It is a tremendous pleasure to be back at the Kalyani Campus of Netaji Subhas Open University. I have excellent memories of my visit last year and am deeply honoured that my name is associated with this Campus on its foundation stones. I am also delighted to see the progress that has been made in the building work since I was last here. I congratulate the Vice-Chancellor and her staff, the Public Works Department of West Bengal, the Department of Forestry and all those men and women who have laboured to make this Green Campus and the Regional Centre a present and attractive reality.

On the way here the Minister of Higher Education spoke to me on the phone and assured me of the commitment of the Government and people of West Bengal to the Netaji Subhas Open University. That commitment is also expressed by the presence with us of the Honourable Pratim Chatterjee, Minister of State for the Fire and Emergency Services. Many facets of the public life of this State come together here in NSOU's Green Campus at Kalyani. I thank all NSOU's stakeholders for their support.

A very important development since I was last here is the reappointment of Professor Surabhi Banerjee as your Vice-Chancellor. Netaji Subhas Open University grew and prospered in size, quality and reputation during her first mandate and the international friends of NSOU are all delighted, as I know you are, by the confirmation of her leadership for another term.

This Kalyani Campus is a lovely place and most appropriate that it should be home to the Green Campus. Last April we inaugurated and celebrated four initiatives and I would like to comment on each of them again as I congratulate you on the new initiatives that we are inaugurating today.

First, I had the privilege of opening this new Kalyani campus of Netaji Subhas Open University. Some people think that because open universities operate at a distance they somehow exist in the air. But it takes people and systems to serve a student body that was 50,000 last April, is 75,000 now, and is rising
steadily towards the one lakh of enrolments that will give you the status of a mega-university.

University people, perhaps even more than other people, work most productively in attractive surroundings. Some of the world's open universities have created particularly attractive campuses and NSOU will now join their number. I am especially pleased to note that this campus will house activities covering the whole gamut of NSOU's work, including research and vocational education.

Second, the campus now houses a new regional centre of NSOU. In teaching their students open universities essentially do two things. On the one hand they provide study materials for the students so that they can learn independently. On the other hand they provide opportunities for interaction between students and between students and staff. The aim of this interaction is to mediate between the study materials and the students so that learning is both easier and more profound.

Producing and providing learning materials of quality is not easy - but it is much easier than providing students with the interactive support they need. This regional centre, which will be linked to a large number of study centres, is a powerful symbol of NSOU's commitment to providing quality education by supporting students strongly.

Today we inaugurate a new Computer Centre. This is a very significant symbol of the development of NSOU. Good service to students boils down to two things: the human commitment to give strong support to students, and the technological framework to give to each individual member of a large student body training and education suited to life in the contemporary world.

At NSOU the commitment to student service is palpable. The visitor can see it immediately in the Vice-Chancellor and every member of staff. But if you have 75,000 students commitment is no good without tools the tools to provide it. A big Open University depends critically on its data-processing systems, which is why I felicitate warmly all those associated with both academic and administrative computing at NSOU.

The third aspect of Kalyani that we inaugurated last year was the Green Campus of NSOU. When I was at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, UNESCO, we laid the groundwork for the United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development that began last year and will run until 2014. Its purpose is to help governments around the world to ensure that in educating their people they are putting down the foundations for a sustainable future. The Green Campus is a symbol of NSOU's participation in that task.

In opening the Green Campus last year we planted four saplings of tree species that have each been the subject of a poem by your great writer Rabindranath Tagore. It is good to see them growing into sturdy trees! Maybe they will benefit from another of the new initiatives that we inaugurate today, the Model Vermi-composting Unit. Recycling is at the heart of sustainable development and I commend you for showing this example.

The fourth stop on our tour of the campus last year was the Biovillage, which I had the honour of naming.
This gave me particular pleasure because the Commonwealth of Learning believes firmly that the route to a happier and more prosperous future for the world lies through a happier and more prosperous future for the world's villages - not just the 600 lakhs of villages in India, but the millions of villages throughout the developing world. With this purpose in mind we are working with the M.S. Swaminathan Foundation in Chennai on our programme called Lifelong Learning for Farmers, whose aim is to improve the livelihood of the world's farmers and villagers.

I am delighted to note that NSOU is also working with the Swaminathan Foundation, whose Biovillage at Pondicherry is the inspiration for the Biovillage here. Thus both NSOU and COL are taking forward the wonderfully creative ideas of Dr Swaminathan and his colleagues.

You did me great honour by associating my name with this campus last year and I am deeply touched that you have chosen to name the new Centre for (Herbal) Medicinal Plants for me as well. I have always been particularly fascinated by the role of plants in medicine. I did my first degree at Oxford University and whenever I visited the famous Botanical Garden there I used to spend time in the Herb Garden, just as I did when visiting the garden of medieval medicinal herbs at the Kew Gardens in London. I always wonder how our ancestors first discovered the particular medicinal applications of each of the hundreds of plants growing in their environment. It is a tribute to the inherent scientific capacity of the human mind.

As you know, there is a new interest in the role of plants in healing and I hope that this Centre for (Herbal) Medicinal Plants will help to keep alive the strong Indian tradition for the use of plants for curative purposes. Thank you again for naming it for me.

Those are my comments on the Green Campus of Netaji Subhas Open University and the new initiatives that we have inaugurated today. I offer my fulsome congratulations to the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Surabhi Banerjee, for the tremendous dynamism that she has shown in developing this University, as evidenced by what we see around us. I also extend my congratulations to all the staff and students of the University who have followed her lead with such enthusiasm.

Originally I had entitled these remarks Sustainable Development and the Open and Distance Learning System. But today that seems rather a long and pompous title. I prefer a shorter one. Let me simply say that what I have seen today represents the Greening of Open Learning and I am delighted to be associated with it.

Finally, I wish NSOU a great future on this campus and I urge the people of Kalyani to support with enthusiasm this new enterprise that is becoming a significant economic driver for the community. It is an honour and a pleasure to be with you today and to bring you the good wishes of the Commonwealth of Learning, which is so proud of its links with NSOU.