

Address by Prime Minister
Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee

At the First Convocation of
Nagaland University
Kohima – October 28, 2003

It gives me great pleasure to be with you at this first ever Convocation of Nagaland University.

At the outset, my hearty congratulations to all the students who received their honours today. Convocation is an important milestone in the educational journey of a student. To many, it marks the end of their formal educational career and the beginning of their working life. To others, it is just a stepping-stone to pursue higher studies. To both, I wish success in their chosen paths.

In the finest Indian tradition, today is the occasion for all students to express their gratitude to the teachers who taught them, and to the institution in which they studied.

Nagaland University was established in 1994. So I was surprised when I was told that this is the first convocation of the university. We know that every newly created institution has some teething problems. But if such teething troubles continue for nine long years, it is surely a pointer that something was amiss somewhere.

I hope that hereafter the convocation will be held each year without fail.

Convocations are usually held in a university auditorium inside the university campus, and not under a *shamiana* like this at the Central Secretariat. But we all know that one of the teething problems that your university has been facing is that it does not yet have a proper infrastructure. Hence, I have a pleasant announcement to make today.

The Government of India will provide Rs. 35 crore for the development of proper infrastructure for Nagaland University at a new location in Lumami. This work will be implemented by a Central Sector organization within the next three years. The university will be expanded and new infrastructure created. I do hope that it will be managed well.

I would like the design and execution of this work to match the enchanting natural beauty of Nagaland. The university campus should become a proud and modern landmark in the State, befitting the stature of a centre of excellence in higher education.

A good university is, of course, more than a beautiful structure. The soul of a university is the academic and research work that takes place in it. The hallmark of a centre of excellence is the high standards of teaching, a culture of single-minded pursuit of knowledge, and top-quality research.

These cannot be created by money alone. These attributes of excellence can be gained only by the dedication, discipline and determination that the students, teachers and university administration bring to bear on their work.

In other words, it is in your hands to steadily and continually enhance the stature of your university. Since this is your very first convocation, I

commend you to take up this challenge and, like a good high-jumper, set the bar of performance high and resolve to raise it higher year after year.

You should dream of making Nagaland University one of the preeminent universities in India, attracting students not only from the North-East but also from distant parts of India.

Why only India, in the years to come you should aspire to attract students from the countries of South-East Asia. Higher education is rapidly becoming an important item in the “export” strategies of countries planning to strengthen the knowledge base of their economies. Today a large number of universities not only in the United States and the UK, but also in countries like Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Malaysia are attracting students from India.

Indian universities and institutes of professional education should not lag behind in a similar endeavour. And universities in the North-East, including Nagaland University, should not lag behind their counterparts in the rest of India.

Today this may seem a distant and difficult dream for you to realize. But unless we dream big, and strive hard to realise them, how will we progress? How will we achieve big things?

Young Indians today are no longer satisfied with slow progress and small achievements. They are aiming at the stars. Didn't our own young Kalpana Chawla go on a space voyage? She gave up her life in the process. But she proved that self-sacrifice in the pursuit of a lofty goal is a reward in itself. She also proved that women are not second to men in science and technology, in adventure and enterprise.

Dear students and teachers, in recent years we in India have shown that we too can aim big and achieve big. We are building world-class highways, and Nagaland will soon be connected to this network. We are building world-class telecom and IT infrastructure, and Nagaland is already being connected to this infrastructure.

India has now emerged as one of the global leaders in Information Technology. In the past five years, our earnings through software exports have gone up from Rs. 8,000 crore to nearly Rs. 40,000 crore. India's pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies are making big strides.

In recent years, whenever I go abroad, or dignitaries from abroad come to Delhi, they tell me that they highly admire Indian scientists, engineers, doctors, managers and other professionals working in their countries.

Suddenly, the world is wondering how India has managed to achieve this. One important reason for this is the sustained attention we have paid to expanding and improving our higher education system. Therefore, I strongly feel that young men and women in Nagaland should not be deprived of the bright opportunities that are opening up in India and around the world.

I know that Naga students studying in Delhi and elsewhere in India are highly intelligent and hardworking. But we need to create more opportunities for young Nagas here in Nagaland itself. If lakhs of our young men and women in Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pune and Gurgaon are employed for providing IT-enabled services to banks, airlines, hospitals and multinational companies abroad, why not in Kohima and Dimapur?

The setting up of Nagaland University has been an important step in fulfilling your aspirations. I assure you that the Centre will partner with the State Government to do more. Specifically, the Government of India will provide an additional Rs. 10 crore each for setting up a Centre for Information Technology and a Centre for Horticulture and Floriculture and Agro-Processing in this State.

Your university should no doubt develop strengths in various branches of science and technology. But you should also strengthen your work in humanities, art and culture. Naga people are very spontaneous with their music. I have always believed that those who can sing spontaneously, who can dance naturally are intrinsically good people.

Your university should expand your research in the oral traditions of Nagaland. You should also promote sports, since Naga youth are very talented in various sports. I recall here the great name of Dr. T. Ao, the first captain of India's football team to the Olympics.

Speaking of sports and physical education, I am happy to announce that the Government of India will provide Rs. 15 crore for building a new Sainik School in Kohima. We also want to promote adventure tourism.

Friends, this is my first visit to Nagaland. What has appealed to me the most is that Nagaland presents a fine synthesis of tradition and modernity. Each tribe here is justly proud of its rich tradition, which has been handed down the generations. Each tribe celebrates the brave deeds of its ancient heroes.

But I also see that young Nagas want to achieve similar ambitious deeds in pursuing challenges of the modern world. They know how modernity has transformed life in many neighbouring countries in South-East Asia.

All of us know that India's North-Eastern region is a gateway to South-East Asia. There are so many cultural and spiritual bonds, as well as racial and climatic similarities between the two regions. In recent years, the Government of India has consciously pursued what we call the "Look East Policy" to give a contemporary content to India's close ties with South-East Asia and East Asia.

As you know, India has now become a summit partner of ASEAN. In this capacity, I participated in the second India-ASEAN summit in Bali earlier this month. We have signed a landmark agreement to promote free trade and investment between India and the ASEAN countries in a time-bound manner. We want to start this with Thailand, where I went from Bali.

In February, I will be going to attend the first summit of BIMSTEC countries. BIMSTEC aims at promoting economic cooperation between Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation is another initiative that seeks to strengthen economic ties between countries through which these two great rivers flow. We are also working on a highway going from Imphal to Myanmar to Thailand.

All these initiatives promise to give a big boost to agriculture, industry and other economic activities in Nagaland and other North-Eastern States. Equally important, these hold the promise of opening up alternative routes to connect India's eastern coast with the North-East.

Friends, all this should convince you that a bright future of progress and prosperity is awaiting the people of Nagaland and the rest of the North-East. However, the doors of this future will remain closed until we establish peace and create a life free of fear here.

Unfortunately, there are certain organizations in this region that are misguiding the youth to embrace the ideology of extremism, exclusivism and divisiveness. I believe that it is for the schools, colleges and universities to impart the right education to young people, so that their minds erect a strong barrier against destructive influences.

Look at the positive developments around the world. Nations are coming together to strengthen the bonds of cooperation. The whole of Europe, which was the theatre of two World Wars, is being welded into a single Union. ASEAN is an excellent example of working together for common prosperity.

This being the case, why should the North-East be a picture of mistrust and conflict?

At the civic reception earlier today I said that the Central Government is ready for a dialogue with any organization that is prepared to give up the path of violence. There is no issue that cannot be resolved through dialogue – sincere, sustained and patient dialogue.

I am happy that a good beginning has been made in Nagaland, and good progress achieved. I want to thank all the people and organizations in Nagaland who have contributed to the peace process. We can achieve

much faster progress in our efforts with the involvement of all sections of Naga society and with unity among the various organizations in Nagaland.

As far as the Central Government is concerned, let there be no doubt in anyone's minds that we are as keen as you are to achieve permanent peace with honour and dignity for the people of Nagaland. We fully respect your unique identity. It will be protected. We are proud of your culture. It too will be protected.

I assure you that we will always be sensitive to the needs and concerns of the people of Nagaland, as also of the people of other North-Eastern States. Similarly, the people belonging to each State, and each ethnic group, in the North-East should be sensitive to the needs and concerns of their neighbours.

Let us leave behind all the unfortunate things that happened in the past. For too long this fair land has been scarred and seared by violence. It has been bled by the orgy of the killings of human beings by human beings. Each death pains me. Each death diminishes us. My Government has been doing everything possible to stop this bloodshed, so that we can together inaugurate a new era of peace, development and prosperity in Nagaland.

The past cannot be rewritten. But we can write our common future with our collective, cooperative efforts. In this sacred endeavour, I call upon the intellectuals and educated youth of Nagaland to take the lead. And I fervently hope that Nagaland University will become one of the main sources of education, enlightenment, inspiration and energisation for building a New Nagaland.

Before I conclude, let me recall the wise words of late Dinuo, the great Naga poetess of the fifties, whose poetry deserves to be studied by students in all Indian universities.

Our Life

Our life makes the Day
Our life makes the Night
Our life is made by us
Our life is destroyed by us

Thank you.