

**ADDRESS BY MRS D. PURANDESWARI (HRD) GOVERNMENT OF INDIA AS CHIEF GUEST ON THE CONCURRENT SESSION ENTITLED 'BUILDING BRIDGES: EDUCATION & DIASPORA KNOWLEDGE NETWORK' AT 7<sup>TH</sup> EDITION OF THE PRAVASI BHARATIYA DIVAS (PBD) ON 8-1-2009 IN CHENNAI.**

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Respected Shri Vayalar Ravi, Hon'ble Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs, Dr. M. Karunanidhi Chief Minister, Tamilnadu other distinguished guests and friends and ladies and gentlemen. I deem it a great honour and privilege to have been invited to be Chief Guest in the Concurrent Session titled 'Building Bridges: Education & Diaspora Knowledge Network' at this 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the Pravasi Bharati Divas of Indian Diaspora. It is a great pleasure to know there are presently more than 25 million overseas Indians who are residing in various countries across the globe and that they make it a point to meet once in a year in India to renew their relationship with the mother country. I welcome all members of the Indian Diaspora present here on this occasion to-day and wish them all, belated though, a happy and prosperous new year.

The annual Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention provides a much needed platform to the Overseas Indian Community for exchange of views on ways and means to fulfill their aspirations and expectations from the land of their ancestors. It also provides opportunities for exploring mutually beneficial trade and business relationships and for networking among the community. Celebration of the day every year symbolizes the continued interest of the government of India in the progress and well-being of the Overseas Indian Community.

In 2008, the Prime Minister announced at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas the establishment of the India Development Foundation (IDF), as a non-profit trust to serve as the focal point for Diaspora philanthropy in India. Diaspora philanthropy is not a new phenomenon. Apart from making contributions at times of national calamity, like earthquakes and the tsunami, several overseas Indians are already engaged in various development initiatives in India. Philanthropy is an ideal area where a number of new partnerships can be built, existing ones strengthened and the range and reach scaled up. The IDF will assist overseas Indians to contribute to the cause of education, health and rural development in their erstwhile home villages, districts or states, thus providing a strong public-private partnership bridge between overseas Indians and their target beneficiaries. The idea of PIO university also is gaining momentum with the government approving the basic policy framework for the university. The matter, I understand, is at an important stage of consideration.

It is a matter of great pleasure that the NRIs from India have of late started taking greater interest in the development of their motherland which they left years back. One reason for this I suppose, is that the Western World has started recognizing India as a rising power, and the global superpower, the U.S.A., has recently accepted her as a nuclear partner on the successful finalization of Indo-American Nuclear Deal. This is a tremendous challenge and an opportunity for all of us including the non resident Indians. You should no longer consider yourselves as impoverished immigrants fleeing a poor country but regard yourselves as new bonds bringing emerging India closer to the

developed world, by hastening the process of India's growth and development. Your land of opportunity now, is indeed, India. Her growth potential is limitless, with a billion consumers thirsting for good life, with a booming economy showering riches on entrepreneurs, and with a vast market capable of sustaining even the most developed nation of the world. A vast majority of the NRIs in different parts of the world, it appears, have started realizing this and so instead of clamouring for green cards many NRIs are applying for residency permits in India. I welcome this change in the attitude of the NRIs and hope that in the years to come they will take a more pro- active role in the development of their original motherland which reared them up and equipped them with the basic qualification without which their desire to go to foreign land for career advancement would have remained an unfulfilled and a distant dream.

India's economy has been one of the stars in global business in recent years. The growth has been supported by markets reforms, huge inflows of FDI, rising foreign exchange reserves, both an IT and Real estate boom, and a flourishing capital market. Like most of the world, however, India has faced testing economic times in 2008. Going forward, the new economy is defined by a simple question that has no simple answers – where do we go from here. The game keeps changing which means that the job of high impact leaders is to anticipate the next wave, to make sense of the new world of business and to out think the competition.

Keeping this in mind, corporate India is looking forward to finishing strong in 2008, while also moving progressively into 2009 and most importantly, keeping their eyes on the prize. As

organizations evaluate the performance of the year gone by and set ambitious goals for 2009, they are making the future worth looking forward again.

Many economists have been wistfully saying that if India had adopted an export-oriented growth model, its economy would have grown at an average rate of 9% (if not a double digit) rate in the last ten years. However, they don't hesitate now to happily assert that India has much greater ability to withstand an 'export shock' than any other large and fast-growing economy. In other words, there's considerable scope for the country to pep up the aggregate demand for its output, notwithstanding factors external. Of course, investment can increase aggregate demand but with a time lag, and so, large part of this potential can't be tapped to address the current situation. India is also severely constrained in terms of its ability to step up public spending further (fiscal deficit, properly accounted, would aggravate to about 8% of GDP this fiscal). This implies that large amounts private funds are required for creating a sudden flux of investment. I call upon all our Indian diasporas and NRI's to supplement the efforts of the people and the Government of India in this national endeavour.

Today's global economy places a premium on education, creativity, innovation and knowledge. India with its impressive array of top engineering, medical and management institutions has proved itself an able participant in the global knowledge and technology-driven economy. About 125 of top multinational companies such as Dell, Microsoft, Google, etc have research centers in India. Process engineering, reserve engineering

innovation-based industries. New sectors such as automotive design and development, biotechnology, Nanotechnology, defence, and other are among the fastest-growing industry sectors.

At the other end, India still suffers from a development deficit, particularly when it comes to education. 16% of villages do not have a primary school within a three kilometer radius, and 7 million school-age children still do not go to school. Of those that do a high proportion never goes beyond grade 8, and many drop out before that. Vocational training is practically non-existent, and higher educational institutions have an enrolment of just 12%, well under the figure of countries such as China, Malaysia, etc. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan program for universal primary education has made commendable progress; yet much remains to be done, especially to improve the quality of teachers and teaching. A National Skill Development Council has been set up to create an infrastructure of skill development institutes across the Country that will provide training to 10 million youth annually. The higher education system is being scaled up to add more centers of excellence, including 8 new IITs, 7 new IIMs, 16 new central universities, 14 world-class universities, and five new Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research. The process is already underway and several of the proposed new institutions are already functioning. The government also proposes to set up a national network that will connect the higher education institutions to enable greater collaboration and co-creation of knowledge.

While on the problem of education I would like to refer to two specific problems in the education sector- one relating to faculty shortage and the other relating to infrastructural deficiency. In higher education, there is roughly 25% shortage in faculty and the problem will be aggravated because as I mentioned just now that our higher education sector is being scaled up by adding more centers of excellence. In majority of the countries where they are based, the Indian community members are among the most educated citizens. Their drive for education and their significant presence in certain sectors of the economy have earned them high respect as valued members of the community. Today, these highly skilled people have become a formidable 'brain resource' for the country. Moreover, with the advent of economic liberalization, a reverse brain drain has been visible as many overseas Indians may return to India, adding to the knowledge resources of the country. They may to a great extent tide over the problem of faculty shortage. These who choose to stay back might, for short periods, serve our universities and centers of excellence, which will go a long way in boosting up the quality of education also.

The second problem is of infrastructural deficiency which arises because we require more school buildings, class rooms, kitchens for Mid-day meals, toilets etc for our schools; and huge lands for college/university buildings, hostels including ladies hostels, staff quarters, libraries and laboratories commensurate with centers of excellence that we have conceptualized to develop. Our NRI brothers and sisters can assist us in participating in the investment process side by side with the governmental agencies. Also the philanthropic NRIs may setup chairs in the Institutes and

universities in memory of their near and dear ones and they can institute also scholarship schemes for the meritorious and schemes of financial assistance for the poor, disabled and marginalized students.

The immense knowledge capital of the overseas Indian community can be a major factor in boosting and accelerating India's development process. The task ahead is to channelise the font knowledge in a systematic and organized manner so that their knowledge, expertise, skills and resources can be successfully leveraged. An institutional framework for this would include Pravasis as knowledge partners, domestic organizations as stakeholders and the government as a facilitator.

The Diaspora knowledge Network is envisaged as an electronic platform to generate ideas and transform them into community action. It will serve as a point of connectivity among all overseas Indians, wherever based, and will help them articulate their 'one-ness' share their knowledge resources, and develop common programs for partnering with India's development efforts. It will be accompanied by a full-fledged program of training and educational visits of PLO and their participation in projects for innovation and technology promotion in India. The idea is to formulate a 'virtual think tank' to assist in India's development, including in areas such as youth and skill development, community and public health, local governance and capacity building, and women empowerment.

Knowledge is the key to future progress, as it has been the differentiator of past development of nations. India, with its developmental challenges and immense 25 million human capital base overseas, cannot afford to let the opportunity of synergies slip. It is imperative to devise and facilitate the means for knowledge collaboration between India and its Diaspora.

Many NRI Indians whom I have met in foreign countries have told me that it was not easy for them to forget their motherland which has nurtured them in the early part of their life and provided education and upbringing and made them, as it were to stand on their legs. This is a very natural sentiment for we assign to mother and motherland a position superior to heaven, **“Janani Janmabhoomischa Swargadapi Gariyasi”** In this context, the words of India’s first Nobel Laureate Gurudev Rabindra Nath Tagore are relevant and worth quoting. **“I love India, not because I cultivate the idolatry of geography, nor because I have had the chance to be born in her soil but because she has saved through tumultuous ages the living words that have issued from the illuminated consciousness of her great ones”**. We in India share this noble sentiment of patriotism of our great poet. We would like to assure our NRI brothers and sisters, that wherever they may be, they are our part and parcel of the Indian psyche. We would never lose sight of their problems and difficulties but would stand unitedly strengthened by mutual ties of togetherness between them and this land of their forefathers.

Jai Hind.