

Second Six Monthly Report on Sikkim University (15th May to 14th October 2013)

During the second six months of my tenure the following important developments took place in the life of Sikkim University.

1. Laying of the Foundation Stone

On 16th April 2013, the Hon'ble President of India, Sri Pranab Mukherjee laid the foundation stone of Sikkim University in the presence of the former Governor of Sikkim, His Excellency Sri Balmiki Prasad Singh and Hon'ble Chief Minister of Sikkim, Sri Pawan Chamling, amid prayers and incantations by Hindu priests as well as Buddhist monks.

2. Application for NAAC accreditation

The University applied online for NAAC accreditation on 24th of May 2013 and is awaiting the response of the accrediting body.

3. Approval of the Bar Council of India

On 14th August 2013 the University received the approval of the Bar Council of India for its undergraduate law course. This was a major achievement of the University, as the approval of the BCI was pending since the integrated BA-LLB-LLM course started in 2008 and the final year students had become restless over uncertainty of their future.

4. Quantum jump in enrolment in July 2013

The 12th Academic Council and 16th Executive Council meetings held on 9th and 17th March 2013 respectively approved the recommendations of the University Review Committee, which included change of admission policy. This was one of many reforms that the Committee undertook in response to a letter dated 17th October 2012 from the Jt. Secretary of the UGC Dr. K. P. Singh. According to the old admission policy of the University, admission notice was published in some leading newspapers of India and five SAARC countries (Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka). Admission tests were held in 32 cities of India and the capitals of the five SAARC countries. While this was an expensive exercise (a little more than 0.5 crore per annum) less than 200 students actually took admission in each academic year and even during 2012-13 only 34% of the total intake capacity was filled up with the cut-off marks coming down to as low as 40% in some departments.

Under the new admission policy, advertisements for admission were published in three leading English and one Hindi national dailies and some local/regional newspapers. Seats were allotted as per the Government of India norms of reservation and on the basis of marks obtained by the candidates in their qualifying degrees. Counseling of students in and around Sikkim was also done by groups of University teachers, which must have contributed to improving the intake figures dramatically. The total number of students who were finally admitted in July 2013 was about 750, which is about four-fold increase in intake with 100% occupancy in 27 out of 29 departments and with more than 62% as cut-off marks in some departments, which is partly due to addition of 10 new departments started during 2013-14 out of the XI Plan allocation of teaching posts. Further, unlike in previous years, the

University could admit only 30 to 50 percent of the applicants in many departments and the only two departments that could not achieve full occupancy, despite encouraging number of applicants, are Anthropology and Hindi, both of which had started this year.

5. Revision/Drafting of the syllabus

While increasing access to the University education is an important goal of the UGC/MHRD the other important goal equally emphasized by the UGC/MHRD is improvement in quality of higher education. Hence, Sikkim University undertook with all seriousness both drafting of syllabi for the 10 new departments and revision of the syllabi for 19 old departments in a big way since the passage of the University Review Committee recommendations by the University Authorities in March 2013. The new/revised syllabi of Master's and MPhil/PhD coursework of some departments were placed before the Academic Council of 9th March 2013 and the remaining syllabi are listed for the Academic Council meeting of 13th November 2013.

Except in a few cases where the syllabi were adapted from established universities like Hyderabad University and North-Eastern Hill University, syllabi revision/drafting committees were duly constituted with at least one external member in each committee. In some cases, the syllabi drafted/revised by the full-time and guest faculty members were sent to three external experts for their comments and suggestions. All this was financially draining but academically a rewarding experience.

6. Students' feedback on teachers

Another important step towards improvement of quality of education taken by Sikkim University is students' feedback on their teachers. Almost all students responded by filling up the questionnaire. Their feedback will be communicated to their teachers in the coming weeks.

7. Presentation on the University before the Chief Rector

On 4th October 2013, the Vice-Chancellor made a presentation on Sikkim University before the Chief Rector Hon'ble Governor of Sikkim Sri Shrinivas Patil for three hours. During the session the Hon'ble Governor gave several valuable suggestions for campus development and employment of the students of the University. He also offered all possible help to the University for its development.

8. Signing of MoUs for academic collaboration

The following MoUs were signed during the last six months:

- i. MoU with the 14th Finance Commission of the Government of India for undertaking a project on the state of finance in Sikkim.
- ii. MoU with MVIV, Bangalore for research collaboration in the field of botanical and medicinal studies in particular.
- iii. MoU with IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), New Delhi for research on "Value of Ecosystem Services provided by the Tista River System in Upper and Lower Riparian Regions of India and Bangladesh".

9. University Level Academic Activities/Achievements

While several national and international seminars were organized by individual departments during the past six months, the University also organized the following academic activities:

1. The First Sikkim University Special Lecture was delivered by Prof. M. P. Singh, Chairman of Delhi Judicial Academy and a highly respected legal luminary on 18th May 2013. The title of his lecture was “Constitutional Vision of a Just Society”. The venue was the conference hall of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Deorali, near Gangtok and the lecture session was chaired by Sri K. T. Gyaltsen, Speaker, Sikkim Legislative Assembly.
2. The University also organized the national convention on “Future of Legal Education in India” on 10-11 June 2013 in which legal luminaries like Justice (Mrs) Ruma Pal (Chancellor of Sikkim University), Justice S. P. Wangdi (Judge of Sikkim High Court) Justice A. P. Subba (Judge of Gauhati and Sikkim high courts), Prof. B. S. Chimni of Jawaharlal Nehru University, Prof. N. R. Madhava Menon (Founder of National Law School movement), Prof. C. Raj Kumar (VC of Jindal Global University), Dr. S. Gurpur (Director of Symbiosis Law School) etc. were present, who jointly decided to resolve and release “The Gangtok Declaration on Future of Legal Education in India”. The recommendations made therein are receiving the attention of the ministries of Law and HRD.
3. The Sixth Foundation Day Lecture was delivered on 2nd July 2013 by Prof. A. C. Sinha, National Fellow of the Indian Council of Social Science Research at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. The title of his lecture was “Social Formation in and around Sikkim in the middle of twentieth century” and the venue was Saramsa Garden Auditorium. Sri N. K. Pradhan, Hon’ble Minister of Human Resource Development, Government of Sikkim was the chief guest and Sri C.D. Rai was the guest of honour. On this occasion Prof. Sinha was also felicitated for donating his life-time collection of books on Sikkim and other parts of Northeast India to the Sikkim University Central Library.
4. Sikkim University was awarded membership of the prestigious IUCN Academy of Environmental Law, Ontario, Canada.

10. Campus Development

The progress in this regard has been mixed despite active cooperation received from the government of Sikkim.

- i. The mutation of 265.94 acres of land handed over by the state government on 25th January 2013 is completed but handing over of the remaining 34.06 acres to Sikkim University has not yet taken place. The acquisition of the land and its transfer to Sikkim University is expected to take place within 2013.
- ii. The villagers have agreed to relocate their church, temple and monastery and are vacating their houses on campus land. It is expected that most of them, including 7 families belonging to the opposition political party Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, will vacate the campus land by the end of November 2013.
- iii. The process of vacation and resettlement has been slow but peaceful and there has been no need for use of force so far. The strategy of counseling and persuasion has finally begun to work.

- iv. The construction of the 18 km stretch of the connecting road to the campus is progressing rapidly.
- v. The electrical supply up to the campus is also making rapid progress.
- vi. Surveys for water supply up to the campus are complete and the state government is exploring various sources for funding the project.
- vii. The University and the state government are going to sign the MoU for boundary wall construction any day in November, as the Building Committee in its meeting held on 31.10.2013 approved the revision in one of the clauses of the agreement sought by the state government. Once the MoU is signed the construction of the boundary wall will be completed within 14 months, as committed by the concerned department of the state government.
- viii. The University received very encouraging response from Indian architectural firms to its advertisement for Expression of Interest. The last date for submission and opening of tenders was 31.10.2013 The Building Committed has constituted an expert committee of three members to short-list the firms after which they will be asked to present their designs for the campus and its buildings.

11. Recruitment of teaching and non-teaching staff

This is one area in which the progress has not been satisfactory, as a large number of both teaching and non-teaching posts continue to remain vacant.

As regards non-teaching posts, some of the key posts like the Registrar, Finance Officer, Librarian and Controller of Examinations continue to be manned by contract or retired persons either on account of want of sufficiently good candidates applying or not joining after being selected and appointed. For the lower posts, however, the University is slowly filling up all the vacant posts of XI Plan.

The University has 132 vacant teaching posts, all of which have been advertised and screening of applicants has also been completed. However, the University has not been able to proceed further with the recruitment process because it is yet to receive the Visitor's nominees from the MHRD, Government of India for its selection committees.

The University is managing its classes with the help of guest and contract faculty members from different parts of India, including one from Oxford University. The University has also mobilized its own faculty members as adjunct faculty for teaching integrated courses in other departments.

12. Administrative achievements

With the initiative of an experienced and efficient Officer on Special Duty in charge of the post of Registrar the following could be achieved in the field of administration during the past six months:

- i. Appointment of Heads and In-Charges of departments and Deans of two ad-hoc Schools. Prior to this the departments were run by Coordinators and there were no Deans appointed for the 17 Schools of the University.
- ii. Constitution and notification of the Affiliation Committee, Boards of Studies and School Boards.

- iii. The proposed constitution of the College Development Council and the University Court is now pending with the MHRD, Government of India.
- iv. The First Ordinances of the University duly approved by the Academic Council and Executive Council in March 2013 are also pending the approval of the MHRD and assent of the Visitor.
- v. Confirmation of the services of 69 teachers who were on contract basis for various durations during the past five years or so.
- vi. Preparation of service books for all the confirmed teachers and non-teaching staff was completed.
- vii. Implementation of the CPWD fair rent assessment uniformly in the terms of contract with 22 building owners whose houses were hired by the University on rent.
- viii. Starting two more hostels, one for girls and one for boys from August 2013. All the hostels, including the two new ones, are full to their capacity.
- ix. Quality infrastructure for two new hostels and 10 new departments in record time.
- x. Sent several non-teaching staff for workshops and trainings in various parts of India. Also facilitated many teachers for Orientation and Refresher courses in various universities in India. Some of them even went abroad with the University funding for presenting papers in conferences.
- xi. Drafted Recruitment Rules for all non-teaching posts on the basis of the handbook prepared by Govt. of India, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances, Pension and Training.
- xii. Overall streamlining of the University administration.

13. Conclusion

On the whole, the University does not seem to be doing bad, but a lot more could perhaps be achieved if the University had received the Visitor's nominees in time and if the villagers of Yangang had completely vacated the lands they had sold to the state government.

The University seeks to focus its energy during the next six months on (1) the planning and designing of campus, (2) appointment to remaining teaching and non-teaching posts, and (3) revision of the UG syllabi and norms of evaluation in order to revamp undergraduate education in the state. It is also expected that there will be a fair degree of progress regarding boundary wall, road connectivity, electricity and water supply to the campus.

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