

Honourable Chancellor Sri Viren J. Shah, Respected Chief Guest Prof. Pabitra Sarkar, Members of the Court, Members of the Executive Council and other Authorities of the University, the Recipients of Honours and Degrees, Members of the Faculties, Students, Research Scholars, and esteemed Guests :

On behalf of the University of North Bengal I welcome you all at the 35th Annual Convocation. We have just completed forty years of the University. For the last four decades our University played very significant role in the development of higher education in six districts of North Bengal and the neighbouring state of Sikkim. The University of North Bengal was established in 1962 with a hope to fulfil the aspirations of people in the northern districts of West Bengal. Later the hill state of Sikkim was included in its territorial jurisdiction. Now the frontier of this university runs flanking the bank of *Ganga* in the south to the base of *Kanchenjunga* in the north. The region encompasses lofty mountain peaks, hilly terrain, vast riparian plains, dense forests rich in bio-diversity and settlements of multi-ethnic groups having multi-faceted cultures. Economically the region lacks in many ways to enrich the lives of toiling masses. Hurdles for development are manifested in poor transport network, scarce energy resources and inadequate social infrastructure.

Amidst this ocean of backwardness it had been really a very difficult task to sail with cardinal direction in achieving the goal for human resource development. Constraints had been many, and still exist today. With all limitations the University resolved a path of struggle to overcome all obstacles and hazards on its way. Our endeavour for the excellence in higher learning still continues surging over many obstacles.

Award of Degrees and Diplomas

In this 35th Annual Convocation the Court will confer degrees to 778 postgraduate and 10466 undergraduate students for the examinations held in 2000 and 2001 respectively. Diplomas will be conferred to 62 students for their success in various professional examinations. The University Medal and Endowment Medal / Prize will be awarded to 61 P.G. and 69 U.G. students as a recognition for their academic excellence. This year the Court has proposed to award Ph. D. degree in various subjects to 34 successful candidates. M. Phil degree will be presented to 38 candidates. I congratulate the recipients of medals/ prizes and all successful candidates and hope, they will prove their worthiness of such attainments.

Hon'ble Chancellor Sir, the Court of the University of North Bengal conferred the Doctor of Literature (Honoris Causa) degree upon Prof. Amartya Sen for his outstanding contributions in welfare economics at a Special Convocation held on 14th December, 2002 at Raj Bhawan, Kolkata.

Objectives for the Tenth Plan

The University Grants Commission has outlined the 10th Plan objectives to achieve a profound

transformation of higher education in the country for promotion of sustainable human development along with the relevance for closer links with professions and improvement in the quality of teaching, research and extension activities. "The scope and demand for higher education is increasing and the new paradigm in higher education involves creation of intellects (and that means promotion of global standards in institutions of higher education) of world standards and also training of skilled human power at a mass level without compromising on quality" (U.G.C., 2002).

In the context of complex demands for higher education it is acknowledged that the present system has produced trained human power of quality and India has been as a nation of new identity. "India experts are the backbone of knowledge revolution that is taking place world over. They are not only recognized in the emerging fields of computers, information technology and biotechnology but also in pure sciences, economics and finances and also in fields related to humanities and social sciences" (Nigavekar, 2001).

Pursuits for Excellence

Our university is now vibrant with activities to seek a goal for excellence. In this era of globalization we have no option except to take the challenge in capacity building of human resources in various emerging fields, particularly in frontier sciences.

With this objective the University of North Bengal introduced the M.Sc. courses in Biotechnology, Computer Science and Anthropology from the academic session 2001-2002. Biotechnology and Information Technology are now the frontier of sciences, whereas the multi-ethnic societies in North Bengal demand the introduction of Anthropology for better understanding the region. The demand for management education is also increasing on global scale. The University of North Bengal has decided to introduce the Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.) course under the Prof. Nurul Hasan Centre for Management Studies from this year. The University had been pursuing a policy for human resource development in management studies in various fields like Tea Management, Market Management and Tourism & Hotel Management for the last few years. The University has also started a Diploma Course in Environmental Laws from this session under the Department of Law.

The need for higher education in medical sciences is a cry, not only for North Bengal, but also for the whole state of West Bengal. The North Bengal Medical College with approval from the University of North Bengal has approached the Medical Council of India for approval of M.D. courses in eight more medical subjects. The University will also introduce the M.Sc. courses in Biochemistry, Microbiology, Physiology, Anatomy and Pharmacology at North Bengal Medical College from the next session.

The excellence in teaching in the university largely depends on the proliferation of research activities. Our teachers in various departments are engaged in research programs supported by different sponsors. This can be evidenced from the report on activities of various departments. All science departments, i.e. Botany, Physics, Chemistry, Zoology, Computer Science and Geography, are endowed with 26 major research projects in various fields having a worth of Rs.2.25 crore (approx.). Many other departments in other faculties and centres are also conducting research programs for attainment of higher learning.

Profiles of the P.G. Departments and Centres

The University has at present nine P.G. departments, i.e. Anthropology, Biotechnology, Botany, Chemistry, Computer Science and Applications, Geography and Applied Geography, Mathematics, Physics and Zoology, under the Faculty of Science; ten P.G. departments, i.e. Bengali, Commerce, Economics, English, History, Law, Nepali, Philosophy, Political Science and Sociology, under the Faculty of Arts, Commerce and Law; six centres sanctioned by the University Grants Commission i.e. Centre for Himalayan Studies, Centre for Life Science, Centre for Women Studies, Centre for Adult and Continuing Education, High Energy and Cosmic Ray Research Centre and University Science Instrumentation Centre, and five other centres, i.e. Akshay Kumar Maitreya Museum, Centre for Development Studies, Department of Tea Management Studies (under Prof. Nurul Hasan Centre for Management Studies), Centre for Remote Sensing Applications and Centre for Studies in Local Languages and Culture. The University also runs a Weather Service Station to record daily weather data for research studies and circulates weather information to media and other organizations in the public interest. The University Library has large collection of books and journals and caters services to all concerned, including services through internet. The Library is also linked with the department of Library and Information Science offering B.L.I.S. degree.

The University has three P.G. departments, i.e. Botany, Zoology and Nepali at Darjeeling Government College, and one P.G. department of Ophthalmology under the Faculty of Medicine at North Bengal Medical College.

The University felt the growing need for extension of higher education to a large number of deprived students in backward areas of North Bengal. These students fail to get admission in colleges and university departments due to limited number of seats. Even under constraints the University decided to establish the 'Directorate of Distance Education' in 2001-02 in creating a network of P.G. and U.G. education in selected subjects. Our effort stands to be vindicated by all concerned, particularly by the students in remote areas. This new wave of education will gain higher amplitude shortly and transform the social base radically.

Many of our faculty members continue to contribute in their respective fields of specialization, deliver lectures as visiting fellows and attend seminars and workshops in the country and abroad. Their recognition in their respective fields will help the University in achieving excellence as a centre of higher learning.

Outstanding Achievements during the Year 2002-03

The University Grants Commission for the first time has recognized the departments of Botany, Chemistry and Philosophy in the University for Departmental Research Support Scheme (D.R.S.) under Special Assistance Program (S.A.P.) after careful and in-depth examination of the academic achievements made by the departments during the last five years. Such proclamation has certainly elevated the status of the University.

The Department of Botany has been inducted under the Special Assistance Program (S.A.P.) of U.G.C. having the thrust area in 'Microbiology including Mycology and Plant Pathology', for a period of five years and supported with a grant of Rs.45.00 lakh.

The Department of Chemistry has received a grant of Rs.40.00 lakh from U.G.C. under Special Assistance Program for five years to conduct research in, i) Physico-chemical studies on ions in non-aqueous and micro-emulsion media and ii) Transition metal compounds with catalytic and biological relevance.

The Department of Philosophy has been supported with a grant of Rs.15.20 lakh under the Special Assistance Program (S.A.P.) for five years to carry on research on the thrust area of 'Meaning : Classical Indian Philosophy and contemporary Western Philosophy'.

The Department of Science and Technology, Government of India has granted Rs.85 lakh to the Department of Chemistry and Rs.37 lakh to the Department of Physics under the FIST Program during the year 2002-03 in consideration of outstanding research work in the departments. This support will help the departments for advancement of research activities.

The University of North Bengal has also been chosen by the U.G.C. for installation of VSAT in accessing other university libraries for electronic database. The VSAT will be installed very soon.

Other Achievements

The University of North Bengal has been privileged to conduct the Refresher Course in eleven subjects during the year 2002-03. These subjects are namely, English, Bengali, Nepali, History, Political Science, Philosophy, Commerce, Geography, Chemistry, Botany and Zoology. Nearly 60 experts from other universities and institutions have been invited to deliver lectures. In all about 330 teachers from colleges and university departments have gained advanced knowledge in the subject.

The University in recent years has become a hub of intellectual discourse with participation of scholars from other universities and institutions in various seminars and workshops organized within the campus. A two-day International Workshop was organized by the Centre for Women Studies, in which many scholars from Bangladesh including Dr. Md. Shahidullah, Secretary, University Grants Commission, Bangladesh attended. The University was privileged to hold the 'Frontiers Lectures in Chemistry' of National Importance funded by JNCARS and attended by eminent scientists like Prof. C.N.R. Rao, Prof. S. Chandrasekharan and Prof. A. Chakraborty. The Department of Law organized the symposium on 'Human Rights' for the Judicial Officers of West Bengal in collaboration with LASWEB. A training program for Tea Garden Managers was also organized under the Environmental Capacity Building Project, assisted by National School of Laws of India University, Bangalore.

Many outstanding scholars like Prof. S.D. Maharaj of the University of Natal, South Africa, Prof. A. Beesham of the University of Natal, South Africa, Dr. Amit Ghosh of National Semiconductor Corporation, U.S.A., Prof. L. Starkel of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland, Prof. Roger Burrige, University of Warwick, U.K., Prof. A. Kembhavi and Prof. N.K. Dadhich of IUCAA, Prof. C.N.R. Rao and Prof. S. Chandrasekharan of JNCRAS, Prof. A. Chakraborty, IACS, Prof. Kamalesh Kar, SINP, Prof. Pabitra Sarker, W.B.S.C.H.E., Prof. Amalendu De and Prof. A.K. Danda of Asiatic Society, Prof. Amiya Bagchi, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Prof. Barun De and Prof. Sunil Munsri visited the University during the session 2002-2003 and delivered lectures. The University has been benefited with such interactions.

Surging Ahead

The University of North Bengal has been able to fulfil its commitment to publish the examination results in due time. The academic time-schedules in the University could be restored with the early publication of results, particularly of the undergraduate examinations. The whole process of examinations at U.G. level has been computerized. This remarkable achievement has become possible with supports from all concerned, teachers, officers and employees of the University and affiliated colleges, particularly through active participation by the officers and employees of the Examination Branch.

The University could effectively utilize in full the allocation of Rs.2.60 crore, sanctioned by the University Grants Commission for the purchase of books & equipment, construction, campus development and other activities during the 9th Plan period. The Visiting Team of U.G.C. appreciated our effort not only in the utilization of grant, but also for generation of resources from own sources for progress and development.

We gratefully acknowledge the receipt of additional maintenance grant of Rs.1.05 crore than the previous year under Non-Salary Account from the Government of West Bengal, which will help in mitigating our hardships for the maintenance of campus.

The University of North Bengal has been able to prepare the Annual Accounts (including the Balance Sheet) up to-date (i.e.2000-01). The Balance Sheet has been drawn on cash basis, calculated since the inception of the University, i.e.1962. This has been possible with untiring effort of the officers and employees of the Finance Branch.

Epilogue

On behalf of the Court of University of North Bengal I express my deep gratitude and thanks to our Hon'ble Chancellor Sri Viren J. Shah for his keen interest and active support for all sphere of activities in the University. I convey my heartfelt thanks to Prof. Pabitra Sarkar, Vice-chairman, West Bengal State Council for Higher Education and appreciate his generous help extended to our University. We have been privileged by his presence in delivering the inspiring address as Chief Guest at the 35th Annual Convocation.

On behalf of the Court of North Bengal University I propose vote of thanks to all present at the 35th Annual Convocation and also seek their support in future.