

'Calcutta University is in the frontline of higher education'

Identified as a university with potential for excellence, this institution is considered one of the world's top academic hubs

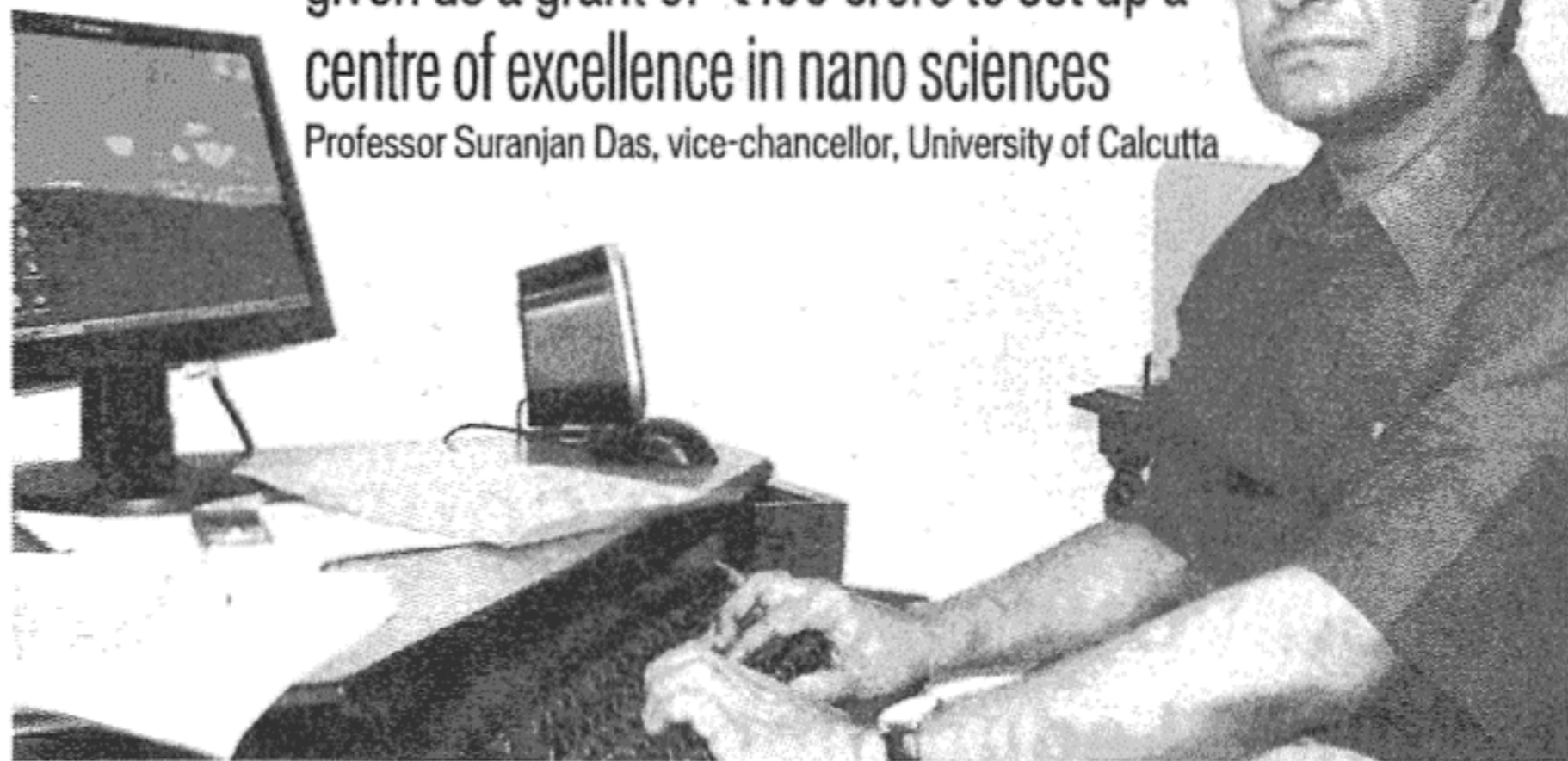
Kolkata was once the leading centre of learning in the country. But that's not the case now. What are the reasons for the decline?

I don't believe in that. I think CU was in the frontline of higher education earlier. It continues to be so and will remain so in the future. Here's why:

- The UGC has identified nine universities in the country as universities with potential for excellence and CU is one of them.
- CU has the largest numbers of departments having DRS, DSA and CAS status.
- According to a India Today Nielsen survey (May 31, 2010 issue) CU has been ranked number one among state universities and number three among Central and state universities taken together.
- I refer to the journal Current Science, Vol 97, September 2009, which shows the number of NET-qualified during 2002-2006. CU ranks very high as one of the top 20 universities.
- Scopus, (a bibliographic database containing abstracts and citations for scholarly journal articles) shows, that in terms of the impact factor of publication in science and technology, CU is ranked sixth at the all-India level.
- In a study which analyses the higher education and research scenario in ten states of India during 2000 to 2006, CU is ranked first in terms of published research articles (on an average 664 articles in a year in peer-reviewed national and international journals).
- In 2009, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council has re-accredited CU with Grade A.
- In November 2009 the UN had organised an international conference of VCs and educationists from 90 countries of the world. It was held in the UN headquarters

The government of India has recently given us a grant of ₹100 crore to set up a centre of excellence in nano sciences

Professor Suranjan Das, vice-chancellor, University of Calcutta



in New York. UN, after the conference, identified 10 universities from across the world as academic hubs and CU is the only university from India which has been granted this recognition.

A unique feature of our university is that we have been able to maintain a fine balance between conventional subjects and emerging areas like bio-sciences and applied sciences. The government of India has recently given us a grant of ₹100 crore to set up a centre of excellence in nano sciences. The ministry of external affairs of the government of India has sponsored the establishment of an institute of foreign policy studies in our university, which is the first of its kind in the country.

Where does Kolkata stand vis-à-vis other metros of the country as an educational destination?

Kolkata ranks high as an educational destination. But we need to do more. We need to develop more inter-disciplinary teaching and research. However, we have two problems: a) our size. 300,000 undergraduate students spread over 170 colleges and 12,000 postgraduate

students spread over seven campuses. Therefore, the student teacher ratio is unfavourable. b) We have shortage of space.

In terms of funding from the UGC there is a bias towards the central universities. As a result of this in the 11th Plan period we have received only ₹21 crore from the UGC, whereas central universities like JNU, Delhi University, Aligarh and Jamia have received anywhere between ₹250 crore to ₹300 crore.

Is there anything unique about the education that a student might expect to get in the city?

Kolkata is the culture capital of India. It is true that Kolkata ceases to be as cosmopolitan as say, Delhi or Mumbai, now. But cultural exposure-wise it's unique. Education, I believe, is a holistic thing. It would be incomplete without the cultural exposure.

How has the education scenario changed? Many private players have entered the field. PPP in education is welcome but that should not degenerate into a commercial activity.

As told to Pranab Ghosh