New York varsity honours India's 'Hugging Saint' Mata Amritanandmayi

New York, May 26 : The State University of New York (SUNY) has conferred Hindu leader Mata Amritanandamayi with an honorary doctorate degree in humane letters.

The honour was bestowed on her at a special convocation held at Lippes Concert Hall of the University's Buffalo North Campus by Dr. John B. Simpson, President of the University and Eunice Lewin, Trustee of the State University of New York.

In the University's 164-year history only two other world leaders, including Tibetan spiritual head the Dalai Lama have been awarded this doctorate.

The SUNY honorary degree recognizes Amma's commitment to expanding educational opportunities and international cooperation as also her extraordinary humanitarian services, said Dunnett.

It is also a recognition of her 'tireless efforts on behalf of global peace, for her commitment to education and for the far reaching impact of her charitable organizations in relieving poverty and human sufferings in India and around the world', said a university release.

"Through this conferral, we pay tribute to the far-reaching contributions of a distinguished educational leader, prominent humanitarian and esteemed spiritual leader," said Dr. Simpson in his address to the gathering.

Others who received honorary doctorates from SUNY this year include MapQuest founder Barry Glick, pioneering AIDS/HIV- researcher Dr. Robert Vince, and Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Steve Reich.

The State University of New York is one of the largest university systems in the US with 64 campuses, with four main centres in Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo and Stonybrook.

Amritanandamayi Matt was the first to respond with relief to the quake-affected in Haiti in January this year. Her disaster relief include flood-affected in Karnataka.

Her charity has so far constructed 40,000 homes for the poor throughout India, provided scholarships to 1,00,000 children of impoverished and debt-ridden farmers in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, orphans in Kerala, Nairobi, Haiti for almost 600 children, pensions to about 1,00,000 destitute women and physically and mentally challenged.

Besides the Ashram also manages several educational and research institutions, and hospitals throughout India.

'Amma' as she is known to her followers is also a recipient of Interfaith Centre of New York's 4th Annual James Parks Morton Interfaith Award for her role as a spiritual leader and humanitarian, specifically for her rehabilitation work for 2004 Tsunami victims. She also received the distinguished special UN consultative status in the Economic and Social Council of the UN and the Gandhi-King Award for Non-violence by the World Movement for Non-Violence.

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