

**Speech by Smt. D. Purandeswari, MoS(HRD-HE) as Chief Guest in the
Valedictory Function Of The 12th All India Youth Festival Organised by
The Central Kolkata Science & Culture Organization For Youth, On
17th March, 2007.**

Mr. Basudev Burmanji, Organisers of the CCS & C O.Y and other distinguished guests.

I am extremely happy to come here today as the chief guest for the valedictory function of 12th AIY Festival 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 national movement. Bengal has always been in the vanguard in the country's freedom struggle and the Indian Renaissance of the 12th and 20th Century. She also gave to the country eminent persons, social reformers and national leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Shri Ram Krishna and his worthy disciple Swami Vivekananda, Rabindra Nath Tagore to quote just a few. At the outset I pay my respectful homage to all of them.

I understand that your organization is a social and philanthropic organization doing excellent work to motivate our younger generation in the field of science and culture for the last few years. I am also told that the organization regularly arranges for seminars workshops trainings on self-employment lectures, debates, exhibitions and distribution of textbooks and scholarships to needy meritorious students etc as a part of our dedicated services to the greater community.

Despite my heavy schedule of work in Delhi, more especially due to the ongoing Parliamentary Session, I have chosen to accept your invitation for two prominent reasons. The first because it was difficult, if not possible, to stay '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 as 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.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan aptly said 'to build a modern India needs the meaningful canalization of the youth force towards well-defined and welfare oriented goals.' The association of youth is therefore a must in the nation – building activities. 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 nation building.

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 34 % of the total population. It is expected that the youth population would grow up to about

347 million by 2000 A.D. This gives us an idea of the vast human resource that the youth represent 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 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 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 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.

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. Now we have a goal of Education for All by 2000 A.D. To achieve, this goal, vigorous efforts are being made. 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.

So, how do we go about inculcating the spirit of discipline, good mannerisms and brotherhood? 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 our children are willing 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 does contribute significantly towards the process of building national consciousness. However, 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? There already exists the

National Cadet Corps (NCC) programme, which aims to build upon the training a young mind receives at home and at school. The NCC is one place where our youth are moulded into a strong self-disciplined force capable of hard work and hardships and where the spirit of brotherhood is supreme in reaching towards pre-determined goals. The motto of the NCC is “Unity and Discipline” and its goal is to create a human resource of organized, trained and activated youth, to provide leadership in all walks of life including the Armed Forces and always available for the service of the nation. The NCC aims 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.

Our Government run many rehabilitation and welfare schemes for people in distress. But government effort alone is not enough. Providing jobs, employment opportunities, including those for self-employment and business opportunities for the huge number of unemployed is but one side of the coin only. They have to be trained for various professions, and this is perhaps more important than merely words of solace and input.

National unity is an important and essential component of nation 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.

As I said right at the start of my lecture today, I have tried to use this pulpit to put across a message to you and to the nation at large. India is still at the formative stage of nation building and we have a long and uphill road to travel on. The youth of our country must move in rapid strides towards the attainment of goal of national welfare.

“A true soldier does not argue, as he marches, how success is going to be ultimately achieved. But he is confident that if he only plays his humble part well, somehow or other the battle will be won. It is in that spirit that every one of us should act. It is not given to us to know the future. But it is given to everyone of us to know how to do our own part well”.

Jai Hind

Distinguished Guests,

Ever since the organizers approached me for delivering the Krishna Menon Memorial Lecture, I have been thinking about the message I should convey from this sacred pulpit to a distinguished audience. The concept and practice of nation building has been the first priority for all those, who like me, have grown up on the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi and vision of Pandit Nehru. In the last 40 years of my public life I have been fortunate enough to get the opportunity to participate in this process both as a social activist and as a part of the national government. I have been a witness to two-generational changes in our political and national life and have seen the evolution of the Indian democracy to a strong, stable and progressive institution.

In my present capacity as the Defence Minister, I have deeply felt the rare qualities of Indian Armed Forces which have contributed to the strengthening of the democratic institutions. Therefore, I decided to speak today on the subject of “Civil-Military Cooperation in Nation Building”.

I have a special reason for having accepted the invitation to be here today. I have great admiration for Shri Krishna Menon in whose memory this lecture has been organised. In fact, my chance encounter with him in April, 1969 brought me into Rajya Sabha and here I will like to narrate a story.

In 1969, the second United Front government under the leadership of ‘Bangla Congress’ and CPM was voted into power with overwhelming majority in West Bengal. At that time, a sitting Member of ‘Bangla Congress’ in Lok Sabha elected from Midnapur expired and the party decided to field me as a candidate of United Front as Midnapur was the bastion of ‘Bangla Congress’. Suddenly we received a letter from Late Shri RK Karanjia, Editor, Blitz proposing that Shri Krishna Menon who was not a Member of Parliament at that time, should be fielded as United Front candidate from that constituency. Though, till then I had never met Shri Krishna Menon, I was his ardent admirer and, I jumped at the idea and persuaded the then Chief Minister Shri Ajoy Mukherjee and the senior party leader of ‘Bangla Congress’ Shri Sushil Dhara to agree to the proposal. Shri Jyoti Basu, the then Deputy Chief Minister and leader of CPM, late Shri

Indrajit Gupta, Leader of CPI and other leaders of the United Front also lent their support to my proposal. Shri Krishna Menon was fielded as United Front candidate with the party symbol of 'Bangla Congress' (as the seat was allotted to 'Bangla Congress'). I volunteered to be his Chief Election Agent and he won the seat by an overwhelming majority from a totally rural Bengal constituency. Such was the strength of the party and attraction of the personality of Shri Menon!

During the election campaign, I came in very close contact with Shri Krishna Menon and my admiration and respect for him increased day by day. While we revered Pandit Nehru as the creator and prime articulator of India's foreign policy, we saw Shri Krishna Menon as his able lieutenant and accomplished representative in the world fora. As a speaker he was forceful and logical. His wit and humour kept the audience spell bound.

Incidentally, you may find it interesting to know that I used to act as a translator, from English to Bengali, for Shri Krishna Menon. During the course of his election campaign, services of the Principal of a local college were engaged to translate his speeches. As all of you know Shri Menon's intellectual capacity and articulation encompassed world politics, neo-colonialism, danger to world peace, disarmament, all these became the contents of his speech. Quite naturally, all these blew over the heads of the rural audience of Midnapur when literally translated by the Principal of the local college. Seeing a total lack of response from the crowd, Shri Menon thought that the Principal was not good enough and lacked the knowledge of English language, though he translated every word literally and correctly.

As a hardcore political activist, I recognised the problem and after 2-3 public meetings, I decided to translate his speech myself and made a full fledged political speech, which was more appropriate and acceptable to the local audience and sure enough this speech was received with thunderous applaud. Shri Menon was quite happy and satisfied and he carried the impression that I was the best English knowing man in the locality, which I was not. I was later on elected to Rajya Sabha on my party nomination and had a very long innings before I entered the Lok Sabha in 2004. That, of course, is a different story.

The sentiment behind the annual Krishna Menon Memorial Lecture series is the nation's grateful acknowledgement of the contribution of its great souls such as Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Krishna

Menon, among others, not only towards the ultimate freedom and independence of India, but also towards the onerous and uphill task of nation building. As Krishna Menon wrote in 1971, “...*The building of a modern India needs the purposeful channelisation of the entire energies of her people towards well defined goals.*”

Let me be a little provocative. What is India? Is it a Nation or a Civilisation? Let me quote Nehru to seek some answers. He said, “...*She is like some ancient palm leaf on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously. All of those existed in our conscious or sub-conscious selves, though we may not be aware of them, and they had gone to build up the complex and mysterious personality of India*”. We are an ancient civilization and a modern nation state. While we may justifiably bask in the glory of our past, it is for the future of India that each one of us must contribute with hard work and dedication, to build layer upon layer of a modern nation state.

A nation usually has three essential attributes, namely, well defined territory, political unity and recognition by other states and international law. Legal nationality with a well-defined territory is not enough to build a strong and vibrant nation state. The cementing factor in nationhood has to be a substantive “national consciousness” or “national sentiment”. National integration would mean growth of an attitude of mind, whereby it becomes natural and normal for every citizen to regard loyalty to the nation to be above group or sectional loyalties: every group or section of the nation subordinates its interests to national interests: and conversely, the national government thinks of the interests of every citizen and of every group and section of the nation. The great leaders and the ordinary people of India made many sacrifices in the last century to achieve freedom and independence. Let us, the citizens of India in this century ensure that their Herculean effort has not gone in vain.

As the civilian head of the Defence Ministry, which encompasses the vast military arm of the nation, I am conscious of the “they” and ‘we” divide between the civilian and military sides of our society, that permeates not just the Defence Ministry but almost all sections of our country. While such bifurcation may be conducive to carrying out effectively the assigned tasks of the military and civilian wings of our administration, a general divide of our society along such lines is not helpful in the higher task of nation

building, for which each of us has our duties and responsibilities. An important goal of our government is to bridge this gap in our collective consciousness.

Let me begin with our Armed Forces. Let us look at some of their attributes which have strengthened the democratic structure of our nation. The first amongst those is the apolitical behaviour of our Armed Forces. The leadership of political establishment has been fully accepted and Armed Forces have carried out their duties with integrity and dedication. If we look back at many other contemporary neo-liberated countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America we find that though they embarked on the path of Presidential or Parliamentary form of democracy, they could not sustain the sophisticated democratic system and fell into the hands of Military Junta. Such examples are not lacking in our neighbourhood!

The members of India's Armed Forces are disciplined, professionally competent and imbued with a spirit of sacrifice. When a soldier joins service he pledges himself to the code of a warrior, which is

*“I am a warrior, defending my Nation is my Dharma
I will: -
Train my mind, body and spirit to fight.
Excel in all devices and weapons of war – present and
future.
Always protect the weak.
Be truthful and forthright.
Be humane, cultured and compassionate.
Fight and embrace the consequences willingly.
God give me the strength that I ask nothing of you”*

I feel these sentiments must find an echo in the civilian side also. The nature of battle may differ, the type of weaponry may vary but at each stage of nation building we have to fight many a battle to overcome the odds. These qualities are what we should strive for in every citizen of our country, not just when they are residing within the country but also when they live and work abroad, temporarily or for long periods of time. After all, when we travel overseas, we are all India's unofficial ambassadors and how we conduct ourselves reflects directly on the prestige and the goodwill of the nation in the eyes of the global community of mankind.

The programme aims to build up young men and women with strong minds and bodies so that they become good leaders and useful citizens. The 13 lakh NCC cadets undergo stints at various training camps, including National Integration Camps, Leadership Camps and Rock Climbing Camps, which are an important part of the NCC curriculum. The camps help in developing camaraderie, teamwork, dignity of labour and self-confidence. The NCC movement should be enlarged and more of our youth should be encouraged to join in our effort at nation building. Of equal importance is the need for each NCC cadet and leader to pass on his training and spirit to his siblings, friends and those around him.

Our men and women in uniform must also take up this role model task in civil society. After all the military does not exist in isolation of civil society. It is through the family that the personnel of the armed forces are linked to civil society. Here in their family role, our men in uniform have the greatest opportunity to pass on their training and guiding spirit to the members of their families, especially those younger than them. It is my hope that each and every member of the Armed Forces of India will take this task as seriously as he does his assigned duties. The Ministry of Defence encourages and promotes both academic and adventure activities through autonomous institutions like the Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis at New Delhi and the Mountaineering Institutes at Darjeeling and Uttarkashi. At such places too, the military and civil officials and laypersons interact in close proximity and this provides further opportunities for civil-military interaction, which leads to beneficial results to both.

I would not like to give the impression to this audience and to my countrymen, the majority of who would identify with the civil institutions of the country, that in the nation building exercise, the teaching and learning process is only a one-way affair, i.e., from the military to the civil side. Just as civil society has much to imbibe from the military's discipline, self-confidence and brotherhood, the military too can absorb a lot from the civil side in its own development and improvement.

Compassion and tolerance, I believe are two fundamental attributes of any great civilization. Love for mankind and help for those less fortunate than you is the fountainhead of humanity. Civil society, especially through non-governmental and voluntary organizations has taken a lead role in this area. The military units of the country need to absorb the ideals of

compassion, tolerance and adjustability, to live and work in all sorts of circumstances, not all of them to our liking. Many of our brethren in the Armed Forces live in seclusion, away from the humdrum of civil life inside the cantonment or an exclusive and fenced off military establishment. I have often thought of the cantonment in any urban area, as a city within a city. It has neat and well-lit roads with well-positioned signage and rows upon rows of neat and tidy buildings. People within the cantonment go about their work with the minimum of fuss and noise. Those of us who live on the outside, and who have had the good fortune of visiting a cantonment, yearn for the day when the rest of the city would also look and behave like the military establishment. However, the reality on the outside is quite different. While civil society is constantly facing and tackling the good, the bad and the ugly side of life, especially in urban areas, the military man is ensconced in his protected environment away from the many challenges that are encountered on the other side of the fence, except perhaps, when he goes home during furlough. This makes adjustment to life in civil society particularly difficult for many members of our Armed Forces. The problem is compounded when you realize that vast majority of our jawans are retired from the Armed Forces even before they reach forty years of age. How can civil and military society cooperate in this area?

Other than helping the civil administration in counter insurgency operations in certain sections of the country, our military capabilities, which are undergoing modernization on a rapid scale, and whose basic purpose is the defence of the realm of India, are also being geared for increasing use for aiding the civil administration for tackling natural and man-made disasters. Most crisis situations have a military and a civil component to them. In some cases, such as an earthquake, the civil element is expected to react first and subsequently use the assistance of the military for additional relief and rehabilitation. In other cases, such as aggression/intervention by the Armed Forces, the military element came first, while the civil administration was to have followed closely behind the military campaign. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the civil-military or military-civil reaction to any crisis situation should move together in conjunction and coordination rather than in a 'they' and 'us' fashion. This is already happening in our country as seen during the reaction to the Asian tsunami crisis, during the widespread floods in the country last year and during the massive earthquake in Jammu

and Kashmir last October. The services rendered by Armed Forces to provide relief to the effected persons during these disasters were indeed splendid and won widespread appreciation and admiration from all, not only in India but in the outside world also. Even in the midst of our own tragedy, we, in true Indian tradition, extended our hand of help and co-operation to other effected countries also.

In this field of disaster management, there is a need for fine-tuning, including in the realm of building up capabilities. This is one area where civil-military cooperation for nation building can be strengthened immediately in a short time, and government has already taken steps in that direction. However, for this transformation to be entirely successful the bureaucracies on both sides, civil and military, will have to initiate changes in attitudes and work together for the nation rather than as separate compartments, with one side trying to outdo the other. I presume this sort of cooperation and coordination is needed not just between the military and civil administrations of the country but also between different agencies both at the Centre and the States.

Honourable Chairperson, Distinguished Youth Ministers and other delegates from various Countries, ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, I deem it a privilege to be able to participate in this first ever World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth. I would like to congratulate both the United Nations as well as the Government of Portugal for taking this initiative. However, I consider this conference as part of a continuum of initiatives taken all over the world particularly since the International Youth Year 1985, to address the various concerns of youth. I was, in fact, very eagerly looking forward to this Conference.

In view of the changing socio economic scenario, it has now been decided to reformulate the National Youth Policy in order to make it more need based and in tune with current requirements. After widespread deliberations with all the stakeholders, a new National Youth Policy has been formulated and is under finalization. The underlying theme of the New Policy is Youth Empowerment.

A National Programme of Action for Youth is also being developed simultaneously for an effective implementation of the New National Youth Policy with an effective mechanism for its evaluation and monitoring at all levels.

India is largely an agricultural country and so, most of our young people live in villages. Hence needs of rural youth are particularly taken care of. Rapid urbanization is leading to migration of youth to urban centres and the rural youth who migrate to cities in search of education and employment are sometimes unable to cope with the alien situation leading to psychological maladjustments and risky behaviour. Special efforts are made to help this group of young people. Similarly, special programmes have been designed for youth with disabilities, other marginalized youth, including socially and economically backward sections.

Opportunities for Youth

Our thrust is on providing access for youth to education, employment, health and other services to afford them better living conditions. Efforts are being made to provide youth with ample opportunities to develop their skills, capabilities, personality and become good citizens of the country. Youth in India today, are much more sensitized than before and there is a growing demand for a recognition of their rights.

Student youth are encouraged to take up programmes on education, health, community services etc. on a voluntary basis through their participation in schemes like the National

Service Scheme and the National Cadet Corps. Government of India also supports the programmes of Bharat Scouts and Guides. The student youth of these organizations participate in the nation building process taking up special programmes on literacy, BIV/AIIDS, drug abuse, environment enrichment etc. In addition to these schemes, we also have a number of student youth associations and youth wings of political parties, who also take part in nation building activities.

Like wise, the non student youth in the villages are mobilized through the network of Youth Clubs affiliated to the Nehru Yuva Kendras. It is estimated that about 8 million youth are participating in various activities through over 1 lakh 60 thousand youth clubs of the Nehru Yuva Kendras. In addition, India is fortunate to have a host of Non Governmental Organizations which support youth programmes.

Government of India have launched schemes to promote Adventure, National Integration, provide assistance for training of youth in skill development etc. Government of India also supports the Youth Hostel movement and there are 50 Youth Hostels already functional in the country motivating young people to travel to places of historical, cultural and educational interest.

To encourage training , research , guidance and documentation for youth work and youth programmes, a national level apex agency, Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development has been established to act as a think tank for youth programmes, policies and implementation strategies.

Now it is proposed to introduce a new scheme, namely, National Reconstruction Corps which could provide opportunities to young people to participate in the nation building endeavours; on a whole time basis working in their own community settings.

Empowering Youth

In the employment sector, the thrust is on providing opportunities for self employment, entrepreneurship development and skill training. Special employment schemes like, National Employment Assurance Scheme(EAS), Prime Minister's Rojgar Yojana, Jawhar Rojgar Yojana, etc., have been introduced wherein minimum employment and wage earning opportunities are provided for poor youth in the rural areas.

The initiatives have been further strengthened with the promotion and development of Small Scale Industries. 16 million persons were employed in the small scale sector in 1996-97. An important scheme called, Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment(TRYSEM) is being

implemented. Young women are provided training in skills and encouraged to form thrift and micro credit groups.

To provide access to information on education, employment and other services, dissemination of information is accorded high priority. Employment guidance and counseling centres have been functioning in the country.

Human rights education and awareness on gender equity are being carried out through youth organizations. A National Commission for Women was set up by the Government of India and a National Human Rights Commission had also been set up to advise on the policies and programmes.

Young people are involved in health services. India has a well designed health programmes. Young people are involved in creating awareness on health issues, more particularly on drug abuse, HIV/AIDS etc. Primary Health Centres and Village Health Guides provide basic health care facilities to the youth. To prevent drug abuse by young people, Government of India has adopted the strategy of supply control and demand reduction of drugs through stringent enforcement of Anti Narcotic Laws, treatment and rehabilitation of addicts and involvement of community and youth in the process.

International cooperation

India has signed MOUs with many neighbouring and other countries for undertaking youth exchange programmes. Young people are encouraged to travel within the country as well as to other countries and share their experiences and culture. They are encouraged to understand each others culture and traditions and to develop friendship and peace.

Young scientists are encouraged to undertake research in Science and technology. The performance of some of our young scientists even in the developed nations is a testimony to this fact.

I am, indeed, hopeful that the deliberations of this conference will have far reaching effects on the future policies and programmes for the development of youth all over the world.