

CHANCELLOR'S ADDRESS

I am happy to be with you on the occasion of the Tenth Annual Convocation of this University. At the out-set I would like to thank Professor Mehrotra for having made it convenient to be with us this morning to deliver the Convocation address. Professor Mehrotra is a scientist of great distinction and, as Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University, he has brought to bear a scientific and pragmatic approach to the many problems which confront University authorities today. On a previous occasion I had suggested that the issues raised and the observations made by speakers at a Convocation should be the subject-matter for a discussion or a colloquium in which the University authorities, teachers and students should participate. I hope this will be done in the case of Professor Mehrotra's illuminating address.

This is the University's Tenth birthday and occasion therefore for introspection and stock-taking. Though young, the University is, under the imaginative leadership of the Vice-Chancellor, beginning to show signs of vitality and growth. Provided it does not blindly conform to a stereotype that has little relevance to this region's problems and challenges this University can play a seminal role in the socio-economic and educational development of North Bengal.

Last year I strongly endorsed the suggestion of the Vice-Chancellor for the opening of Advanced Study Centres for the Social Sciences and the Life Sciences. I am glad that there has been a prompt response to the proposals made by the Vice-Chancellor and the State Government has sanctioned a sum of Rs. 2 lakhs with which can be started at least one centre. It is now for the University to formulate a concrete scheme and implement it as quickly as possible. The State Government has also approached the UGC and the Central Government for financial assistance for these centres.

I also hope that serious consideration will be given to two other suggestions which I made last year. The first relates to the training of para-medical workers in the University's Medical College. We know how utterly inadequate are the facilities for health and medical care in the countryside. This is particularly so in the districts of North Bengal. The University

may take the initiative in starting a centre for training auxiliary health workers in collaboration with the Health Department of the State Government. My second suggestion was to involve teachers and students in the developmental process. In this context I suggested that the possibility of establishing an Institute of Development Studies may be explored. Even if our resources make it difficult for such a centre to be set up in the near future there is no reason why the problems of development in the region should not be made the subject matter of frequent discussion and seminars. I go a step further and suggest that it should be made compulsory for students and teachers to spend some time every year in the villages where they can participate in the formulation and implementation of developmental programmes. For this purpose it would be a good idea if a group of students 'adopt' a village which they would visit frequently and become co-workers for development. This will help to expose our young men and women to the harsh realities of life in the countryside and provide them an opportunity for being instruments for rural change.

When I addressed you last year I mentioned that I was convening a meeting of the Vice-Chancellors to consider the many problems facing the Universities in this State. This conference was held in Calcutta in August of this year when a consensus emerged on the remedial measures necessary to deal with some of the ills which afflict our institutions of higher learning. If the recommendations made at this Conference are faithfully implemented there will be a restoration of some semblance of order and purpose in the functioning of our Universities. Those recommendations which must receive topmost priority relate to the holding of examinations in time and the stopping of mass copying and other malpractices. It is good to learn that significant progress towards this end has been made in this University. In certain other Universities in the State there are still elements bent on disrupting examinations and aiding and abetting students in indulging in malpractices. No Government or University authority can condone such conduct. In the long run students are the worst sufferers; a degree from our Universities has already come to be devalued. If we cannot stop malpractices in the examination system our Universities may be forced to stop conferring degrees. Government has, therefore, issued instructions to the local authorities to lend their fullest support to the Universities in ensuring the integrity of the examination system as well as in assisting them in the tasks of

invigilation. Meanwhile examination reform, about which we have talked for long, should be introduced without further delay. I am glad that the Vice-Chancellor has taken positive measures in this direction. I hope he can count on the cooperation of teachers and students.

One of the factors responsible for student indiscipline and the lack of integrity in examination is the failure on the part of some teachers to cover the prescribed course and to improve the quality of teaching. This is a matter which was discussed at some length at the conference of Vice-Chancellors who have, I understand, now prescribed a Code of Conduct for Teachers which, inter alia, sets out the duties and responsibilities of teachers, emphasises the need to develop and improve academic and professional competence, enjoins participation in academic programmes, imposes an obligation on teachers to organise their teaching schedule in relation to the curriculum and expects teachers to involve themselves a great er extent in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. This code has already been adopted in this University and I appeal to the large and much respected fraternity of teachers to observe the Code scrupulously.

Before I declare the Convocation closed I take this opportunity of offering my congratulations and best wishes to all those who have received their Degrees as well as those who for outstanding performance, have been awarded medals. Our country is at a crucial stage in its history. The shaping of its destiny is in the hands of our young men and women who constitute the majority of our population. So much therefore depends on the dedication, discipline, honesty of purpose and patriotism with which you discharge your duties and responsibilities in whatever sphere you may be employed.

---