

**ADDRESS OF SHRI P.K.MAHANTA, CHIEF MINISTER OF ASSAM
IN THE FIRST CONVOCATION OF IIT-GUWAHATI
19TH MAY, 1999**

Respected Chairman, Governor of Assam Lt. General (Rtd.) S.K.Sinha, Director, Professor D.N.Buragohain, Members of the Board of Governors of the Institute, Deans, Heads of Departments, Members of the Senate, Faculty members, staff and students of the Institute, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen and the graduating students,

It is my pleasure to be here with you on the first Convocation of the Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati. It is very satisfying to note that the first batch of the B.Tech. students of the Institute is graduating today. I am confident that, like their counterparts from the other IITs, they will also become some of the finest engineers and scientists of tomorrow. I take this opportunity to congratulate the faculty, staff and the students of the Institute on this historic day of the first convocation of the Institute.

The IITs were established to modernise technical education in the country. An IIT at Guwahati has extended the reach of quality engineering education to a region where its scope so far was quite limited. Setting up of the sixth IIT at Guwahati has heralded the emergence of a new academic culture in the North East region.

The five IITs at Kharagpur, Kanpur, Madras, Bombay and Delhi, established during 1951 to 1961, had already earned world-wide fame for excellence in undergraduate and postgraduate engineering education and research. IIT Guwahati became the sixth member of this prestigious family of 'Institutions of National Importance'. While conforming broadly to the general model and objectives of the IIT system, this new IIT is expected to have many special features, taking into account the latest advances in education and technology, and to address the special needs of the Northeast region, where it is located.

I have great affection and a high sense of belonging to the IIT Guwahati as I myself had the opportunity of signing the historic Assam Accord with the Central Government as the then President of the All Assam Students' Union in 1985, through which the IIT Guwahati could come into being. I am happy to note that within less than a year of its formal inception in September 1994, IIT Guwahati started its academic

programmes in rented buildings in the city from August 1995. It is a matter of great satisfaction that the first batch of B.Tech students who were admitted in the 1995-96 academic session have successfully completed the programme today.

From the beginning, the ideal before the IITs was to produce engineer-scientists instead of engineer-managers. Clearly those trained by the IITs were not meant to be just specialists but men and women who were proficient in a wide spectrum of areas. Even though the IITs account for less than 2 percent of the total number of engineering graduates at the degree level produced in the country, they occupy a unique position as the IITs exert tremendous influence on the whole spectrum of technical education and industry. The IITs have to play a pioneering role as far as new technology is concerned. The latest technology is always the preserve of the inventor. That is what gives them an edge over the other competitors even within their own country. No country can progress unless it becomes self-reliant in R&D. I hope this IIT will make an endeavour in this direction.

Fortunately, the character of the Indian market is changing. With the liberalisation of the economy, there is much greater awareness of the fact that sooner or later, Indian industry will have to stand on its own feet and learn to compete in the international market. This in turn would mean that Indian industry has to keep pace with new technologies. The changes in the economic scenario have already begun to influence certain trends. Brain drain, for instance, is still a problem but not as acute as it used to be during the earlier years. In terms of initiative and enterprise, it is the IIT-trained graduates who can make a more meaningful contribution to the Indian industry in the years to come. We can hopefully look forward to it.

All of you know that the North Eastern region including our State of Assam is endowed with vast natural resources. This region holds one-third of the total hydel power potential of the country. The vast water resources of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries, if utilised properly, can very well transform the face of the economy of the region. The huge mineral deposits, abundant forest resources call for proper harnessing for industrial development of the region. The region is to be made self-sufficient in agricultural production. We have the resources, but are lacking in proper infrastructure. We have given much emphasis on industrial development and have adopted a new Industrial Policy for

Assam giving attractive incentives to prospective entrepreneurs. We are even calling upon NRIs and industrial houses in our country and abroad to come to Assam and set up industries here. A new change is taking place in the industrial scenario in our State and the region. Rapid industrialisation of the region based on its local resources has to be taken as a challenge by all of us. In this regard, the engineer-scientists produced by IIT Guwahati have a great responsibility to shoulder. I hope, they will be able to live up to the wishes and aspirations of the people of this backward region.

We must admit that inspite of all the technological advances, the conditions in the rural areas are still not as conducive and comfortable as it should have been. We must take our knowledge of science and technology to the rural areas to devise methods by which their standards of living could be raised.

In the coming years, to meet the challenges of the rapid growth of Science & Technology, technical skills of the highest order would be needed. We will have to be competitive on the world scene and contribute to the global economy. I hope this, IIT will provide strong and innovative leadership to the other technological Institutions of this part of the country in this endeavour. As the wishes and aspirations of the local people are involved in bringing this IIT here, their expectations are very high. Since it is undoubtedly the most important technical institution of the Northeast region, this Institute has a major role to play for this industrially backward part of the country. Let us make this IIT an instrument for a more industrialised and productive Northeast.

IIT Guwahati has been established nearly thirty-four years after the last IIT at Delhi was set up. During these years, the IIT system has matured and IIT Guwahati has the privilege of learning from the experiences of the other IITs as far as organising itself is concerned. I understand that most of the faculty members of IIT Guwahati have either had their education in another IIT or have already worked in one of them. It is heartening to see that they have brought their expertise acquired in the IIT system to lay the foundations of this Institute firmly.

Over the years the IITs have been able to make a name for themselves as one of the best and the cleanest institutions in its academic and administrative activities. This is because of the fact that the IIT system has built-in checks and balances that prevent any kind of deception and encourage reviews and self-criticism. IITs are also fortunate to have a

set of people with integrity and devotion who are ever alert. IIT Guwahati has to be an equal member in this fraternity of the IITs. So it has to function and be allowed to function like the other IITs in every respect. Otherwise it will lose its right to call itself an IIT.

This is an Institute of national importance set up for the first time here. One may ask what benefit the IIT will bring to the people of Assam in particular and the Northeast in general. An academic institute, that constantly endeavours to improve its standards, cannot promise immediate benefits of jobs, admissions or monetary profit, but one should not forget that an institution of this kind is an investment for the future and an instrument of change for the academic and work ethos for all around it - like a tree whose fruits can be reaped only at a later date.

I believe some of the students graduating today may be going abroad for higher studies. You had the best education that this Institute could give you. Wherever you are, you must remember that the Institute has given its best to you and, therefore, always think of how you can contribute to make IIT-Guwahati one of the most acclaimed Institutes of the world. I congratulate all of you once again and offer my best wishes to you all.

I thank Lt. Gen. (Rtd.) S.K. Sinha, Chairman of the Board of Governors, Prof. D.N. Buragohain, distinguished members of the Faculty and the administrative staff and the students for making this convocation a memorable event.

**Jai Aai Asom
Jai Hind.**