

The 9th Convocation of the University of North Bengal

Governor's Address - 30.4.75\*

I am happy to be with you on this auspicious day. I would, at the outset, like to thank our Chief Guest Shri Sankar Prasad Mitra for having so graciously consented to deliver the Convocation address. Apart from having achieved distinction at the Bar and on the Bench Shri Sankar Prasad Mitra possesses a deep insight into the problems which, today, confront the educational world. He also belongs to that diminishing tribe of persons who firmly believe that Mahatma Gandhi had the answers to many of these problems. It is certainly true that commitment to non-violence, in\*University campus and create an academic environment congenial to the pursuit of knowledge. We shall greatly profit by his words of wisdom and sage counsel.

In my address to you last year and when speaking recently at the Foundation Day of the Calcutta University it was my painful duty to highlight some of the major factors which have disrupted life in our Universities with disastrous consequences on academic standards and the hopes, aspirations and careers of countless students. I, therefore, pleaded for a colloquium of all concerned to explore ways and means of stopping the present rot in our institutions of higher education. In my view the first step towards the restoration of normalcy should be a self-imposed Ordinance by political leaders of all parties, University authorities, teachers and student leaders to keep 'politics' off the campus. A similar plea was made recently by the Chief Minister at the Calcutta University when he condemned, in forthright terms, the increasing politicalisation of our educational institutions and appealed to all concerned to keep the academic world free from political influence.

Hard decisions may have to be taken in respect of several matters which directly bear on the proper functioning of our Universities. We can hardly hope to restore their image unless there is a concerted effort to stop malpractices at the time of admission of students or during examinations. Equally important is the need for examination reform, changes in the curricula, student participation in University affairs, better performance by teachers, insistence on merit as the sole criterion in the selection and promotion of teachers and better library and laboratory facilities. I hope to discuss these and other problems, which presently bedevil the University world, at a conference of Vice-Chancellors which I propose convening in the month of June. \*word and deed, could help to restore normalcy in the

It is my firm conviction, however, that progress in the desired direction is possible only if there is genuine heart-searching by teachers and students. These are the most important segments of the academic world and only they can take the initiative in ridding our institutions of higher learning from the ills which now afflict them. The functioning of our colleges is deteriorating rapidly. There are some who tend to make the student the scapegoat when a deeper probe reveals that he is not wholly blameworthy. I am told that the quality of teaching in a number of colleges is poor and that many of the teachers are indifferent to their duties and fail to cover the prescribed courses of study with the result that students are left to fend for themselves or are forced to take private tuitions. Whilst there never was adequate justification for lack of performance on the part of some teachers there is even less now that there has been a generous revision of their pay-scales. It is my fervent hope that Associations of teachers, hitherto preoccupied with agitating for better conditions of service, will, now that their demands have been substantially met, focus attention on the urgency of bringing about a qualitative improvement in academic standards and in eliminating factionalism and other malpractices which threaten to vitiate the atmosphere in almost every sphere of University life. It is also important that student leaders realise the incalculable damage done to generations of young men and women by resorting to or acquiescing in activities which jeopardise the smooth functioning of the Universities. The University scene today is depressing and distressing and this is why I have taken the liberty of speaking frankly and freely in the hope that teachers and student leaders can stop the rot and become effective instruments for change and a restoration of the values and traditions which made University education meaningful.


I welcome the new strategy for the future development of the North Bengal University which has been broadly delineated by the Vice-Chancellor. When addressing you in this campus on previous occasions I have stressed that the University must be relevant to the region which it serves. Unfortunately the Regional Universities in this State have evolved on the stereotype of a Metropolitan University like Calcutta when, in fact, they were expected to cater to the special needs of their regions and to develop a style and identity of their own.

I am happy, therefore, that some fresh thinking has been initiated in the academic community of this University which is situated in an educationally and economically backward region. The potential in the University exists for conducting surveys in the region, collecting sociological and economic data, studying the minimal needs of the different districts and for stimulating discussions and debate on the developmental process. In other words I would like the University to be a catalytic agent for development and its students to be development-oriented. This, of course, implies a radical change in the pattern of studies and the content of curricula. Only then will it be possible to assist in the formulation and implementation of educational and developmental programmes centred on regional needs.

In reorientating the University's objectives and role we must bear in mind the constraint of financial resources and the need for a redetermination of priorities. For instance, it is permissible to argue that higher priority should have been given to the establishment of a Centre of Social Sciences or Life Science Studies, suggested by the Vice-Chancellor, than the opening of a Law College. The University, considering that it has a Medical College in the campus, could have pioneered in opening a school for the training of Health Auxiliaries or Para Medical workers which, apart from creating employment potential, would have facilitated the delivery of minimal health care to people in the rural areas. This is the time for innovation and experimentation. We should examine the feasibility of opening a Faculty or Institute of Development Studies in which students would be expected not only to acquire knowledge about different aspects of development but marry that knowledge with experience in the field. There are many employment opportunities in this region in such sectors of development as Agriculture, Irrigation, Small-scale and agro-based Industries, Health Care etc. I hope that those serving this University and having its interests at heart will get together and devise ways and means of underscoring the developmental role of this University.

A Convocation is a joyful occasion when the barriers are down and there should be a free intermingling between members of the academic, student and extra-mural communities. So many of you will shortly be leaving the portals of this University. You deserve the moral support and good wishes of all in facing the many challenges you will encounter in the world you are about to enter. I offer my warmest congratulations to those who have received their Degrees as well as those who for outstanding performance, have been awarded medals. I wish you all success and the best of luck in your future careers.

Copy to ;  
All University members.

  
Registrar  
University of North Bengal