

**Address by Smt. D. Purandeswari, MoS (HRD-HE) as Chief Guest for the concluding function of “Lead India 2020” at Sangareddy Hyderabad on 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2007.**

I am glad to know that the Lead India is conducting ‘Aap Badho Desh Ko Badhao’ Research & Training Programme at four venues in Medak district namely Andole, Narsapur, Medak and Metpally from 19<sup>th</sup> May to 9<sup>th</sup> June, 07. It is my privilege to address you as the Chief guest on the occasion and share with you my perception in regard to the role of youth in our nation-building activities. Despite my heavy schedule of work in Delhi, I accepted your invitation because, I wanted to have a direct inter-action with an Youth Association like yours which appeared as a reputed social, voluntary and philanthropic association and whose proclaimed aims and objectives exude a spirit of service before self which is the hall mark of all youthful activities.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan used to say that the building of a modern India needs the meaningful channelisation of the youth force towards well-defined and welfare oriented- goal. The association of youth is therefore must in the nation – building. We are an ancient civilization and 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 national development. As you are aware, India is a vast country with a glorious cultural heritage and traditions. It is the largest democracy in the world which symbolizes unity in diversity. Youth in India covers the population

between the age group of 15 to 35 years which constitutes about 330 million comprising nearly 40% of our total population. This gives us an idea of the vast human resource that the youth represents in our country.

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. We formulated 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 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 key issues which concern youth are universal in nature. Education, Health, Employment, Drug abuse, Gender equity are some of these. We are all aware of these challenges and also the possibilities of making a difference if these issues could be tackled successfully. Our experience shows that youth are very responsive to the national challenges,- what they need is proper guidance, training and opportunities to channelize their energies.

As I have stated a little while ago, the major thrust of our new National Youth Policy is Youth Empowerment. This is being achieved through various initiatives taken by both the Government and Non Governmental Organizations.

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 Panachayats 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.

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. This requires constant endeavour and infinite patience, as also idealism and self-sacrifice. Our youth organisations should be free of communal and in develop quality comradeship, discipline and a secular outlook which should be ingrained in the leadership of youth.

I am sure, that 'Lead India' and similar other voluntary organisations will be able to inculcate and install these qualities in our youth so that our country can move ahead in rapid strides towards the goal of national welfare. I wish all success in your endeavour towards the achievement of this goal.

Jai Hind