

CONVOCATION ADDRESS

OF

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Hon'ble Minister of Mines and DoNER

Government of India



सत्यमेव जयते

THE 12<sup>TH</sup> 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, members of the faculty and staff; graduating students and their parents and guardians; ladies and gentlemen:

I feel that it is a great honour and rare privilege to be present here on the occasion of the 12<sup>th</sup> Convocation of IIT Guwahati. The institute, in a short span of a decade and a half, has developed itself into one of the leading scientific and technological education and research centers in the country. I am happy to see this reflected in the excellent academic resources, and more importantly, in the vibrant teaching and research atmosphere in this beautiful campus. This is vital for nurturing young talents.

We have witnessed the epoch-making initiatives by the Government during the 11<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan. Our Hon'ble Prime Minister has rightly termed it as India's Educational plan. It has aimed at increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education to 15 per cent by 2011-12. The recent establishment of more IITs is a part of this initiative. I dream of more and more students having access to quality education which is the hallmark of IIT education.

Since the establishment of the first IIT about 60 years back, the IITs have become epicenters of excellence in engineering education. Their impact in engineering education has remained unchallenged despite the establishment of a large number of private and public institutions. To lead the way in the emerging scenario of an information and communication era, more and more disciplines in engineering, science and the humanities and social sciences have become part of the IIT curricula and the student intakes have increased manifold. IITs and IITians play a significant role in shaping directions for the new science and technology institutes in the country. They have shared this responsibility well, as is evident from recent mentoring of the young IITs by the older ones.

In the context of challenges with regard to economic development that our nation has set out to achieve, research and development initiatives become important. IITs have significant contributions to make to help achieve these targets. I am impressed by the

contributions made by IIT Guwahati and their impact on society as a whole. The steady growth of R&D investments in technological, scientific and social science research is an indicator of our country's goal of unbounded spread of knowledge. As centres of knowledge, it is our responsibility to lead the way in making our approach more inclusive so that it meets the needs of our people. We need to carry out research for the betterment of the lives of our populace, to feed the hungry, and to reduce environmental damage and climate change.

The present day knowledge economy also makes it imperative to carry out cutting edge research, to innovate and to improvise continuously to enable us to emerge as a leading global force. The most important ingredient for becoming such a force is undoubtedly our vast human resources. Improvement in human development indices will indicate higher employability of our youth and better economic conditions. To achieve these, we have to ensure that our youth have access to the latest scientific, technological and management principles and practices. I wish to iterate that the onus on the IITs has increased manifold in this respect.

As Minister of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), I have a personal interest to ensure that there is an urgent need to initiate development activities in the entire North Eastern Region. Unfortunately, the region also has its share of development problems that I am well aware of. Premier institutes such as IIT Guwahati and IIM Shillong that are now situated in this region have a special responsibility to partner with our local institutions to contribute to the growth of the region. The people of this region look up to IIT Guwahati to provide technological solutions to their problems. I am happy to note that the institute has taken up several studies to address the problems faced by the people of the North East in general and Assam in particular. It is also heartening to know that IIT Guwahati has set up a Technology Incubation Centre (TIC) to promote entrepreneurship among the students of the Institute and the region where they will be given space, access to equipments, technical expertise and facilitation services. TIC might be the catalyst in ushering in an era of industrial development in the region.

This brings us to an important issue – the state of education in the North East. Though the region has witnessed considerable improvement in education infrastructure in recent years, a majority of our youth are still not sufficiently equipped to compete at national or international levels in terms of employability or entrepreneurship. The literacy rate is higher than the national average but vocational training and entrepreneurial skills remain weak areas. The percentage of students going for higher education in the region is below the national average. This percentage suffers further when we consider the number of students opting for the Science and Commerce streams. The number of colleges and institutions imparting education in these two streams is also limited in the region.

The need of the hour is to create opportunities for them to acquire skills and competencies. The Ministry of DoNER has put high emphasis on this critical aspect. It has come up with a Scheme for Capacity Building and Technical Assistance with the aim to provide funding for skill development, enhancement of employability and competencies, and promotion of self-employment and entrepreneurship amongst the youth of the region. Enhancement of knowledge and skills of mid level officials in the Government sector for good governance are also aimed for under the same scheme. Special focus will be given to girls, women, disabled persons and youth from BPL backgrounds and from remote and backward districts or unreached areas. Focus will also be on those who are school dropouts or have discontinued education after the secondary level. Proposals from Central and State Government Departments, Centres of Excellence in Training, Education, Research, Universities, PSUs in Central, State, Joint or Cooperative sectors and Autonomous Organisations under Central, State and Local Governments will be considered under the Scheme. We are hopeful that the youth of the region will utilise these opportunities and eventually learn to be economically independent. My Ministry is looking forward for innovative and result-oriented programmes from this prestigious institute to partner in the development process of the Nation in general and this region in particular.

In the context of these developments, it is needless to say that my Ministry is committed towards contributing towards enhancing the academic environment in the region. You may also be aware that a major development objective for the North

Eastern Region is the strengthening of its human resources, particularly the youth, so as to make them skilled and employable.

The North Eastern Region Vision 2020 states that despite expansion of education infrastructure, satisfactory literacy rate and pupil-teacher ratios in the region, the skills and knowledge base of the youth in NER is inadequate to equip them to compete at national and international levels for employment or for entrepreneurial activities. The Vision for the region therefore envisages a vast expansion in the availability of opportunity for acquiring skills and competencies.

My dear young degree recipients, my heartiest congratulations to you on your achievements. You have had the benefit of the best of education this country can offer. I urge you to put it to the best use possible, in the interest of yourself, the nation and of mankind. I urge you to appreciate the importance of constant endeavor in the realisation of one's full potential. There may be setbacks on your path, but keep your enthusiasm high. Because, to quote Winston Churchill: "Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm."

Jai Hind

Shri Bijoy Krishna Handique