

Convocation Address

of

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Honourable Union Minister of Human Resource Development,
Government of India

at

The 15th Convocation

of

Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati

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Chairman, Board of Governors of IIT Guwahati, Dr. R. P. Singh; Director of the Institute, Prof. Gautam Barua; members of the Board of Governors; members of the Senate; distinguished guests to the Convocation; members of the faculty and staff; graduating students and their parents and guardians; ladies and gentlemen:

I am very glad to be here on to be part of the 15th convocation of IIT Guwahati. It is my first visit to this Institution and I am indeed impressed with the ambience of the campus.

IIT Guwahati is the result of the vision of our late Prime Minister, Shri Rajiv Gandhi, a visionary leader who wanted to take India into the 21st century, and was instrumental in setting it up to meet local aspirations. In its short existence of nearly two decades, this IIT has achieved many milestones. It has been able to develop a State of the Art infrastructure in this beautiful landscape. It has created advanced facilities for research and has regularly been getting a large number of sponsored research projects and consultancies. It was the first IIT to start a well subscribed undergraduate program in design. The infrastructure and facilities created here have helped it to attract constantly good faculty. I would like to congratulate each and every person associated with IIT Guwahati for working towards building this institution with sincerity and unfailing dedication and attaining visibility round the globe.

The demographic dividend is favourable for India and our young population is going to be an invaluable asset, if equipped appropriately with the knowledge and skills needed for empowering them. Quality education thus becomes an essential pre requisite for sustainable and responsible development. The two flagship programmes of the MHRD,

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan*, are aimed at universalization of elementary and secondary education respectively. Further the Government of India intends raising the gross enrolment ratio into the higher and technical education to 30% by the year 2020 from the current level of 18.8%. In this regard, we have embarked upon an ambitious program of capacity creation by starting Engineering programs in each Central University and establishing at least one National Institute of Technology and one Central University, in each state. Besides capacity creation, the teaching pedagogy also requires to be changed and improved to meet this explosion in demand as we are going to experience a continued faculty crunch at least for next several years.

North Eastern region today has seven Central Universities (NEHU, Assam University, Tezpur University, Manipur University, Rajiv Gandhi University Itanagar, Tripura University and Sikkim University) and eight NITs including 6 new NITs which are in different stages of development. Besides there are several Engineering Colleges both Govt. funded through the respective State Government as well as those in private sector. With the projected development of infrastructure and progressive industrialization in wake of the Government's LOOK EAST policy, more institutions imparting technical and higher education are likely to come up in this region. IIT Guwahati, being the only IIT in the Northeast region, has to act as a pace setter and provide academic, research and innovation leadership through active networking with all these existing and upcoming institutions. Your experience of successfully mentoring IIT Patna will be of great use here. As I have said before, pedagogy has to evolve to meet the explosion in demand. IIT Guwahati has already contributed substantially to the earlier efforts in this direction, for

example the National Program on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL). The commissioning of National Knowledge Network (NKN) has now facilitated sharing of lectures through virtual classrooms. I would like to see IIT Guwahati act as a regional hub of the National Knowledge Network and share its expertise and resources with other institutions of higher education and research through virtual class rooms and collaborative research. This joining of hands together will impart a greater level of education to all despite the constraints of geography, manpower and infrastructure. It should also emerge as an Institute of excellence in the South East Asia. The higher education scenario across the globe is changing and there is a need to come up with a comprehensive plan to meet the challenges and demands of the future. The focus is on higher level of training and skill development which is multidisciplinary in nature, cutting edge research in interdisciplinary areas and research innovations, development of newer technologies, processes and products, green initiatives, sustainability and re-skilling of technical workforce. The country cannot progress beyond a limit without a sound R&D base and self sufficiency in critical areas. China today spends more than one and a half percent of its gross domestic products on research and development whereas India spends less than one percent. This gap cannot be bridged by the Government alone and private sector and industry will have to make greater contributions for supporting R&D activities in the country. This calls for a focussed strategy for greater inter-institutional collaboration, industry-academia collaboration, as well as excellence in research and pedagogy at par with international standards. A robust monitoring mechanism to evaluate the impact of research being done in our institutions of higher learning in generating genuine new knowledge and application of its outcome is

also necessary. On its part, the Govt. will continue to focus on expansion, equity and excellence in all levels of education.

Even though the North-east has an abundance of natural resources it lags behind in terms of industrialization. Nature also throws up many challenges in the form of floods, earthquakes, landslides, etc. IIT Guwahati has a responsibility to both aid in the establishment of industry and also to help to mitigate natural disasters. I understand it is already engaged in a number of projects related to earthquakes and floods. Research in food processing can help give a boost to the marketing of fruits and vegetables. The petrochemical complex that is being set up in Assam requires downstream industries to use its output. IIT Guwahati can play a role in building technologies requiring low capital inputs. The local pollution free environment is also ideal for Electronics and Photonics production facilities and IIT Guwahati may take lead in this area. In view of its strategic importance, the Govt. is committed to substantially upgrade the infrastructure in this part of the country in coming years where, again, the technical expertise of IIT Guwahati will be useful. You are all aware of the activities of the BRO and its work in this region and I would urge to IIT Guwahati to look into this area. Another crucial area that IIT Guwahati can possibly concern itself is leveraging the might of the Brahmaputra for more effective infrastructural logistics. There is also a need to be more proactive in academic and research collaborations with reputed educational and research institutions in South-East Asia.

Now coming to my young friends. Your journey here comes to an end on this day and a new journey either in a job or in another academic program is about to commence. You should remember that the very

process of learning is never ending as long as one lives. While some part of learning is absorbed within the four walls of a class room, a laboratory or a workshop, a lot of it is imparted outside institutional confines through ordinary experience. All of it can be collectively called as education. Education in general leads to more productivity, more earning and more material well being. This is true at an individual level, as well as at the collective level. But please remember that while technical expertise may make a materially rich society, it may not necessarily be the most pleasant society to live in. A healthy society needs a moral compass and values such as honesty, compassion and humility that have been with us for centuries and their importance is universally accepted and felt. Education should not be looked upon merely as an instrument, as a means to achieve something else. Education should be valued because it enables a society to live better – materially and morally besides quenching the innate thrust for knowledge.

The contemporary conditions of the country's collective morality can make one pessimistic. It can give a sense that as a society our moral compass has gone awry somewhere. One may even be inclined to think that the spate of violence on women, the escalating corruption, the shrinking of the democratic space which enables a necessary ambience of debate and discussion is due to the improving material well-being of the country. Let me disabuse you of this notion. While high living standards enjoyed by small sections of the population may lead to crimes in a country where most of the people are deprived of basic amenities of life, this need not be the case. A truly educated society cultivates a genuine sense of fellow-feeling. Such a society shares the good fortunes rather than restricting them in narrow confines. The least

corrupt and most peaceful countries in North Europe also count among the top most countries in terms of per capita income. In sum, economic well-being need not invite fracturing of societal oneness. As young graduates about to step out into the teeming and multiple realities of contemporary India, I would urge you to think of your good fortune in stepping out of the portals of a premier educational institution such as this IIT. There is a lot of difference all of us can make without too much effort. By being good students, you have already fulfilled an important task. You will now have to take the work forward and see how best you can further maintain your academic orientation outside the classroom and strive for excellence. Striving for excellence is not a onetime effort. Rather to excel one has to do even the most common things in an uncommon way. And to do so “people of excellence go the extra mile to do what is right.” If you can, at some point in your careers, contribute something towards the education of others in society, then only as a whole you will perhaps qualify yourselves in the best manner possible as students and educators. Our country today needs teachers to inform, guide, mobilize and inspire us, and it is a sincere hope that more young people will consciously choose academic (teaching) as a career which enables society to make advances in its consciousness and to become more enlightened.

I congratulate you for your success and accomplishments and hope that you will contribute not for building only a literate India but an educated and empowered India and do your Alma mater and the country proud.