

Open University as/and Ecosystem



*Open University as/and Ecosystem, NETAJI SUBHAS
OPEN UNIVERSITY, Opening of the Kalyani Campus,
Regional Centre, Green Campus and Biovillage, 15
April 2005*

*Remarks by: Sir John Daniel, President & CEO
Commonwealth of Learning*

Transcript

Honourable Minister of Public Works of West Bengal, Shri Amar Chowdhury

Honourable Vice-Chancellor, Professor Surabhi Banerjee;
Members of the University Staff;

People of Kalyani;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I have had great pleasure taking part in this most enjoyable ceremony, which comes a day after I became a member of the Netaji Subhas Open University community through the award of an honorary degree, and two days after I tried to explain the global significance of the work of NSOU in my Endowment Lecture. This new Kalyani Campus is a lovely place and I am honoured that my name will remain associated with it on the foundation stones that we have just unveiled.

May I begin by congratulating the Minister of Public Works of West Bengal for undertaking the construction of the buildings that will spring up here? My thanks go also to the Government of West Bengal for its financial contribution to NSOU and to this project.

We have inaugurated and celebrated four initiatives this morning and I shall comment briefly on each of them.

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 of 50,000 that is rising steadily towards one lakh of enrolments. The university staff 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 Minister has inaugurated a 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.

Third, the Vice-Chancellor opened the Green Campus of NSOU. A year ago, 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 this 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 we planted four saplings and I noted with particular pleasure that each of the species had been the subject of a poem by your great writer Rabindranath Tagore. I hope that someone will soon water them more thoroughly than we were able to do a few moments ago so that they can all grow into sturdy trees!

Fourth, I had the honour of naming the Biovillage. 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 we have inaugurated today. Thus both NSOU and COL are taking forward the wonderfully creative ideas of Dr Swaminathan and his colleagues.

Those are my brief comments on the four new elements of Netaji Subhas Open University 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 wish the Minister and the Public Works Department success with the construction programme and I noted his promise to complete the first phase by the end of October. He may like to note that in distance learning deadlines are particularly important, whether they be deadlines for the production of learning materials by staff or deadlines for the submission of assignments by students. I respectfully ask him to remember that meeting deadlines is vital in the life of open universities.

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 will soon become a very significant economic driver for the community. It has been an honour and a pleasure to be with you today.