Shri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat

Hon'ble Vice-President of India

It is a great pleasure for me to be here in your midst today on this solemn occasion. My heartiest congratulations to the graduating students, as also to their families and the teachers, for the success achieved by them.

IITs were conceived to function as leaders in technology innovation, to produce scientists and technologists contributing to the might of the nation. It is indeed a matter of satisfaction, as well as national pride, that our IITs are now equated with MIT, Harvard and Princeton put together. I, therefore, feel extremely happy this morning to be in the precincts of this premiere IIT; and for giving me this opportunity, I owe my grateful thanks to Prof. M.G.K. Menon.

Let me say how fortunate IIT, Delhi is to have an eminent and distinguished scientist like Prof. Menon as its Chairman. No one knows better than he does as to what needs to be done for promotion and development of science and technology. Under his able stewardship, IIT - Delhi would surely achieve new heights of glory and excellence in every sphere of academics.

My young friends, you are now on the threshold of a new chapter in your life. What aspirations you have and what vision of the next century you carry, what new world order you would build, what environment you would create? What are the challenges and problems you will have to encounter in the career ahead of you? How far ahead other countries would have gone by the time we become a developed nation? And if we want to be amongst the top ten developed nations, how shall we beat others in the race? How are you going to face this challenge of global competition? You need to ponder over these issues with a sense of urgency as well as seriousness; for you are going to be a major player in shaping India’s tomorrow.

Indian philosophy believes in migration of soul after death. But I am told that IIT students believe in migration of soul during the lifetime itself. It is said that the soul of an IIT student migrates to USA in the first year itself; he just waits for his body to migrate on completion of studies and getting a degree! Why this burning urge for migration? Perhaps, only because you are craving for a better environment where your talent and genius can flourish without constraints. Given the right environment and infrastructure support, we know what success our professionals, doctors and engineers can achieve. Their impressive and extraordinary success in USA and other developed countries is a vivid proof.

It is, therefore, very critical that in our country, we provide to you a better system of governance, healthy environment conducive to development and growth. We must provide our people hassle-free and corruption-free governance. I, therefore, believe that the key issues and challenges coming in the way of our development must be addressed with a sense of urgency. It is my humble effort to build up national consensus in favour of such an approach for nation’s development and in particular for measures such as population stabilization, reforms in administration, judiciary and electoral system for better governance.

Friends, our progress, since Independence has certainly not been insignificant. Thanks to our agricultural scientists and technologists, and our farmers, we have achieved self-sufficiency in food; today our granaries are full. The White Revolution has made our country the largest producer of milk and fourth largest in production of eggs. Our achievements in defence, space and atomic energy have been spectacular. We are on the IT super highway. Our economy is stable and resilient; we are aiming at 8% growth of GDP in the Tenth Plan.
But let us look at the other side as well. We are still struggling with the problems of poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy and diseases. 27% of our population is still below the poverty line. More than 4 crore children are deprived of primary education, lakhs of persons still die due to malaria and tuberculosis. About a month back, UNDP released the Human Development Report - 2003. India ranks 127th in terms of Human Development index. What an ignominy it is that our country of over one billion populations, second only to China in the human resource numbers, a country with one of the most ancient civilizations in the world, does not find a place among the top ten.

Many of you would be surprised to know that Britain and India had roughly similar per-capita level of industrialization at the onset of industrial revolution in the year 1750. But India’s level came down as low as one percent of the UK by the year 1900. The reason was that India’s population doubled and re-doubled in the 19th century but on a much less productive base. Friends, the lesson is obvious. The fruits of development would be real only if we stabilize our population. At the time of Independence we were just about 36 crores. Just imagine if we would have stabilized our population to about 50 crores, what a high level of development we would have attained.

I would like to share one more concern with you. We are living in an era of globalisation driven by science and technology. It was told that globalisation had many promises for the developing countries. But to many in the developing world, globalisation has not provided the promised economic benefits. The growing divide between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ has left increasing numbers in the third world in dire poverty, living on less than a dollar a day. Joseph Stiglitz, winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics - 2001, in his book ‘Globalisation And Its Discontents’ observes, “Despite repeated promises of poverty reduction made over the last decade of the 20th century, the actual number of people living in poverty has actually increased by almost 100 millions. This occurred at the same time that total world income actually increased by an average of 2.5 per cent annually”.

The fast-paced scientific and technology progress has caused social differences between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ becoming even more pronounced which tend to create feelings of increasing resentment amongst the deprived and the less privileged. The new technologies of information and communication are making them impatient to have equal access to a better life. If left with unfulfilled expectations, the social tensions and the divide would get stretched beyond the elasticity limits of acceptance and tolerance. A world built on such structure is bound to explode. We have got to arrest this trend through shift in thrust of development towards the poor and the needy. We must particularly ensure that none is deprived of the opportunity to grow and flower up to his or her full got our Independence. Now it is time to show similar spirit and determination, to free our great nation from poverty and under-development. Let us resolve to share the beautiful dream to make a new India, fully developed, strong and powerful. Let us rededicate ourselves to strive hard with determination and say, as Martin Luther King did, “I have a dream to fulfill”. The fulfilled dreams of all of you are going to be the success of India. I am sanguine that your success and achievement will be a matter of pride for you, adding feathers in the cap of your alma mater and ultimately be a success of India. And in the pursuit of your career, I urge you always to follow the path of righteousness, honesty and commitment in pursuit of excellence, and above all be a good human being.

I wish you a bright and rewarding future. May God bless you in abundance with the most precious thing in life, called happiness throughout your life.

Thank you and Jai Hind!