

NCL'S JOURNEY OF SIX DECADE:SUSTAINED EXCELLENCE AND CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL BUILDING

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January 3, 2010, Pune

National Chemical laboratory (NCL), a constituent Laboratory of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, New Delhi was formally declared open on January 3, 2010. We marked 60 years of growth during the year 2009-10, culminating in the Diamond Jubilee of its Foundation on January 3, 2010.

Sixty years is a significant milestone in the history of an institution. NCL has had a lineage of distinguished leaderships who have guided its destiny at various milestones of this journey. With its rich tradition of excellence in scientific research, it has nurtured the best minds of India. It has contributed over the years in myriad ways to the development of the chemical industry in India. It has partnered research with some of the largest chemical companies of the world. The mission and goals of NCL, as stated by its founding fathers, has continued to stay relevant to the needs of India. It has continually transformed and reinvented itself to meet the new challenges at the turn of every decade. We need to adapt to and stay in the present, while also keeping an eye on the future.

It is indeed an honor and privilege for me to be the Head of this Laboratory on this momentous occasion. I also feel humble at this time, because this laboratory is what it is today, due to the sincere and committed contributions of thousands of individuals, young and old, who have made this Laboratory great. We need to acknowledge the contributions of every member of our staff who have worked here since the inception of this laboratory. The success and the glory of this institution is largely a consequence of their toil and hard work. An institution, as old as NCL, is recognized by its tradition and culture. Successive leadership of NCL has encouraged a culture of sustained pursuit of excellence. The Laboratory has to set its eyes even higher now. Its quest and ambition must be bigger than its reach. Only then NCL will come to be recognized as one of the finest institutions in the world.

NCL's sinews are strong. Its genes are rich with many distinguished scientific contributions. NCL must dream big, balance small science leading to individual

excellence with large goals that can touch the lives of the people in our country. If NCL has to stay relevant to India's need, it must align its research to the National agenda.

NCL will continue to sharpen its focus on core science in the disciplines of its interest. This is an essential pre-requisite. Without scientists capable of working in the frontiers of science, no benefits from science can flow to the society. So core science and engineering in chemical and related sciences shall remain as its foundation. I call this level 1.

However, a mere foundation does not make an edifice. On this foundation we must build an inter-disciplinary network of thematic programmes. Themes that are relevant to NCL are advanced and functional materials, hybrid materials, bio-inspired materials, synthetic biology, bio-resource technologies, bio-transformation, bioactive molecules, catalytic processes, scientific computing across multiple length and time scales, etc. These can be termed as level 2. Such interdisciplinary networks, both formal and informal, will lead to focused efforts to address issues such as clean and affordable energy resources, better understanding of diseases, lower cost therapeutics, cleaner water, more efficient and cleaner processing technologies, sustainable building block for materials, converting waste to wealth, etc. This is level 3. Impact on society and public good can be realized only from level 3 efforts. We live today in a utilitarian world. Our stake holders will increasingly expect S&T to create value in society. However for level 3 to be effective in delivery, one must build solid competencies in level 2 and a robust foundation in level 1.

NCL's strategy in recent years is to consciously build research diversity in level 1 and create level 2 competencies. It is believed that with these efforts, NCL will be better prepared to make an impact on the needs of our society.

The curtain raiser of our Diamond Jubilee was marked on January 3, 2009, when our DG CSIR addressed us from this very podium. During the year, NCL has been privileged to welcome many distinguished scientists from India and overseas and large number of students as my colleagues several workshops seminars and conferences. We felt that the best way to celebrate our 60th year was to enable as many professionals as possible to come to NCL, to share ideas and thoughts and form deep bonds of friendship.

Today we celebrate the 60th birth anniversary of NCL. Yet, the curtain has not descended on our DJ year and celebrations. We have reserved the finale to a date, soon, when our Hon'ble PM will come to Pune to mark this historic occasion.

I have been personally assured by the Hon'ble Minister of S&T, Shri Prithviraj Chavan that the PM has accepted our invitation in principle. A date will be communicated soon.

NCL has had a rich tradition of having the PM of India, grace every anniversary, right from inauguration, to silver and gold. So we are delighted that this tradition will continue unbroken.

We are indeed privileged to have with us Dr. J. Sanders, of Cambridge University to speak to us. This is truly fortuitous. Cambridge is celebrating its 800th anniversary and Professor Sanders has played a key role in organizing the celebrations which I am told will culminate on 18 January 2010. As some one beginning its 61st year, we have much to learn from such great institutions as to how to sustain excellence across centers. We need to build enduring values that will transcend generations. We need to seek right genes and encode them into our DNA and let the process of evolutionary biology take over.