

1<sup>st</sup> Convocation  
11<sup>th</sup> December 2004

### **Address of the Chief Guest**

“Leadership in the Knowledge Age”

Chairman Mr. Mukesh Ambani, Members of the Governing Board, Director, Prof. Arvind Kudchadker, Faculty Members, Staff Members, Distinguished Guests and My Dear Students,

I consider it a singular honour to address the first convocation of the Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communications Technology (DAIICT). I belong to the academic world having started my career as a teacher of Modern Indian History. Revisiting the world of academia is like coming back home. And there is no better place to be than in the midst of a setting as understated and serene as this.

DAIICT is an excellent example of the commitment of the Reliance Group to invest in and develop human resources in the field of information technology and communications. Dhirubhai Ambani was a man of vision. DAIICT symbolises that vision. That knowledge as an engine of growth was understood by Dhirubhai Ambani much before the recognition that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will be the century of knowledge.

He believed in fostering a knowledge-led India. Dhirubhai understood that knowledge based economies will provide avenues of opportunities for the youth of India. He also realised that the age of information would quicken the pace of globalisation. He dreamt of creating world-class institutions for higher learning. For him DAIICT was destined to emerge as a premier research-led center for higher education in technology in the world.

Today and here, his dreams are unfolding. DAIICT is a fitting tribute to his vision. I compliment Mukesh Ambani for translating Dhirubhai Ambani's vision into reality; giving substance to his ideas. A discerning son is walking in the footsteps of his father. Yours is a journey of empowerment, where youth imbibe knowledge and generate growth. The journey is compelling, the path enlightening. In a short time, DAIICT has earned recognition for its high standards of education and its infrastructure. The growth of this institute is a tribute to your leadership, your determination and your sense of purpose. Knowing you for some time, I can confidently say that in you, we have the rare combination of a realist driven by idealism. Eric Hoffer once said,

***"The leader has to be practical and a realist, yet must talk the language of the visionary and the idealist"***

My Dear Students,

The opportunities before you are enormous.

At the primary level, there are opportunities brought about by the emergence of the information age. Information and communication technologies are fundamentally influencing the way we live, the way we transact and the way we relate to the world around us. Satellite, Internet, broadband and wireless based information and communications technologies are ushering in fundamental changes in our socio-economic environment impacting on our lives. Digital networks and miniaturized devices are changing our perception of time, distance and space. New simulated virtual worlds are creating exhilarating experiences. Electronic transactions are bringing services to the doorsteps of people.

At the secondary level, there are opportunities brought about by the intersection of information and communication technologies with other disciplines. Global positioning systems are helping us seek and navigate. Bioinformatics is analysing the code of life and giving leads to new medicines that work at the molecular level. Precision farming is helping raise farm yields from limited land resources. Robotics is revolutionising the work place and the home in addition to working in hostile terrains. Telemedicine is delivering health care across long distances.

And at the tertiary level, there are opportunities that promise to bring about radical changes to life. Wearable and embedded computers could network each one of us at all times and places. Nanobots, or microscopic computerised robots the size of blood cells, could be traveling through the capillaries of our blood. They would be seeking and destroying pathogens, thereby augmenting our immune system, and communicating on the state of our health to service providers.

All these opportunities are substantially enhancing human ability. They are making existing systems efficient and productive. They are helping individuals participate freely in international social and economic transactions. They are re-defining the concept of nation states. They are taking mankind to completely new virtual ecosystems.

The realisation of the canvass of new and emerging opportunities is exhilarating. This calls for a new mindset. A mindset that makes all of us not just as creators, providers and seekers of knowledge but as agents of change. Agents who can bring about intellectual competitiveness for India. Agents who can shape new economic opportunities. Agents who can enhance economic productivity. And agents who can deliver services at the doorsteps of people.

The present Knowledge Age has resulted in knowledge and knowledge based workers at the forefront in a competitive international environment. The value of knowledge is constantly on the rise and will continue in an upward trajectory in the foreseeable future. A new world economic order is emerging - one based upon the constant flow of intellectual, not financial capital. Every function, every industry in all regions of the world - developing and industrialised nations alike - is experiencing profound changes in the way we manage our most precious resource - human talent. Leadership in this age has become more a function of navigation and networking than the traditional command-and-control systems. Modern leaders do not fear the speed of change; they embrace an agenda of learning. They know that effective management is not a matter of having the most knowledge; it is about knowing how to use it. It is not enough to know modern management concepts but to know how they are put in action. Leadership in the knowledge age has become more of an art than a science. As Henry Kissinger rightly said: ***"The task of the leader is to get his people from where they are to where they have not been."*** That is your vision for tomorrow.

Knowledge and information technology are the future impetus areas for creative and successful leadership in a highly competitive world. Today's highly competitive and global economy requires much more than mere information cramming up. The excessive emphasis on information and the inappropriate emphasis on learning are the necessary evils of the existing system of education. On the other hand, emphasis on knowledge will result in a holistic development of the individual. The ability to learn and unlearn faster, the ability to put knowledge to work, the ability to create, the ability for imagination and intuition are much more important not only in today's age but also in the coming ages.

Leadership deals with developing strategies of change and creating new systems and organisations or instituting revolutionary change into existing systems and organisations. New technologies are facilitating revolutionary changes in social organisations and systems. Underpinning all this change is the emergence of knowledge as a dominant property. Historically, knowledge has always played an important role but has not served as the driving force behind the evolution of the political economy. In the past, knowledge has helped individuals and organisations to acquire and utilise land and capital. Today, economic success is largely determined by the quality and relevance of information one possesses. The most successful organisations are those who are innovative and capable of constantly reinventing themselves to better serve the evolving needs of society. The most successful leaders are those who are innovative, creative, and capable of perceiving, obtaining and utilising new, useful and relevant information.

The societal changes occurring are fundamental and deep-rooted, rather than cosmetic or superficial involving changes in habits, culture, values and beliefs. The

workplace is not just changing in appearance but more fundamentally in terms of from where and how one contributes to an organisation's growth and development. This kind of revolutionary change requires a new kind of entrepreneurial leader with vision, imagination, creativity, and the ability to motivate people to follow and dedicate them to a lifelong pursuit of knowledge.

The challenges of an Information/Knowledge Society require new kinds of skills and capabilities and require new ways to obtain these skills and reinforce these capabilities on a continuing basis. The traditional Industrial Age education system was based on acquiring skills and knowledge sets in a proscribed sequential manner. The Information Age workplace is based on change and new knowledge. The degree and level of new knowledge generation is unprecedented. New careers are emerging and almost instantaneously disappearing. The domain knowledge for traditional professions is also under constant change and revolutionary revision. The only certainty is the proliferation of new knowledge. There is clearly a need for a new system of learning, a seamless lifelong system that does not work against career changes and opportunities but rather serves the unique and ever changing educational needs of knowledge age workers. Leaders and the organisations must commit themselves to continuing education and knowledge generation. Thus, the major challenge for individuals, leaders and organisations is to constantly reinvent themselves by learning how to utilise new information to build new and relevant knowledge.

Knowledge has been linked to progress and there is nothing new about it. What is different in the Knowledge Age is our ability to focus upon and manage knowledge, both individual and collective, more explicitly. As knowledge has a multiplier effect, what is needed is a new style of leadership behaviour having the ability to focus upon and manage knowledge. Knowledge Age leadership demands more vision and visibility. The leader needs to manage the innovation infrastructure within which ideas are generated and applied. Today's leaders must inspire passion for the work. They need to ensure that teams are stable enough to meet the high frequency burst of information and complex demands on decision-making. They must have an ability to help others maintain focus and balance, as they establish priorities. They should lead by example. They should be able to convey context and meaning in ways that enable others to leverage their own talents. Someone rightly said that, "***The quality of leadership, more than any other single factor, determines the success or failure of an organisation***".

Knowledge Age Leadership is all about a leader's ability to innovate - create knowledge, convert it into viable products and services, and apply it for the profitable growth and sustainable future of an enterprise, the vitality of the nation's economy and the advancement of society in general. Tomorrow's leaders will be

perceived more of local, national, regional and international statesmen who are able to effectively balance economics, education and the environment.

### **Ladies & Gentlemen,**

India has the unique opportunity to leverage her demographic advantage of a large, young population with information technology skills. India essentially has three distinct advantages in the information age. It has a democratic political set-up, a gene pool in human resource capital that is probably the best in the world, and English is widely used throughout the country. India's biggest success is its intellectual capital. India can be the fountainhead of a new world of technology, information and knowledge. Knowledge creation must be seen to be endogenous to India's economic growth.

If the Industrial Revolution laid the foundation of the West's domination of global economy, the current IT revolution is leveling the playing field. The skills that are needed in tomorrow's society will be those associated with information and knowledge rather than industrial skills. If India has to become one of the global leaders in this unfolding scenario, it will need to unleash the full potential of its greatest asset - its human capital. It is this brain-power which will play a dominant role in the knowledge industry in the coming decades.

India can emerge as a world leader in the knowledge based industry on the basis of its human and intellectual capital. What is needed, is to nurture the country's human capital by laying emphasis on socio-economic development of the people. Education and health are two strategic variables, which can contribute immensely to the economic development of the nation.

India, with its booming software industry, its extensive network of research and development centres and massive educational infrastructure is poised to become a knowledge economy. But it can be a reality only when all sections of the society have access to information and are integrated through information and technology.

India has about a billion people. This number will swell to a billion and a quarter in twenty-five years time. The world sees them as a billion brawns. Our challenge is to make the world see them as a billion brains.

### **My Dear Graduating Students,**

Young minds like you, who are graduating today, have a great responsibility on your shoulders. You are graduates of one of the best technology institutions in the country. You have been educated and trained by a highly committed and competent faculty. You are privileged to have the backing of thousands of bright

technology professionals in Reliance Infocomm. You have both the privilege and the opportunity to engage in path-breaking work.

I would like all of you to see yourself as agents of change for a new India. The goal of technology leadership for India in the era of creativity is realisable in your lifetime. You are graduating at the most appropriate time for shaping a technology-driven India. You can make this dream a reality. You can be leaders in a technology-driven new India. To achieve this, you have to follow one simple, but profound, principle of Dhirubhai Ambani. Never compromise on excellence. Never give up. Convert adversity into opportunity.

The Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi had rightly said, "*We must become the change we want to see*".

Let us make the twenty-first century, "*India's century*". Let us take India to the forefront of information and communications technology. I am sure that you are the ones to make it possible. This is our hope from you.

Warm congratulations to each one of you graduating from DAIICT, Gandhinagar. I wish you a very creative and stimulating life. I wish each one of you a fruitful future. I am sure you will do India proud.

Thank you.

**Shri. Kapil Sibal**

Hon'ble Minister of State (IC) for Science &  
Technology and Ocean Development