

आचार्य
श्री नरेंद्र मोदी

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SHRI NARENDRA MODI

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प्रो. विद्युत चक्रवर्ती

UPACHARYA (VICE-CHANCELLOR)
PROF. BIDYUT CHAKRABARTY

विश्वभारती VISVA-BHARATI

(Established by the Parliament of India under
Visva-Bharati Act XXIX of 1951
Vide Notification No. : 40-5/50 G.3 Dt. 14 May, 1951)

संस्थापक
रबीन्द्रनाथ ठाकुर

FOUNDED BY
RABINDRANATH TAGORE



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The Second Missive

**To my colleagues, students, and other stakeholders surviving on and thriving
because of Visva Bharati:**

26 June, 2020

This Missive and the last one are neither an attempt at being “defensive”, nor an effort to shake off the administrative responsibilities bestowed upon me as Visva Bharati’s Vice Chancellor. The aim is not to apportion blame, but to generate a sense of belongingness *vis-a-vis* the university which is a source of our sustenance and growth. My Missives also contain a call for introspection: we need to question whether our love for Visva Bharati’s legacy translates to real-life acts of service to honour the great legacy that Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore established.

- 1) It is beyond doubt that there are many issues that can easily be tackled by being together for the benefit of this glorious academic institution which immediately links all its stakeholders with the great legacy that this endeavour of Gurudev Tagore carried.
- 2) We have problem areas which cannot be addressed instantaneously, because that would require support of various kinds (including pecuniary assistance) from outside agencies (MHRD, UGC, among others).
- 3) As everybody knows, Visva Bharati is not a conventional university: it is essentially an ideology, comprising both a unique pedagogical method and a vast repository of cultural teachings that draws from the glory of global civilizations. Visva Bharati’s unconventionality manifests itself in the regular prayers held in *Upasana Mandir*, *Baitalik* on special events, *Magh Utsab*, *Hala Karshan* (beginning of cultivation season), *Briksha Ropon* (tree plantation drives), *Poush Utsab*, *Basanta Utsab*, celebration of 25th Baisakh (being the birthday of the founder), organizing an event on 22nd Sravan, among others; these signature events are powerful statements of the university’s uniqueness. Now, let me pose a very fair question. In a university with approximately 15,000 members (students, teachers, non-teaching staff, among others), how many of us participate in these events? An honest and casual survey will reveal the unfortunate truth.
- 4) Various stakeholders, especially our students, have asked for facilities that other universities enjoy, such as consistent Wi-Fi. In order to create a Corpus Fund we in

the administration requested our colleagues (faculty members and non-teaching staff) to contribute 10% of our salary. Some of us were even willing to give a full month's salary for this purpose. This request for donating a miniscule portion of our monthly salary was placed in various forums, and turned down in one voice. When the 7th CPC arrear was released, the administration made a similar request to those who received the arrears, and this was rejected as well. The decision of not parting with one's "hard-earned and legitimate" income was made on grounds that prevailed over the concern of the earners for the university's upkeep and the wellbeing of its students and others who needed help. All this has ensured that the university is left with a single source of income: the MHRD. It is a known fact that government support is routinely slashed, and so the university is increasingly burdened with the responsibility of raising funds for its own upkeep. Even in such gloomy circumstances, the MHRD sanctioned funds to install Wi-Fi on campus, the duration of which is unfortunately restricted due to the insufficiency of funds. To keep it functional 24/7, thereby taking care of this long-standing demand of the students and other stakeholders, we need to come together to raise more money. Our experience confirms that this can easily be done. We had begun providing relief to the COVID 19 victims on 10 April, 2020; it is being given twice a week; at least 400 families receive relief every week. It is a matter of great satisfaction that the relief operation continues uninterrupted. Moreover, we have been managing this on the basis of voluntary contributions by individuals who are part of Visva Bharati and who care about the institution. Recently, we also set up a fundraiser for the family of an illustrious son of Birbhum: the late Rajesh Orang, who sacrificed his life at the northern border. The fundraiser became a source of inspiration, thanks to the near-unanimous willingness of our staff to donate. I cite these examples merely to illustrate that if there is a will, there is a way.

- 5) Our Alumni Association remains a largely unimpactful body, unlike how it is in other universities, both in India and abroad. A casual survey of the fund situation in those universities where the alumni associations are active and effective shows that income from interests drawn on various deposits, especially the Alumni Fund, are an important source of funding for most of the welfare activities that these universities undertake. We have begun the process of revamping our Alumni Association: I am asking for your aid in making it a wellspring of all kinds of support, including financial support, for Visva Bharati's student-related welfare ventures.

6) Our Achievements: -

By getting the full arrear of the 7th CPC, Visva Bharati is one of those rare universities which has benefitted from the support of the MHRD and UGC.

We recently embarked on a mission to uproot Parthenium plants growing on campus. This was urgently necessary since the wild growth of parthenium is a health hazard. The monthly cleaning of the campus is also one of those events which brings many of us together for a cause.

We have diversified the pool of candidates for the position of the *Acharya* in the weekly Mandir. In doing so, Visva Bharati has followed in Gurudev's footsteps to make sure that the campus is free of hierarchies and prejudices along social, economic and cultural axes.

The regularly held **Visva Bharati Lecture Series** (19 lectures held so far) have allowed us to engage with the ideas of experts in various fields.

The 2019 *Poush Utsab* was closed within four days to honour the direction of the Hon'ble National Green Tribunal.

By not going ahead with the 2020 *Basanta Utsab*, the Executive Council of Visva Bharati helped build circumstances which were propitious to the containment of COVID 19, ultimately overturning extensive preparations that had been made for an *Utsab* that was to be organized jointly by the university and the Government of West Bengal.

Our 2019 Convocation was graced by the Hon'ble President of India, the visitor of the university, in the role of Chief Guest.

With the re-inauguration of the renovated *Shyamali* by the Hon'ble Vice President of India in 2019, Visva Bharti retained an important monument which once served as the residence of not only Gurudev himself, but also of Mahatma Gandhi on his visit to Santiniketan.

Let us note that Visva Bharati's fall in the NIRF ranking is apparently also due to "the outsider's image of Visva Bharati". Our terribly low marks (even less than some of the universities which are far below Visva Bharati in the overall ranking) are a matter of concern. As I mentioned in my earlier Missive, this needs to be handled collectively; otherwise, the decline cannot be stopped. We have reason to be hopeful that we will, as a team, surely address the lacunae, since Visva Bharti seems to have done fairly well in other criteria. The areas bringing our score down can easily be dealt with once we have the right kind of mindset. A couple of these areas are as follows: -

- a) Till 2019, there were 47 Audit Objections on various kinds of deviations and delinquent practices. With the intervention of the administration, the audit objections have been reduced to only 31, and we hope to reduce it to 28 by March 2021.
- b) The charge against Visva Bharati of being 'a commuting university' will evaporate if we begin showing our professional commitment to this university that allows us to survive and thrive.

I reiterate that my Missive's aim is not to score brownie points, but to bring to the public domain issues that need immediate attention, lest Visva Bharati fall further in the NIRF ranking. Unless we proceed on a war footing with our efforts, our NAAC ranking (B+), which might have contributed to the University's outside perception, cannot rise. As I mentioned in my first Missive, the Visva Bharati administration does not have at its disposal Aladdin's magic lamp which can instantly repair the damage. However, I have faith that those who have concern for Visva Bharati will undauntedly stand by Gurudev's most magnificent project, and will readily work towards its wellbeing.

As always, I urge all of you to stay safe by keeping physical distance while being socially connected.

Keep the faith,

Bidyut Chakrabarty
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26/06



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