computer education and Computer literacy among all sections of people in this region.

The Centre for Adult and Continuing Education which started functioning from August 3, 1987, has already made its presence felt by its activities. It has recently organised a seven-day Orientation Training for 20 Adult Education Programme Officers from the affiliated Colleges and has also organised during the last few months several training programmes for volunteers in some affiliated colleges.

The North Bengal University Sports Board continued its regular activities like organising Inter-Collegiate Tournaments in Football, Athletics, Table Tennis and Badminton, and also sponsored the North Bengal University Team's participation in various Inter-University Tournaments. The North Bengal University team distinguished itself by winning the East Zone title in table tennis.

The North Bengal University Research Scholars' Associa-

tion added its quota of variety and spice to the community life on the campus by organising sports and games and colourful cultural programmes. That the research scholars possess many-sided talents and creative faculties besides their serious pursuit of academic research has been amply demonstrated by these activities. The North Bengal University Employees' Association, in their own efficient manner, organised a good programme of sports and games and cultural functions. Last, but certainly not the least, I must mention the distinctive role played by the North Bengal University Students' Association, active as ever, in the corporate and academic life of this University through a spate of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

May I record my deep appreciation for the unstinted support that I received from all sections of the University community and my colleagues in the elected bodies? I firmly believe that the University has years of glory ahead as an active catalyst for the spread of higher education in the region.