

VIDYASAGAR UNIVERSITY



SECOND CONVOCATION

ADDRESS
BY
PROFESSOR AMIYA KUMAR DEV
VICE-CHANCELLOR

4 APRIL 1997
MIDNAPORE 721102
WEST BENGAL

Honourable Chancellor, respected Chief Guest, former Vice-Chancellors, members of the Court, members of the Executive Council, members of the Finance Committee, members of the Faculty Councils for Postgraduate Studies, members of the Council for Undergraduate Studies, guests, members of the press and representatives of the media, colleagues—teaching, non-teaching and administrative, graduates convoked and assembled for conferment of degrees, students, research scholars, ladies and gentlemen—

May I accord you a most hearty welcome to this second Convocation of ours on this fourth day of the month of April in the year nineteen hundred and ninety-seven of the Christian era and the twenty-first day of the month of Chaitra in the year fourteen hundred and three of the Bengali calendar. Our first convocation was held two years ago on 9 January 1995 in which we conferred degrees since inception to 1993 except for Ph.D. where we were updated. We are going to follow the same format at this as well: Ph.D. till date, the other degrees of 1994 and 1995. There is still a little arrear. We hope to clear it at the next convocation.

Between the first convocation and this we have made some progress. Two new colleges have been

given affiliation thus raising the roll to thirty-five: Hijli College and Haldia Institute of Technology. The former began in 1995-96 with an avowed emphasis on vocational education, the latter in 1996-97, our first engineering college offering the four-year B.Tech. course in Chemical Engineering, Computer Science and Engineering and Instrumentation Engineering. The All India Council for Technical Education has also approved it for Mechanical Engineering which it may add later. Besides college roll there has been an addition in the subject roll. Quite a few colleges have been given permission to introduce new subjects, in both Honours and Pass, and also three-year vocational courses in such fields as Seed Technology, Sericulture, Communicative English, Tax Procedure and Practice, Industrial Fish and Fishery, Office Management and Secretarial Practice. At the same time two colleges have been the first in the state to offer the newly instituted elective subject in Physical Education, Midnapore and Garhbeta. We have already introduced Physical Education as a one-year professional course on the bachelor level at one college—Seva Bharati Mahavidyalaya. Our interest in vocationalisation and application orientedness of education has also led us to giving affiliation to a course in Master of Social Work at the

Vidyasagar School of Social Work run by the Jayprakash Institute of Social Change.

All this is, of course, not to the detriment of our regular undergraduate programme. The State has sanctioned more regular subjects to our colleges, both Honours and non-Honours, and we have given the necessary teaching permission. And commensurate with such expansion, and consequent to a long-standing necessity felt in the concerned quarters, we introduced last year a postgraduate programme in 'Geography and Environment Management' on an active support from the State increasing our postgraduate offering to sixteen, eight in the Arts and Commerce Faculty, eight in the Science. We have already admitted the second batch of students to this new discipline giving priority to our Geography Honours students some of whom had been waiting to do their master's with us.

In course of the past two academic years and through a concerted effort we have been able to advance our academic calendar to a near regular. Our master's enrolment last year was done within July by processing our Part II, that is, final, Honours results within two months. This was possible because we had the scripts centrally evaluated instead of sending them out to the evaluators. We are indeed happy to have set an

example for the other affiliating universities in the state. Anyway, our new postgraduate class had the lectures commenced in 1996-97 on 1 August. We plan to maintain this, if not advance it a little further. And the system of central evaluation this year is going to include Part I Honours and B.Ed. as well. Simultaneously the master's programme too, through a rationalisation of evaluation from a straight double to a single double, is being brought under a regular calendar. That is, we are not only going to begin on time but also finish on time so that our master degree holders do not lose a year and fare better on the national scene. I would record here that the State Council of Higher Education is in the process of recommending a rationalised and uniform calendar for all state universities.

As regards the introduction of a three-year first degree for all first degree students, thus abolishing our present two-year Pass course which has been recently recommended by the University Grants Commission, we are going to go by the model or models that the State Higher Education Council may propose. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Council for rethinking higher education to a degree in part with a simultaneous emphasis on expansion and quality. The recent

recommendations on the strengthening of select colleges in different parts of the state and on creating facilities in a few colleges for postgraduate teaching thus lessening the burden on the university departments are welcome.

That we have not only been engaged in teaching and in teaching related programmes but are also doing research these two years can be seen from (a) our publications, individual as well as departmental in the form of journals, (b) our increased participation in seminars and conferences, mostly national but limited overseas as well, (c) our own holding of seminars and conferences, both ourselves and in collaboration, and finally from (d) our minor research projects, on funding from the UGC Unassigned Grant as well as other agencies. It is in this connection that two endowment lectures should be mentioned, (1) the Vidyasagar Memorial Lecture instituted by the University on the occasion of Vidyasagar's death centenary the first of which was delivered this December by Professor Sumit Sarkar of Delhi University, and (2) the Quit India Movement Commemorative Lecture instituted at the golden jubilee of the Quit India Movement the second and the third of which have been delivered these two years by Professors Benoy Bhushan

Chaudhuri and Buddhadeva Bhattacharyya of Calcutta University. Apart from these annual lectures we have had a number of other lectures by various experts and personalities coming from various parts of the country, even overseas, including the Jnanpith winner U.R. Anantha Murthy, President of the Sahitya Akademi and Dr. Asok Mitra the eminent economist and member of the Rajya Sabha. Speaking of collaborative seminars and conferences, we held in 1996 the annual conference of the Bangla Vidya Sammilani and that of the Indian Anthropological Society, and this year the eighth congress of the Physiological Society, an interdisciplinary seminar on 'Participatory Eco Development: Problems and Prospects', with the IIT Kharagpur based NGO IBRAD and a second interdisciplinary event, a workshop, with the ICSSR supported Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi on 'Planning Social Development: A Rural Focus', and finally, a seminar on the Emerging Issues in Accounting and Finance, with the Indian Accounting Association, Calcutta Branch.

In pursuit of the third dimension of university education, we have set up an Extension Centre in which self-financing certificate and diploma courses are going to be given from the coming academic session in such fields as Computer

Application, Laboratory Technology and Seed Technology to begin with. The courses are being designed in such a way as to impart full application oriented training to those who offer them in search of a career or for the sake of career improvement. This is only the initiation; we plan to fare further, in answer to the developmental and career needs of the region.

We are well placed in outreach activities. Our NSS (National Service Scheme), in both colleges and on the university campus, is perhaps one of the most organised units in the state. Not only has there been a regular programme on the bill including road laying, gardening and tree planting, but special assemblies have also been organised from time to time and at various places to address such social menaces as AIDS and impending social agenda as environment. Besides, one of our colleges, Sabang Sajani Kanta Mahavidyalaya, was chosen this year for the National Integration Camp. That is not all. We have also been cooperating with the State's literacy mission. The district's external evaluation has been more than once been supervised by the Vidyasagar Centre for Social Sciences which comprises a good many members of our staff. And our students have always come forward to go out to the villages to conduct the evaluation.

Last year we shared the responsibility, this year it was solely ours. Indeed our students' dedication is exemplary. And they are doing this without sacrificing their studies. Most of them come from a rural background. Yet their success in NET, GATE and SLET proves them fully worthy and brings us credit. They are also bringing us credit in sports and cultural activities. This year in the Inter-University Tournament our football team went up to the national level and came out fourth. And in the East Zone Inter-Varsity Youth Festival at Kalyani University this year our quiz team came out first. I take this opportunity to congratulate my students for all their attainments.

At our first Convocation we announced our newly established Directorate of Correspondences Courses offering master's in four Arts subjects and Commerce. In these two years that Directorate has made progress. It has been enlisted by the UGC and on an initial grant from there switched over to a regular Directorate of Distance Education as per norms laid down by the Distance Education Council of India. This year the Directorate has announced a *Bridge Course in subjects in which master's is offered*, in keeping with the recent UGC circular on *the duration of the first degree and the requirements for the master's admission*. It is also

planning a master's programme in the sciences. The Directorate has earned us credit by processing its examination evaluation centrally and very fast and given us confidence that it is possible to do things if we seriously mean them.

Speaking now of the infrastructure, I must record the development that has been possible in these two years. The State has successively sanctioned us some posts, teaching, non-teaching as well as administrative. Our sanctioned strength now is: teaching = 85, non-teaching = 105, administrative = 19. Of this 73 + 84 + 13 are in position; the rest are in the process of being filled up. The State has also maintained a steady fund flow for the completion of our current phase of construction. And I am glad to report that over these two years the Postgraduate Girls' Hostel (our first on-campus hostel) and the Library have been finished and commissioned. By finished I do not mean finished in terms of the original plan, for the plan in both cases had to be revised. What we have of the Library now is roughly the half of the Library to be. As to the Girls' Hostel only the ground floor and a part of the first floor of the three-storied hostel have been built accommodating in a rationalised way 50 girls. Professor Satyasadhan Chakraborty, Higher Education Minister,

Government of West Bengal was kind enough to inaugurate it and Sri Indrajit Gupta, Home Minister, Government of India to inaugurate the Library Building in a ceremony in which Professor Chakraborty was the Chief Guest. The work on the other three incomplete sites of this phase — the Boys', the Teachers' and the Non-Teaching Staff Hostels— is going to be resumed now after an unavoidable interval of over a year and we look forward to their completion before very long. I would record our sense of gratitude to the State, the Higher Education, the Finance and the Public Works Departments in particular. Such generosity is a proof of the value attached to higher education. A university named after one of Bengal's pioneers of education would else have drooped.

The University Grants Commission was not unkind to us in the VIIIth Plan though little capital grant was given. These two years we have spent whatever we got for books and journals as well as for equipment and we are now ready for the left-over special grant that the Commission had been kind to give us under these two heads. The health equipment grant on a 75:25 share is half spent, the plan for the rest having been submitted. I may say in passing that spending out a grant is not necessarily easy, for there are constraints, no

less on the grant givers than on the takers. Anyway, our meagre building grant from the VIIIth Plan has been spent. The allocation for the Commission sanctioned staff which the State had been so kind to readily concur with has been for the most part spent. Since this is on an actuals basis and the Commission has kindly extended the five-year period to 31.3.99 we have no problem. I would record our gratitude to the Commission for readily sanctioning a Women's Hostel, outside Plan allocations, on a 60:40 share the work on which is under way and we hope to provide rationalised accommodation to another 40 girls or so. But sanction on two other schemes, on a Gandhian Study Centre and on computer strengthening for departments offering computer on their syllabus, are awaited. The Visiting Team for the VIIIth Plan assessment was here a few days ago to whom we have submitted our IXth Plan projections. We expect a generous IXth Plan grant from the Commission along with a substantial allocation for construction, for ours is still a largely incomplete campus devoid of such indispensable facilities as a guest house, an auditorium, a sports complex and a students' amenities centre.

I am glad to report that two of our faculty-submitted projects have been accepted by

the All India Council for Technical Education, Dr B.R. Pati's from Botany and Forestry and Dr P.C. Dhara's from Human Physiology and Community Health. My congratulations. This is only the beginning of our relationship with the Council. We must go further, for now that we have a Technology Faculty in the offing and a Technology Institute affiliated, we should more and more realise our technology potential, above all the locationally immediate rural technology.

I am also glad to report that in these two years our Library holdings have increased quite substantially. Again we have to go further, much further indeed in this, for the Library is a university's lifeline. The UGC has recently put us on the INFLIBNET roll and given us an initial grant. More grants are needed and more rationalised effort to go computerised and be set on the way to a full electronic library. Education expansion and information technology are commensurate with one another and unless we tie up with some network we will be left behind.

I would not moralise, but we all know that higher education is at the crossroads today. Which direction it is going to take will perhaps depend on how we function today, more on the amount of dedicated work we put in than on the amount of

rhetoric we produce. As for me, I must thank everyone for the development that has been made possible to this young university over the last two years, and by everyone I mean every member of the university community— teachers, students, non-teaching and administrative staff, research scholars, and above all the members of the Court and the Executive Council, the Finance Committee, the Faculty Councils, the Undergraduate Council without whom nothing would have been and nothing should have been. For in a university we live in a democracy. By everyone I also mean the State and its concerned departments and those outsiders who have ever been encouraging us, some by giving book gifts and creating endowments. A university asks for a lot of generosity. I am grateful to Professor A.P. Mitra for accepting our invitation and coming to this relatively remote place in spite of his very very busy schedule. He is one of our country's most eminent atmosphere scientists and one of the most active. To have him here with us today is a singular honour. I look forward to his valuable advice. And I am most grateful to our Chancellor whose time we are stealing from the highest office in the state. But he never says no to small and remote places. I look forward to his words of encouragement to our graduates and degree holders.

Last but not least, may I congratulate the graduates, one and all, those who have come on being convoked and those who could not come. May I also congratulate in absentia those who were not physically convoked here today, obviously for logistical reasons, but whose conferment has just been done in absentia— our Bachelor degree holders of the years 1994 and 1995. Congratulations also to those rank-holders and merit-earners who are going to be awarded medals and prizes today. Congratulations, all of you. And my very best wishes. Let your path be unhindered, sivaste panthanah santu.