UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

THIRTYEIGHTH ANNUAL CONVOCATION

FEBRUARY 24, 2006
VIDYASAGAR MANCHA

Hon'ble Shri Gopalkrishna Gandhi, Governor of West Bengal and Chancellor, University of North Bengal, Professor Pijushkanti Saha, the Vice Chancellor of the University of North Bengal, members of the Court, Senate, faculty members, students, degree recipients, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen -

It is indeed a rare honour to address you on this occasion of 38th Annual Convocation of the University of North Bengal.

The University of North Bengal is blessed with the majestic Himalayas and a rich mix of different national cultures. The mind-soothing serenity of the mountains and its verdant forests create a conducive ambience where academic ventures can be carried out without any interruption.

The University has a rich tradition of more than four decades, and in the process of its growth, it has produced thousands of students, who are serving the society in various capacities. And today, you will be joining them to further the vision and mission of its founding fathers.

We are living in an era of technological wonders, be it telecommunication, space or information. In the race of economic and technological prosperity, the world resources are depleting at an unprecedented rate. Thus, only those new technologies have to be brought into use, which can not only be sustained for the present generation but are to be ensured for the generations to come.

Today, India is facing a challenging situation. The country is bestowed with a large amount of knowledge capital. It is the second largest country in terms of S&T manpower. This feature has been responsible for getting several opportunities in terms of exponential growth in software and information technology, business process outsourcing (BPO) and R&D outsourcing. A large number of multinational companies are opening up with technology development and manufacturing units in the country. While jobs are reduced in many other countries to reduce the expenditure and balance the economics, the reverse is happening in our country. India is expected to become an economical super power by 2050. The other country that is being tagged together with India in terms of growth is China.

The question about how the higher education system of the country should gear up itself at this crucial juncture is very important and should come up in the minds of all educationists of our country. A look at the higher education system reveals the major challenges being faced by Indian higher education system, which includes:

- Maintaining a good quality of education
- Providing educational opportunities to the large number of seekers

- Developing expertise and opening of new disciplines
- Maintaining the HR balance considering the needs of the country
- Regulation and accreditation of the institutions
- Building of proper educational infrastructure
- Student discipline
- Maintaining a good quality of research and development

In the past, Indian higher education was confined to mainly Government run institutions. These institutions were providing a reasonably good level of quality education. Subsequently governmental control on higher education was eased and permissions were given to a large number of private bodies to open up institutions. However, a bulk of these institutions was affiliated to existing well-established universities while a few were given deemed university status. Many of these institutions were inadequately equipped and lack in infrastructure. Although the process of opening up of the higher education sector to private organizations created a significant rise in the educational opportunities, quality of education has suffered. The worst hit was science education. Many educationists feel that today the quality of a science postgraduate is significantly lower than that of a postgraduate two decades back. The charge in the society for engineering education has also resulted in a drop in the quality of intake. States like West Bengal have been traditionally giving importance to science education and also fortunately the tradition has been continuing. It is also very appropriate that MHRD has gifted an Indian Institute of Science Education & Research to be setup in Kolkata.

The yet other alarming situation is the mediocre quality of the scientific research-taking place in the country. Although there has been a rise in the research output of the country in recent times, impact-making research has been grossly missing. It is therefore, very essential to give a major thrust to quality R&D. Over the last few decades, the CSIR laboratories have contributed a reasonably good amount of research output. However, enough effort has not been going into the commercial exploitation of this output. The MHRD has rightly identified the need and has stepped up efforts to create science educational opportunities at the quality levels of the IITs and the IISc. All IITs are considering opening up new disciplines in science. IIT Kharagpur has responded enthusiastically and had introduced courses like M.Sc. in Economics and M.Sc. in Statistics and Informatics, last year. Shortly we are also going to initiate academic programmes in Biosciences and Material Science. Needless to mention that the quality of the input into these programmes is excellent since the admission into these is through the reputed Joint Entrance Examination (JEE).

Today, some of the areas of science have emerged as new disciplines and gaining a lot of importance. These areas include, Biosciences, Materials Science, Environmental Science, Nanotechnology, Information Science, Earth Science and Atmospheric and Oceanic Science. Although

some of these have existed for a long time, they have gained special relevance in the recent past. These disciplines are highly relevant in today's scenario and call for an enhanced level of quality human resource generation.

As already mentioned due to a high level of popularity in the country for Engineering irrespective of the aptitude, the cream of the students have been going for Engineering education. While it has some positive repercussions, it has started creating imbalances in the human resource generation. There is a strong need for channeling quality students to take up education in science and other disciplines as well.

With advances in research, today scientific research and laboratory practice needs sophisticated equipment. Great discoveries of the type by Sir C.V. Raman may still be possible but is very difficult. Unfortunately, many educational institutions offering postgraduate education and research programmes lack in the basic infrastructure even for laboratory practice. This is yet another area which needs immediate attention.

At the outset I would like to emphasize that a time has come for intelligentsia of the country to take a serious stock of the situation and improve upon the higher education system of the country. I have used this opportunity to raise the involved issues also to appraise the graduating students of the scenario and set some goals for those who are intending to carry out further studies like taking up research activity. I also congratulate the graduating students of the North Bengal University for successfully completing the major part of their formal education and I wish them a grand success in all their endeavors.

Jai Hind.