

Inaugural speech of MoS (HRD-HE) as Chief Guest in the function of the 11th All India Youth Festival organized by the Central Kolkata Science & Culture Organization for youth on 7th August, 2007.

Mr. Basudev Burmanji, Organisers of the Central Calcutta Science & Culture Organization for Youth and other distinguished guests.

I am extremely happy to come here today as the Chief Guest for the inaugural function of 11th National Expo organized by Science and Culture Organization in this historic city of Kolkata. The name of Kolkata conjures up myriad reminiscences in our mind. This city was the political capital of the country for more than 150 years but more importantly it was also the hub of socio-cultural regeneration and the Indian national movement. Bengal has always been in the vanguard in the country's freedom struggle and made supreme sacrifices for attaining the freedom the country from colonial rule. She has also been the fore runner of the Indian Renaissance of the 19th and 20th Centuries and produced some of the country's eminent personalities, social reformers and national leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Shri Ramkrishna Paramahansa and his worthy disciple Swami Vivekananda, Rabindra Nath Tagore Deshbandhu, C.R. Das, Subhash Chandra Bose, Shri Aurobindo to mention just a few. At the outset I pay my respectful homage to all of them.

I understand that your organization is a reputed social and philanthropic organization engaged in work relating to our younger

generation in the field of literature, science and culture for the last few years. I am also told that the organization regularly arranges for seminars workshops trainings lectures, debates, on various facets of self -employment, self - development and other youth activities; it also organises exhibitions, distribution of textbooks and scholarships to needy and meritorious students etc as a part of its dedicated services to the community. These are laudable activities and I congratulate the Society on this account.

Despite my heavy schedule of work in Delhi, more particularly because of the ongoing Parliamentary Session, I have accepted your invitation for two primary reasons, first because it was difficult, if not impossible, to say 'no' to a colleague like Basudev Barmanji and secondly, because, I wanted to have direct inter-action with an Youth Association like yours which appeared to be a reputed social, voluntary and philanthropic association whose proclaimed aims and objects exudes a spirit of service before self which is the hall mark of all youthful activities and enthusiasm. A developing country like India require more social organizations like yours for an growth and advancement.

Half of the Indian population is below 24 years of age and there are to-day around 120 million youth in India in the age group of 17 to 22 years. As per another survey Youth in India covering the population between the age group of 15 to 35 years constitutes 330 million comprising nearly 30% of our population. This gives us an

idea of the vast human resource and tremendous Youth force which can be profitably harnessed profitably for the country's development.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan aptly said that 'to build up a modern India needs the meaningful and effective canalization of the youth force towards well-defined and welfare oriented goals.' The association of youth is, therefore, an indispensable requirement in the nation-building activities. We are an ancient civilization but a modern nation state and while we may justifiably bask in the glory of the past, it is for the future of India that our youth power must contribute with hard work, dedication, determination and fortitude in order to fulfill the onerous and uphill task of nation building.

The Youth in India have always been in the forefront. Be it our struggle for freedom or our quest for development, youth have played a vital role. Coinciding with the International Youth Year, a separate Department of Youth Affairs and Sports was set up in 1985 and effort began to formulate a National Youth Policy which was adopted in 1988 and various schemes were introduced to cater to the needs of youth. These schemes aimed not only on the personality and skill development of youth, but also endeavoured to involve them in community based nation building activities so that they could become catalysts of change and development. The government also declared that the 12th January which was the birthday of Swami Vivekananda would be observed as the National Youth Day every year. I feel that we could not have selected a more appropriate day for the purpose.

The New National Youth Policy recognizes four thrust areas namely, Youth Empowerment, Gender Justice, a Multi-Sectoral Approach and emphasis on Information and Research Networks. It has identified the key areas of youth concern like, education, training and employment, health, environment, recreation and sports, art and culture, civics and citizenship, science and technology so that attention could be focused on these areas. The New Youth Policy also endeavours to attach priority to the needs of underprivileged and marginalized youth.

The reduction of the minimum voting age from 21 to 18 in the year 1989 and a legislative measure taken in 1992 providing for reservation of one third of the seats for women in the village administrative units called Panchayats have enabled young people and young women to influence the decision making process in the country. Youth participation in the decision making bodies has been considerably enhanced by these decisions. Even in the present Lok Sabha a number of MPs have been elected who represent the youth force, although our vision to reserve one-third of the seats in Parliament for our women folk is, unfortunately, still a distant dream.

It has been rightly recognized that access to education and training has to be augmented so that youth can develop their competencies. The National Policy of Education(NPE) 1986, has provided for designing both formal and non-formal education programmes involving youth. Our literacy rate has increased to 52.91 percent in 1991. Today, 94 percent of the rural habitations have

school facilities. Gross enrolment ratio at the primary stage has also increased to 100 percent in most of the States. Our various educational schemes like Mid Day Meal, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan etc have already started yielding positive results.

The education system is periodically evaluated and curricula updated in accordance with the advancements in Science and Technology. Efforts are also made to make the education relevant to the market needs and economic demands without compromising on the ethical and moral values of education. We have decided to spend 6% of our GDP in our educational programme. Presently, 3% cess has imposed in the Budget to mop up resources for our expenditure on education.

Inculcating the spirit of discipline, good mannerisms and brotherhood in our youth is very important. This work has to begin at the building blocks of our society – at home and in school. Each one of us adult Indians, as a parent or as a teacher, must shoulder this responsibility. We must bring it on ourselves to lead from the front, in becoming the role model which our children should be encouraged to emulate. In this context, I am reminded of a recent advertisement on Indian television, which shows a child questioning his father for preaching about honesty to his children, but not practicing it himself, when it comes to recovering and paying the mandatory service tax. It is not sufficient merely to exhort our children to be patriotic by singing the national anthem and honouring the national flag. Of course, this laudatory practice should be there for it contributes significantly

towards the process of building national consciousness. But, we must attune our own behaviour and mannerisms at all times and fashion ourselves such that our children feel pride in referring to us as their father, mother or teacher. These three categories would roughly cover the vast majority of adult Indians, but if by chance, you do not fall into any of the three, your responsibility as a role model is no less as a worker, manager or team leader, wherever or in whatever situation you may find yourself. In other words, every adult Indian must bring to his or her consciousness the tremendous influence we have in shaping the future of our country through our role as the beacon of light and hope our children have endowed on us.

There should be a specific role for our youth in this process of spirit building and national consciousness among our youth. We should ensure that our youth are moulded into a strong self-disciplined force capable of hard work and hardships and to see that where the spirit of brotherhood is supreme in reaching towards pre-determined goals. Our motto should be "Unity and Discipline" and the goal should be to create a human resource of organized, trained and activated youth, to provide leadership in all walks of life always available for the service of the nation. In this manner we should try to develop among the youth of India, the qualities of character, courage, comradeship, discipline, leadership, secular outlook, spirit of adventure and sportsmanship and the ideals of selfless service among the youth to make them useful citizens.

National unity is an important and essential component of nation-building building and the growth of national consciousness.

Secularism is the bedrock of our democracy. This implies that the individual while adhering to his own religion must respect other religions and practice tolerance and understanding towards them; in the nonreligious sphere, social life should be governed by rational, ethical and human attitudes rather than by considerations of caste, creed and community.

In this context I would like to draw your attention to Part IV-A of the Constitution of India which enjoins upon the citizens of India to perform some fundamental duties. While all the duties mentioned therein are of equal importance, I will like to make a special reference to one of them which calls upon us to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform. In my view this requires the focused attention of our youth who should and must constantly follow this principle in all their activities and pursuits so that the nation could strive to excellence and rise to a higher levels of endeavour and achievement and at the end of day we may succeed in making India a modern society, democratic in spirit, socialist in content, scientific in temper and secular in outlook.

With these words I have great pleasure in delivering the inaugural address and I have no doubt that your Organization will move in rapid strides on way to fulfillment of your mission in years to come.

Jai Hind