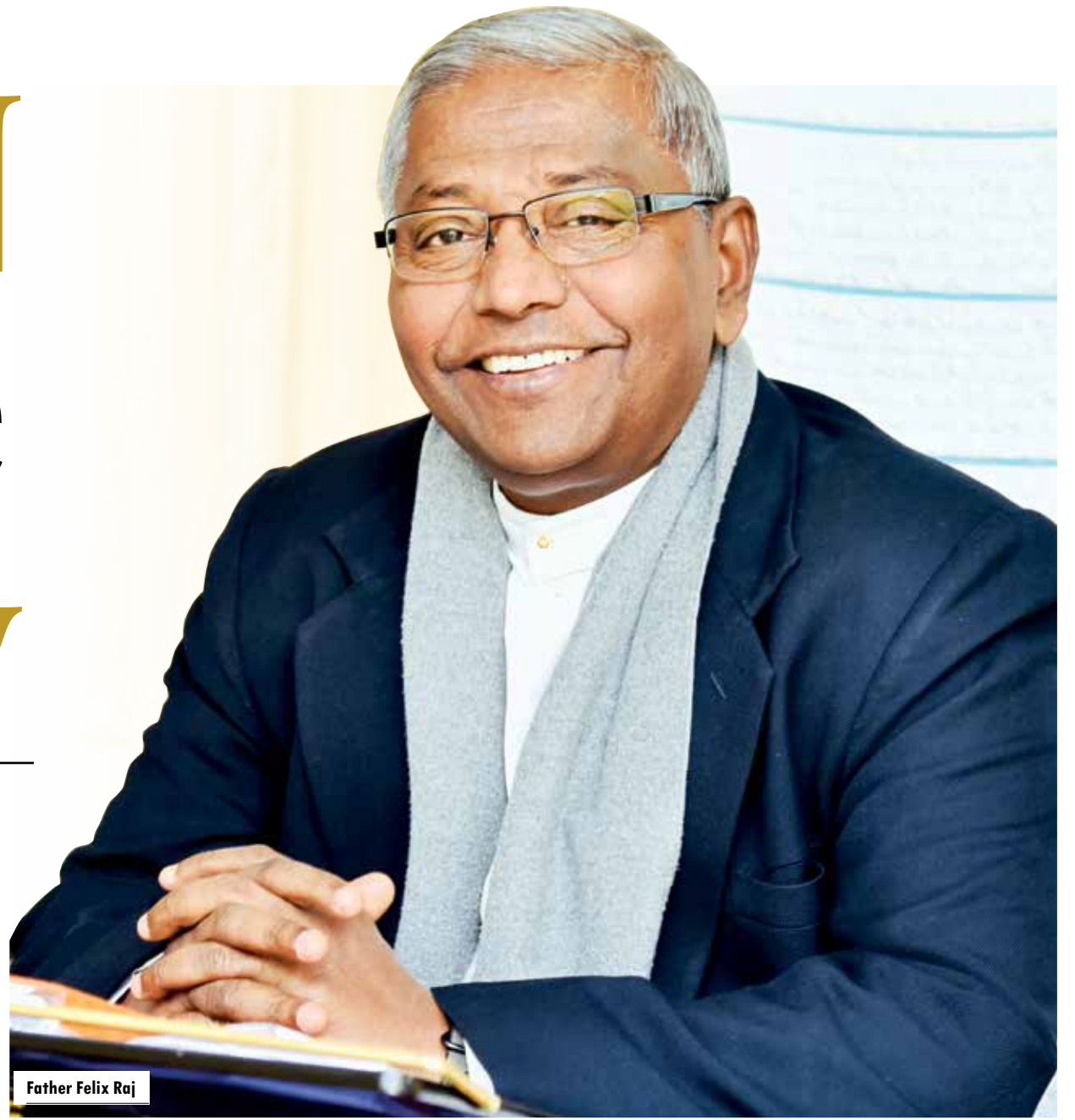


GOLDEN years in the City of Joy



Father Felix Raj

Celebrating 50 glorious years as a Jesuit in Kolkata, Father Felix Raj has seen the city transform for better during his stint at St. Xavier's College and University wherein he led through his vision to serve the community with education and other noble services

AUTHOR



PRABHAT KUMAR DATTA

Quiz: Name a Kolkatan whose first journey to the city was inextricably linked to Lord Ganesh, who witnessed from close quarters the visit of Pope John Paul II to Mother Teresa's city and who witnessed a President and a Prime Minister marking milestones associated with a celebrated institution.

Answer: Father Felix Raj, the founder Vice-Chancellor of St. Xavier's University, Kolkata, who is celebrating 50 remarkable years of dedicated service as a Jesuit in Kolkata.

This golden milestone commemorates his extraordinary journey marked by transformative leadership, unwavering commitment and pioneering achievements.

Father Felix Raj shared a remarkable personal anecdote in *Telegraph* on September 1, 2019, revealing how Lord Ganesh's divine inspiration led him to embark on a bold journey to Kolkata in June 1973.

Of these 50 golden years, 33 years were spent at St. Xavier's College, Kolkata, in various capacities, seven at St. Xavier's University, Kolkata, and the remaining 10 on Jesuit training in Chennai, Pune and Delhi.

Fr. Raj's illustrious career began in 1984 as a Lecturer in Econom-

ics, laying the foundation for a legacy that would inspire generations. During his time as a lecturer, St. Xavier's College celebrated its 125th anniversary in 1985, with the then-President of India, Giani Zail Singh, gracing the occasion as the chief guest.

In 1986, Kolkata welcomed His Holiness Pope John Paul II, who addressed the city's populace on St. Xavier's College grounds. Fr. Raj skillfully oversaw security and media arrangements for this historic event.

His ascent to leadership commenced in 1997 as vice-principal of the prestigious Morning Commerce department, a role he held with distinction for 12 years.

In 1996, he was appointed Rector of St. Xavier's College, serving for six years. He was the youngest Rector of this renowned college since the independence of India. His subsequent tenure as principal from 2009 onwards heralded a new era of growth, aptly dubbed the "Second Foundation" of St. Xavier's College.

In 2010, in the very first year of his principalship, Fr. Raj ushered in the celebration of St. Xavier's College's 150th anniversary, with the then-Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, attending as the chief guest.

Under Fr. Raj's visionary guidance, St. Xavier's College underwent significant transformations. The iconic 100-year-old building was renovated, expanding infrastructure and facilities. The hostel was relocated to BackBagan, and the education department and library transitioned seamlessly.

Fr. Raj also garnered funding for an additional floor on the hostel building and installed solar panels on the terrace that generated 25KV of clean energy with CSR funds.

Fr. Felix Raj's pioneering "Col-

“ This milestone is a testament to your dedication and unwavering commitment throughout your illustrious career. Your long and inspiring leadership at St. Xavier's has been marked by zeal and passion, earning the institutions a pride of place in the whole of India”

—Mamata Banerjee (On Father Felix Raj's Golden Jubilee celebration as Jesuit)



The crowning achievement of Fr. Raj's career is the founding of St. Xavier's University, Kolkata, in 2017

lege to Village and Village to College" initiative, launched in 2005 in South 24-Parganas, revolutionised the intersection of academia and rural development. Founded on the profound notion that "villages are temples of prosperity and educational institutions are temples

of wisdom," this project bridged the gap between the two, sparking transformative change.

Known popularly as Prayas, or the "One Rupee Revolution," this innovative endeavor relied on students' voluntary daily contributions of just one rupee. This modest yet

powerful gesture shifted educational perspectives paradigmatically. Class representatives spearheaded fundraising efforts, forging connections between urban and rural youth. They shared experiences, fostering empathy and mutual understanding. By empowering rural students

through education and skill development, Prayas cultivates collaborative growth between colleges and villages. It promotes cultural exchange, social responsibility and holistic development. This multifaceted project yields far-reaching benefits, demonstrating its potential for nationwide replication.

Fr. Raj's commitment to academic excellence led to significant expansion at St. Xavier's College, Kolkata. He established a PhD department, fostering cutting-edge research and scholarship, introducing new programmes and enhancing the college's academic diversity. He expanded postgraduate courses, providing students with a broader range of specialisation.

In 2013, Fr. Raj's expertise earned him a notable appointment as a member of the West Bengal Education Commission by the governor of West Bengal, providing him a four-year term.

Fr. Raj's 50-year journey has been marked by numerous accolades, including the coveted Bangabhusan and SikshaRatna awards in 2014 and 2016, respectively, from the West Bengal government.

These honors testify to his unwavering commitment to education and social service, inspiring generations in Kolkata and beyond.

In 2014, he inaugurated the twin hostels in BackBagan build by the donations of loyal alumni, and launched St. Xavier's College Kolkata's rural campus in Raghobpur, providing opportunities to 700 students. The following year, he relocated EMMRC from Park Circus to

EM Bypass, enhancing educational film production facilities.

The crowning achievement of Fr. Raj's career is founding St. Xavier's University, Kolkata, in 2017, inaugurated by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and L.N. Mittal, an alumnus.

Through his tireless efforts, Fr. Raj mobilised Rs 500 crore in investments, primarily through alumni support. Today, St. Xavier's University, Kolkata, thrives with 4,200 students.

Building on this momentum, Fr. Raj emphasises that an additional Rs 300 crore is needed to complete the campus's remaining infrastructure projects, including an auditorium with 2,500 seat capacity, crucial for the university's continued growth.

On the occasion of his golden jubilee as a Jesuit in January 2024, Mamata Banerjee, the Hon'ble Chief Minister of West Bengal, congratulated him, saying: "This milestone

is a testament to your dedication and unwavering commitment throughout your illustrious career. Your long and inspiring leadership at St. Xavier's has been marked by zeal and passion, earning the institutions a pride of place in the whole of India."

The 150 strong Jesuits of the Kolkata Province will gather to celebrate Rev. Fr. Felix Raj's jubilee on November 15 at St. Xavier's University, Kolkata.

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Views expressed are personal

Fr. Raj's 50-year journey has been marked by numerous accolades

Horrorifying parallels

As the sinking city of Jakarta has forced Indonesia to shift its capital to Nusantara, cities that may face similar threats, including Kolkata, need to rethink their future plans



SHOVANLAL CHAKRABORTY

The urgency of climate change is impressing itself on some countries far more than on others. Take, for instance, the case of Jakarta in Indonesia, which is perhaps the fastest sinking city in the world. In 2022, when world leaders gathered at the climate summit in Egypt, Antonio Guterres had a message for them: "It is either a Climate Solidarity Pact or a Collective Suicide Pact." The case of Jakarta is particularly pertinent here as an example of how climate change is already causing enormous change in the lives of people living in the Global South.

It is perhaps this urgency and the lack of any chances of real progress resulting from the multilateral COP summits over the years that has led Jakarta to find its own solutions. Instead of letting the fortunes of a city rely on help or international cooperation that may not come, the Indonesians have decided to move the Indonesian capital away from the island of Java, where



Jakarta is sinking (right) and is likely to cause loss of livelihoods and resources for millions of homes—a fate that cities like Kolkata (left), too, shall fear



Jakarta is located, to the island of Borneo in East Kalimantan province. The new capital of Indonesia will be Nusantara and

this year marked the first time when independence day celebrations were held there. While Jakarta has a different climate

than Kolkata's, some of the factors that have affected that city threaten Kolkata as well. In recent years, Kolkata has also reeled

from heavy flooding after unexpected torrential rains. Like many other megacities, the city's urban sprawl led to an increase

in flooding following torrential rainfalls. Even more problematic is the fact that the most built-up areas with the least amount of vegetation are often also the poorest ones. The poorest areas in turn are the ones least likely to be able to afford electricity or to have other means of cooling their environs. Not only that, Kolkata also experiences the urban heat island effect.

As has been the case in such discussions in the past, the gulf between the experts in the Western countries who make climate policy and the people in the Global South who face the actual heat and the deluge seems too wide to bridge. In Jakarta's case, the problems were not always so intractable but the inability to arrive at solutions owing to corruption and lack of political will created a situation

where moving the capital was the band-aid that was passed off as a solution. Similarly, Kolkata's issues can be solved if there is proper zoning and a commitment to adopt policies that somehow address the issues faced by the city. However, this

is unlikely to come about, given the rampant greed, corruption and the lack of motivation and political will that prevail. But then as Tagore wrote "To lose faith in mankind is a sin".

Views expressed are personal

While Jakarta has a different climate than Kolkata's, some factors resemble