

Inaugural address by Mrs D. Purandeswari MoS, HRD (HE) On The “Young Visionary 2007- Stakeholders In Sustainability” Organised by The Tehelka Foundation At The National Bal Bhavan, New Delhi On 12th December 2007.

Puneeta, other distinguished friends and guests,

It gives me a great pleasure to inaugurate this morning a conference organized by the Tehelka Foundation on “Young Visionary 2007: Stalk-holders in Sustainability” I am glad to observe so many young students present here who will have an opportunity to interact with academics, scientists, activists and experts on various facets of development and growth and who in the process of interaction will be able to build up an awareness about their rights and responsibilities in regard to the country’s development and growth.

Despite my heavy schedule of work in Delhi, I have accepted your invitation for two primary reasons, first because it was difficult, if not impossible, to say ‘no’ to a request received from Puneeta, and secondly, because, I wanted to have direct interaction with an Youth Association like yours. I should convey from this pulpit to my young audience. After some reflection, the concept and practice of nation-building and the role of youth power in relation thereto emerged in my mind as a suitable subject to talk to my young friends on the occasion.

Half of the Indian population is below 24 years of age and there are to-day around 120 million youth in India covering the population between the age groups of 15 to 35 years constitutes 330 million comparing nearly 30% of our population. This gives us an idea of the vast human resource and tremendous Youth force which can be harnessed profitably for the country’s development.

India’s leading philosopher-statesman Dr. S. Radhakrishnan used to observe 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 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 focus their energy and strive relentlessly with hard work, dedication, determination and fortitude in order to fulfill the onerous and uphill task of nation building.

The National Intelligence Council (NIC), a division of America’s Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), in its 2005 report entitled “Shaping/ The Global Future” avers that India and China will be the economic heavyweights of the 21st century. Barring a few upheavals in these countries, the rise of these two powers is a virtual certainty,

according to the NIC. This bold and confident prediction comes in the wake of several other similar reports that also dwell on the inevitability of the rise of India and China. The talk of India attaining or aspiring to be an economic superpower is, therefore, not a mere daydream unrelated to the realities of the situation. India, by all accounts, is fast emerging on the world stage as an economically powerful and a technologically vibrant nation firmly fixed on its way to global power.

Knowledge, thus has come to play an important role not only in the socio-economic development of any state but also in enhancing the level of maturity of a society in tackling the problem of its vulnerability in this globalised world, which in due course can lead to protracted conflicts of various kinds. Asia, unfortunately is failing to understand the emergence of

“Knowledge-State” hence it has not taken adequate steps in this direction. This has seriously undermined the prospects of economic prosperity, peace and stability of the countries and manifold development people of the region. Hence, there is an imperative to comprehend the impediments towards the development of a viable ‘Knowledge-Society,’ which can help the countries of this region to build-up a fast-track ‘Knowledge-Economy’ and transform itself into a knowledge-State.

The Knowledge Economy

In contemporary world the status of knowledge economy can be best determined by the frequency of ‘level of information’, where economy indicates the level of exchange available to individuals in interaction. Symmetry of information in society at different levels is an important prerequisite for the knowledge economy. *The stage of equilibrium of knowledge economy is reached when the existing asymmetry moves towards a positive direction and attains symmetry.* The very dynamics of the market economy depend on access to information. The individual can interact for an economic exchange only when they have access to right and adequate information. The asymmetry of the information between individuals or groups constitutes the level of information, which determines the price of the commodity for exchange. A low level of information or lack of access to information leads to exploitation by those having high levels of information. Knowledge economy is therefore an important prerequisite of market economy.

In 1993, the Hon’ble Supreme Court of India, declared that right to education was a fundamental right. Earlier it was considered that the Government’s obligation to elementary education was restricted only to Article 45 of the Constitution in Part IV thereof which was not juridically enforceable. The 1993 judgment of 1993 made it clear for the first time that the right to education as a fundamental right emanated from the Right to Life in Article 21 of the Constitution. The debate on the need for a separate provision in the Constitution making right to education as an enforceable right started seriously thereafter and in 2002, the 86th Constitutional amendment was enacted to make education a fundamental right in terms of the newly inserted Article 21-A which declared: **“The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine.”** The contemplated legislative intervention in Article.21-A, when implemented, would bring about a metamorphosis in universalizing education on a mass scale.

May I, however, point out that long before Art.21-A was written into our Constitution in 2002, we could conceptualize and bring into operation a centrally sponsored scheme to boost the universal primary education and to improve the nutritional status of the children of primary classes. This was started pursuant to the FM’s Budget Speech in the Lok Sabha on 15-03-1995. A National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education or the Mid Day Meal Scheme was launched on 15th August 1995 to

give a boost to universal primary education. It was expected to increase enrolment, attendance and retention and improve the nutritional status of children in primary classes in Government, local body and Government aided schools. From October 2002, the programme has been extended to children studying in the EGS/AIE centers. The Mid Day Meal Programme through which we have tried to boost the nutritional intake of our poor children and to increase the retention rate in school, is not like any other ordinary Government Scheme. Hailed by the world-renowned Economist and Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen “as the biggest pro-poor initiative since the land reforms of Seventies” the Mid Day Meal Scheme in 9.52 lakh schools for 12 crore children is fast firming up complete with a well defined implementation and monitoring process. For us, therefore it is a mission, a matter of faith which we have to fulfill in any case at any cost. With our unflinching belief that “feeding children is feeding

development” the scheme is sure to enter final phase of qualitative stabilization very soon.

The other main vehicle at present for providing universal education to all children is a comprehensive programme called Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), which was launched in 2001-02. This programme was built upon the experience of several primary education programmes that preceded it. It is a partnership programme between the Central and State Governments, which seeks to improve the performance of the school system through a community-owned approach, with specific focus on the provision of quality education. SSA is a time-bound mission, with the objectives of ensuring Universalization of Elementary Education and bridging of gender and social gaps by 2010.

National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL), is an important component of SSA, which provides additional support for girls’ education in educationally backward blocks by way of girl-child friendly school, and supply of stationery and uniforms to under – privileged / disadvantaged girls. Another important component of SSA is the Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternative and Innovative Education (EGS & AIE), which is specially designed to provide to children in school-less

habitations and out-of-school children, access to elementary education. The scheme supports flexible strategies for out-of-school children through bridge courses, residential camps, drop-in centers, summer camps, and remedial coaching.

Since the introduction of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2001, State Governments have reported a significant decline in the number of children not attending school. When the programme began, the number of out-of-school children in India was estimated to be about 39 million; since then, this figure has fallen steadily, and in November 2005 it was reported to be around 10 million and the number is since declining gradually. SSA was launched to ensure that all children between the ages of six and 14 would attend school and receive quality elementary education within a fixed time period. Central outlays for SSA were increased from Rs.1600 crore in 2001 to Rs.7156 crore in 2005-06. A 2% education cess was levied from 2004 to provide additional finances for elementary education and the rate of cess has been increased to 3% during the current year's budget (2007-08).

India is emerging on the world stage as the largest economically powerful, culturally vibrant, multi-ethnic and multi-religious democracy. With a population of over 1 billion people, an expanding middle-class of 300 million and GDP growth rate of nearly ten percent, India cannot be ignored. Together we are building a strong and resurgent nation whose confident march forward is being keenly watched by the whole world. What has expedited India's growth is our belief that a country's educational system is central to its competitiveness. Of the 9 parameters used by the World Economic Forum, Geneva to judge an economy's competitiveness, 5 are connected to the quality and quantity of its education system. On the whole, higher education in India has done extremely well in training people. That we are the 11th largest exporter of services in the world, when we are the 29th largest exporter of goods, says it clearly enough. That there are concerns in the West about the threat from Indian service exports, speaks volume of the strength of our human resources. The IITs especially, have become a global brand. If any proof is needed that it is the quality of human capital that determines the economic performance of a country, then it is India. We have to leverage our young demographic profile to sustain and enhance this advantage. How our education system performs is therefore critical to this process.

Young friends, I firmly believe that our national progress depends, crucially, on the ways and means through which the youth are encouraged and nurtured as a positive force. In this context, I recall the hope-inspiring-words of India's illustrious saint-patriot, Swami Vivekananda who declared: (I quote)

“My hope of the future lies in the Youths – Youths of character and intelligence – who can sacrifice their lives for the good of the country,”
(unquote)

With these words I have great pleasure in delivering this inaugural address and I have no doubt that through years and decades to come you would continue to make relentless efforts for realizing the mission of all-round development of our motherland.

Jai Hind.
