

**VICE-CHANCELLOR's REPORT**  
**PROF. (DR.) SUDHIR KRISHNASWAMY**

Hon'ble Chief Guest, Shri Nandan Nilekani,  
Hon'ble Chief Justice of India and Chancellor of the University, Justice Shri.  
Uday Umesh Lalit,  
Hon'ble Judges of the Supreme Court of India,  
Hon'ble Chief Justices and Judges of the High Courts,  
Hon'ble Minister of Law, Parliamentary Affairs and Legislation, Mr. J. C.  
Madhuswamy,  
Hon'ble Minister of Higher Education, Dr. C. N. Ashwath Narayan from the  
Government of Karnataka,  
Hon'ble Chairman of the Bar Council of India, Shri. Manan Kumar Mishra,  
Esteemed Members of the Governing Bodies of the University,  
My invaluable faculty and staff, our proud graduating students and their  
families,

Good morning and a warm welcome to the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Convocation of the  
National Law School of India University, Bangalore.

I stand here this morning to discharge two key tasks: to congratulate the  
graduating students and wish them the best for their journeys beyond the  
University, and to present a brief account of the University in the past year and a  
broad sketch of our near future.

It's been three years since we've been able to come together and graduate a  
batch of students in person. The last two Covid affected years have taught all of  
us to place a premium on the time we're able to spend together. So, we  
especially cherish this opportunity to gather here today to celebrate the

University's most important annual academic ritual: graduating 76 BA LLB (Hons) graduates; 40 LLM postgraduates; 53 MPP postgraduates; 6 PhD candidates; 1 MPhil candidate; and 653 candidates from our Professional and Continuing Education programmes. We congratulate these students as they move out of their educational cloisters into the wider world that awaits them.

These graduating batches have soldiered through an exceptional natural experiment: a Covid pandemic induced transition from physical to digital education in a few days from what may have otherwise taken a decade. They've emerged battle ready for the world of digital work and ready to embrace far deeper changes in our approach to the economy, politics and society. Your fortitude in pulling through these Covid disruptions will shape you in the years ahead and prepare you for the tectonic changes that await your generation.

Your University has bestowed on you the chance to live a life full of achievement and opportunity. The greatest risk is the possibility that you will not embrace your life's calling to the fullest. The lawyers and law students in this room will be familiar with Oliver Wendell Holmes. A venerable US Supreme Court Judge, he is well known for his sparkling books titled *The Path of the Law* and *The Common Law*. It is less commonly known that before he studied the law, he was a medical Doctor and had enlisted on the Union's side in the American Civil War at the age of 20. In a Memorial Day address to other Civil War veterans in 1884, he outlined his reasons for enlisting in the Civil War:

“I think that, as life is action and passion, it is required of a man that he should share the passion and action of his time at peril of being judged not to have lived.”

I trust that like Holmes, all of you will embrace the passion and action of your time. At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, India revisits the challenge of our founding decade: can we become prosperous while remaining democratic and inclusive?

Our constitution posits that all three goals may be achieved simultaneously. As you choose the battles of your time, I trust that you will stretch yourself and extend the moral horizons of your society in directions that will elevate and sustain us all. Your striving and endeavour will further enhance and dignify this University's role and purpose in our national life.

Measuring a university's success is a difficult and contentious task. Rankings serve as a proxy measure. Universities are built to measure up to ranking systems rather than the other way round. Despite these hazards, your University has consistently topped all available and credible ranking frameworks. We've ranked No. 1 on the NIRF system 5 years in a row! Maybe this reflects the resilience of the NLS Bangalore model, and its ability to reinvent and adapt to changed circumstances. But rather than explain our past and current rankings, I'd rather engage in a more critical self-reflection that hints at our future directions and promise.

In Academic Year 2021-22, NLSIU announced a new 3-year LLB (Honours) programme. We admitted students based on a novel admission test, designed and implemented by NLS faculty. The initial cohort of 60 students has completed a term on campus and we're delighted with the progress they've made, and the promise they've demonstrated. We remain confident that NLS will transform the 3-year LLB degree in India in the 2020s, much like we pioneered and electrified a new 5-year BA LLB law degree in the 1990s. We certainly believe that the new curricular model and intense pedagogical practices in the programme will put us on the track towards a second transformation in Indian legal education.

This Academic Year, we've continued expanding our student intake in the BA LLB, LLM and MPP programmes. Significantly, we've reduced faculty-student

ratios and the average size of the classroom from 80 to 60 even as we've expanded overall student intake. In the last year, we've redesigned the LLM and MPP curriculum based on feedback from faculty, students and our recruiters. In Academic Year 2022-23, we've begun a comprehensive redesign on the BA LLB programme which will result in the foundational reset of the programme from Academic Year 2024-25.

The National Education Policy 2020 proposes radical reforms in higher education with an accent on more multidisciplinary programmes and larger university clusters. We are actively engaged in building such a university cluster with the Indian Institute of Science and the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore. Individually, these institutions are already India's best academic institutions in their respective fields. Together, we will be in a position to expand our academic programmes and research projects in new collaborative directions. We anticipate exponential rewards arising out of these collaborations, and early results should be visible this Academic Year.

For National Law School to remain 'national,' its students, faculty and staff must reflect our national diversity. This requires that our University community draws on all the States of the Union, reflects our social, religious and ethnic diversity, and from all classes and castes. I'm glad to report that the University has expanded its affirmative action programmes to ensure that we achieve the widest diversity in our University community. The expansion of faculty, students and staff has helped us reflect the national character more fully than the recent past. While the National Law University system remains under pressure of being subsumed by regional concerns, the National Law School in Bangalore has maintained and enhanced its national diversity and preserved its national character.

None of this expansion is sustainable unless we keep up the pace of infrastructure development on campus. In this Academic Year, we opened up a ‘New Academic Block’ with 7 new large classrooms and 2 new seminar rooms. This Block has additional faculty rooms and researcher workspaces. Simultaneously, we expanded hostel capacity in existing hostel blocks, and partly revamped hostel furniture and utilities ahead of the academic year. The overwhelming positive response to these infrastructural upgrades has motivated us to upgrade all other existing hostels, while we set out to build new hostel blocks. We’ve upgraded our maintenance of the University campus, and improved internet and other infrastructure utilities at a rapid pace.

This year, we completed a comprehensive Revised Master Plan with a leading architectural firm in Bangalore. I trust that some among you stopped by the display boards in the auditorium foyer. You would have noticed that we have developed a bold yet responsible plan for the future development of the campus. The plan commits us to treading lightly on the earth and minimises resource use. We will ensure universal access to all parts of the campus, and improve the lived experience of the University community by integrating common open spaces with academic and residential spaces on campus.

While the full implementation of the Revised Master Plan will take 3-5 years, the radical overhaul and redesign of the Sri Narayan Rao Melgiri Memorial National Law Library to expand capacity and to integrate adjoining open areas is underway. We expect to inaugurate these new facilities in the current academic year, and reposition this Library as the new core of academic and institutional life on campus.

While NLSIU has pioneered legal education reforms since its founding, it has also produced new and useful law and policy research that has anchored several

areas of reform. However, we're yet to develop a robust institutional approach to research output that is scalable and replicable. One model may be to recruit the best faculty and assume that research results will follow. This view has some merit. The recent rankings confirm that NLS's enhanced research output by faculty has resulted in higher rankings. However, there is more to research production than rankings.

We've recruited a cadre of Academic Fellows beginning their academic careers with us. We've committed to recruiting dedicated research staff so that there are two researchers for every member of the teaching faculty at the University. This is an aggressive and ambitious goal. It will take us two years to realise this target. At that stage, we're certain that the University's research and public interventions will begin to have an outsize impact on Indian academic and policy circles.

The University has also launched a new unified publication platform. This research repository will initially host all the University peer-reviewed journals in an open access format that is digitally indexed in leading databases in India and around the world. This repository will transform access and visibility of our work, and we aim to make it the go-to portal for information on Indian law and public policy. In the years ahead, we will add a monograph series and other research outputs that will act as an invaluable public knowledge resource.

In 2020-21, we developed a grand challenges model of research for the University. We identified 5 grand challenges for India in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the climate crisis; state capacity and the rule of law; the labour transition; regulating technology (especially Artificial Intelligence); and legal system reform. These grand challenges require committed resources and University investments across decades. Unless we recruit research staff committed to ground breaking

work in these fields, India has a slim chance of developing a locally relevant model that can sustain global leadership.

For such a grand challenges model to take root and thrive, we need an ecosystem that prizes developing robust knowledge solutions to urgent national and global problems. Currently, we don't have a government funding institution (like the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) or the National Science Foundation in the US), or a philanthropic funding imagination that prizes outcome focused research. The internet, autonomous vehicles, and supercomputing all emerged from grand challenges set out by DARPA. Pathbreaking scientific, social scientific, and legal research will not emerge from India unless we make investments in similar models now, and sustain them for a couple of decades.

At NLS, we hope to incubate, create, and then institutionalise these grand challenges research models, and adapt them to the fields that we work in. We aim to collaborate with philanthropists, entrepreneurs and the government to make this real by the end of the decade. If NLS is able to germinate and sustain the legal system reform revolution that India desperately needs, we would have delivered on our founding vision and promise.

## **Conclusion**

Three years ago, in my first Annual Report, I emphasised the need for NLSIU to restore and revive the rigorous academic practices and frugal financial practices that allowed the University the autonomy to lead the legal education revolution in India. In the last three years, the University's Governing Bodies ably led by our Chancellor and Hon'ble Chief Justice of India, Justice Uday Umesh Lalit, and the Chairman of the Bar Council of India, Shri. Manan Kumar Mishra, have

pushed forward with such speed and purpose that in a short period, we have shored up our institutional foundations and are now ready to embark on a second phase of this University's development.

In the years ahead, your University is ready to renew and reimagine its founding vision as a national and international leader in legal education and research. We will aim to become the institutional anchor around which the transformation of the modern Indian legal system and public governance is built. Our graduating students are one large part of our contribution to national renewal and rejuvenation. The explosive growth in the research capacities of the University will be the second driver of transformative institutional reform and growth. We welcome all of you to join us as we set out on this ambitious and challenging next phase of the National Law School experiment!