

Taking science beyond labs, into every home

DEBRAJ MITRA

Calcutta: Discovery is no longer the defining question for Indian science, the man leading one of India's premier technology institutes said on Wednesday.

"The defining question is whether we can ensure that every discovery reaches every citizen. Whether every village can benefit from AI. Whether every family can access affordable diagnostics. Whether every child, every woman, every elderly citizen and every underserved community can experience the transformative power of science," said Suman Chakraborty, director of IIT Kharagpur.

It was only fitting that he spoke in memory of a man whose life's work was dedicated to taking science into the lives of people.

Chakraborty was one of the keynote speakers at the 24th Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray Memorial Lecture, organised by the Indian Chemical Council — the apex national body representing the chemical and allied industries — at the Meghnad Saha Bhavan Auditorium at Calcutta University in Rajabazar.

Ray (1861-1944) was a pioneering chemist, educator, entrepreneur and institution builder who championed India's freedom from colonial rule and self-reliance through scientific temper and enterprise. August 2 marked his 165th birth anniversary.

"If scientific excellence remains confined to journals and laboratories, we will have advanced knowledge but not necessarily humanity. If every discovery ultimately reaches the last citizen, science becomes an instrument of justice, dignity and national transformation. That,

I believe, is the truest continuation of Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray's vision," Chakraborty said. "To honour him is not merely to remember what he achieved but to complete the mission he began — to build an India where science is measured not only by what it discovers but by whom it serves."

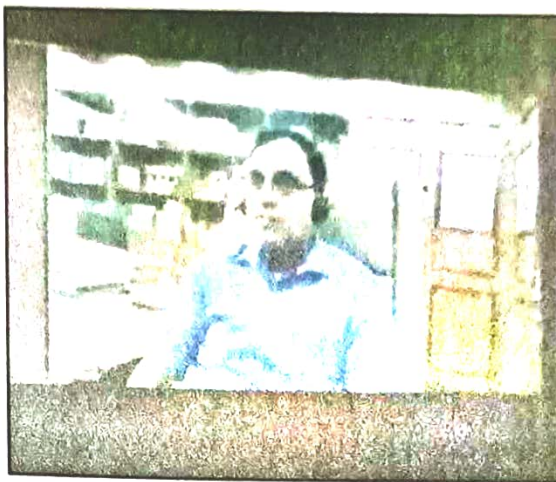
On July 16, 1938, Ray and B.D. Amin founded the Indian Chemical Manufacturers Association in Calcutta along with a group of industrialists. The organisation was later renamed the Indian Chemical Council and shifted its headquarters to Mumbai.

Chakraborty addressed the gathering — comprising students, researchers, teachers and industry representatives — virtually. His lecture, titled "Science with a Human Face", was accompanied by an audio-visual presentation showcasing prototypes of low-cost, accessible screening devices being developed at IIT Kharagpur in collaboration with other organisations. The devices are designed to improve diagnostic access for marginalised communities.

Siddhartha Ghosal, CEO and country president of Dow India, spoke on "Advances in Sustainability and AI", highlighting how sustainability and AI are reshaping the future of the chemical industry.

He stressed the need for stronger industry-academia. While universities continue to produce capable graduates, he said, "closer alignment with industry needs is essential to equip graduates with emerging capabilities in sustainability, AI, digitalisation, materials science, data analytics and advanced manufacturing".

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**IIT Kharagpur
director Suman
Chakraborty delivers
the lecture virtually**

Science for all

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Ghosal called for “deeper collaboration through curriculum co-creation” to strengthen India’s future readiness. “The books of Classes XI and XII are often dated. The syllabus needs to be aligned with the future needs of the industry,” he said.

Srikumar Ghose Choudhury, managing director and director (finance) of Bengal Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals Limited, founded by Ray in 1901, said: “He (Ray) did not have any greed for money. There were no financial objectives he wanted to pursue; his only objective was research for the development of mankind. For that, he pushed the company to an extent that it was generating profits from its operations.”