

Text of the Vice-President's interaction with participants of the seventh batch of the Rajya Sabha Internship Programme, New Delhi (excerpts)

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Good morning all of you.

I am sure it is a real good morning. Have you been able to know each other slightly? It will take a while but it will be a great connect. A connect for a lifetime.

Shri P. C. Mody, Secretary General, Rajya Sabha, an enormously talented person. 1982 Batch Indian Revenue Service Official, had the longest term as CBDT Chairman, and now functioning as Secretary General of Rajya Sabha during my tenure. Also during the tenure of my very distinguished predecessor, M. Venkaiah Naidu Ji. So, he stands for continuity, His words are very significant. Prime Minister's mission, his passion can be executed primarily by those who are fundamental to democracy in the world.

In the world, I say — Youth. And for India, you constitute the remarkable demographic dividend for youth. Our age is around 28 that of U.S. and China is around 38, 39. So, our youth demographic dividend is envy of the world. You ought to bear that in mind.

The growth engine can fire all cylinders only with your active participation. You are the most vital stakeholders in governance and democracy. Fortunately, you are living in an era where the country is booming with hope and possibility. A situation far distant from my days — Hope and possibility. Anything is within your reach.

You only have to go to global organisations when they speak about Bharat. IMF — India is a favourite global destination of investment and opportunity. World Bank President has said, our digitisation, accomplished in less than six years, is not achievable otherwise in more than four decades. Now, these bodies are accolading us, applauding us, because there is a ground change, people-centric policies. Therefore, time for us to take pride — We are Indians. We belong to the largest, oldest, and most functioning democracy on the planet. We have a unique history of more than 5000 thousand years. No country comes close to it.

Let me welcome in particular today, whose presence I have solicited and that is Dr. S. Radhakrishnan Chair, Dr. M. L. Raja. He is accompanied by Dr. Sankarshwari. My wife is also a doctorate, has a doctorate in Economics. So, I am in the same boat as Dr. M. L. Raja, because we have superior authority at home and around always.

This Chair was initiated after one of the distinguished sons of Bharat. The first Vice-President, who became President, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, a philosopher, and also known for his academic commitment as a teacher. The Chair was initiated for the first time in the year 2009. Technically, Dr. M. L. Raja is the third recipient, de facto — second.

The Chair was made functional during my tenure, when Jawahar Kaul, a distinguished journalist from the state of Jammu and Kashmir, deeply committed to nationalism, got the honour to get the Chair and Dr. M. L. Raja, from deep south state of Tamil Nadu, is the second one to get it. He is a highly qualified medical professional with extensive experience in medical practise and unlikely companion being humanities.

Normally, the two do not go together. So, you have in you convergence of both, apart from ophthalmology, he is an expert on ancient history, archaeology and epigraphy. But I venture to say something, a slight transgression. Ophthalmologists can correct only physical vision. Problem arises when there is distortion of figurative vision that is beyond ophthalmology. That can be done only by change of national mindset.

Authored already 13 books in Tamil and English on historical and scientific topics. Only the Governor of Tamil Nadu recognised and accredited him for his Tamil literary works. Rajya Sabha Secretariat is indeed blessed to have such a recipient of this Chair and, I am sure he will contribute in exemplary manner.

About the Chair, let me tell you, in 1962, September 5 was declared as Teacher's Day. It happens to be birthday of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. That underscores that you may have any position, President, Vice-President. You may be a philosopher, you may be a great author. But social recognition has come by virtue of his being a teacher. Teacher's Day, always bear that in mind. Respect your parents as much as you respect your teachers, either way. “ , ”

Coming back to this internship programme. It's a promising opportunity for young minds to gain first-hand experience of parliament, its building, its ethos, its background, its functioning, and its rich values. The new building of parliament that came into being during COVID in a record time of less than 30 months, fully furnished and functional, showcases our cultural history of more than 5000 years.

This internship will instill in you a sense of responsibility, fire you with zeal of nationalism, and expose you in turn to the core values of our democracy, which is inclusivity. You always have to bear in mind Bharat was not born in 1947. We are a nation with long traditions.

Indian Parliament is much beyond a legislative body. It is a reflection presently of 1.4 billion people's will. It is the only legitimised constitutional platform that reflects authentically the will of the people. Therefore, parliament has primacy. Parliament has primacy. What is everything? Because there are areas where executive has primacy. How to govern. Judiciary has primacy, how to deal with justice system.

Parliament has primacy on two counts. One, it is ultimate authority to make law. Secondly, it holds executive accountable because governance is defined by some fundamentals and, one fundamental is transparency. Second is accountability. And in modern times, we have added a third facet to it. Optimal performance by institutions to gallop our progress trajectory.

Parliament is a place, ultimate place, for debate, dialogue, discussion and discourse. When you will be exposed to parliamentary functioning, functioning of committees, you have to be highly inquisitive. By and large, on several issues, you have to self-learn. Self-learning is a new mode of learning because even those who walk out of universities and colleges, learning never stops. We will be on quicksand of time if we don't change with times. Therefore, as reflected rightly by a philosopher in pre-Socratic era, Heraclitus, the only constant in life is change.

Our constitution, boys and girls, is a most sacred document. You will come to know how it was formalised. Little less than three years. By our founding fathers, who dealt with divisive issues, contentious issues, issues that were highly inflammatory. But they dealt it with an approach of coordination, cooperation, consensus. Something you have to learn in life and for that, what is important is that you must always respect the other point of view. Because if you think you alone are right, the other person is wrong, you are depriving yourself of a great benefit of input. Secondly, my own experience is, more often than not, the other point of view is the correct point of view.

If you look at the Constitution as signed by framers of the Constitution, you will have the occasion to see it. When you see it, you will find it has 22 miniatures. Each miniature reflects our historical past. Glorious historical past. It shows Gurukul, it shows Indus Valley Bull, it shows Ram, Sita and Lakshman coming back to Ayodhya, after triumph of goodness over evil. That is in part three of the Constitution, Fundamental Rights. When it comes to Directive Principles of State Policy, you will find Bhagavan Krishna giving discourse to Arjuna at Kurukshetra. And you can keep on going to other facets, you will know about it.

Constitution grants Fundamental Rights but Constitution, apart from granting Fundamental Rights, also ordains every citizen to perform duties. Rights have no meaning unless they are enforceable. Therefore, boys and girls note. India is amongst very few countries in the world where for enforcement of a Fundamental Right, you can knock the door of the highest court of the land. You can access judiciary at the premium level to vindicate your Fundamental Rights. But every citizen and institution must exercise their powers within constitutional boundaries. Upholding constitutional ideals.

We can love our neighbour only when we don't make incursion in the exclusive domain of the neighbour.

Physical territory and otherwise. This constitutional domain sanctity is required to be preserved in all situations. If there is any disruption of it, you can sense danger. Like institutions, even political tribes have a moral duty to the national cause because, ultimately all institutions, the legislature, the judiciary, the executive, the focal point is national growth, national welfare, public welfare, to generate transparency, accountability, honesty.

On issues of national security, economic progress, all factions need to put national interest over partisan priorities. I will appeal to everyone in the political spectrum to seriously reflect, come to a conclusion that on issues of national security, on issues of growth, on issues of our internal security, there must be consensus. Sometimes politics get too hot for nationalism and security, something we need to overcome.

Right now after Pahalgam and the response there too, the entire nation is witnessing an upsurge in nationalism. A new sense of patriotism is within us. The entire nation has risen as one because, for the first time Bharat has demonstrated to the entire world no more tolerance of terrorism. This is bold, powerful Bharat and that is why something in the history will record. It never happened in our country before, and has happened in the world very infrequently. Muridke, Bahawalpur headquarters and bases of Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, they were targeted precisely, penetratingly, devastatingly causing no injury to peace-loving people. Targeting only the terrorists because, our civilisational essence is 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' world is one.

Therefore India's strategy has been to target not civilians, but only terrorists and what a demonstrable exercise it was. The coffins were escorted by their army, by their politicians, by terrorists. No proof needed. So, I emphasise, we can serve the nation impactfully as indigenous because we have the opportunity to contribute by performance of duties. The balance has to be maintained. Let us not cherry-pick. We'll go for Fundamental Rights, claiming them 24x7, and be totally oblivious of Fundamental Duties.

Boys and girls, you'll have the occasion to focus on Constitution but Part-III of the Constitution is heart of it. Articles 12 to 35, they give six Fundamental Rights. Right to equality. Earlier we had privileged pedigree, meritocracy had no place. Patronage was a password for a job, for a contract. Some people thought we were above Law, some people thought we were beyond the reach of Law, that we are immune to Law and no enforcing process.

Now we know it, all are equal. Those who thought they are beyond the reach of law are facing the heat. The second is the Right to Freedom. Now this right is very fundamental because expression and dialogue, discourse define democracy. But this comes with a great responsibility. All rights come with responsibility. The Right Against Exploitation. The Right to Freedom of Religion. Cultural and Educational Rights and right to Constitutional Remedies. But if we focus only on our Rights and not on Duties, we don't measure up to the requirement of a citizen in the largest democracy, the oldest, the most functional.

There are 11 Fundamental Duties. These duties were not initially there in the Constitution and I'll tell you for a reason. Our founding fathers obviously expected that we will be alive to these Duties. We will respect those Duties but when it was noticed that it is required to express them out in the Constitution so that people in particular become aware of these, and these were introduced by 42nd Amendment, and 86th Amendment.

If I have to give a sense of Fundamental Duties, it is to prioritise national well-being. To contribute optimally for public discourse, public order, public discipline, environment, everything which is known as goodness in life for one and all is a sense of it.

You therefore, I think, must resolve how can I contribute for my nation, for national security, for national economy, for national welfare. The recent episode, Operation Sindoor, has changed our mindset massively. We are now nationalistic as never before. This is reflected in participation of all political landscape in delegations that have gone abroad to project our message of peace and our complete intolerance to terrorism. Therefore, having seen recent events, we have no choice. We have no other option but to remain united and grow stronger.

For national security, we need indigenous strength. War is best avoided from position of strength. Peace is secured when you are ever ready for war. Therefore, strength comes apart from technological prowess, conventional arms strength, from people also. That we have to bear in mind.

To you impressionable minds, I wish to give you five principles which you need to practise. They're very easy, but they will be game-changing in your life. They will be transformative for society and, all these principles emanate from our civilisational ethos:

- One, social harmony. Why should there be disharmony? Why can't there be love, affection? Why can't we respect one another's views? Why should we dislike the other point of view? If we do not like a point of view, let us be persuasive. Let us be compassionate.
- Second, family enlightenment, things have to start from the family, from the childhood. We must learn our culture, our values to respect parents. I find most houses do not have Vedas. They do not focus on our cultural background, our historical background. We need to be there.
- Third is environmental consciousness. Now, we do not have another planet to live on. This is the only one but, if you go to our ancient knowledge, which is a treasure the world envies, you will know this country has always respected Mother Earth. Earth is not exclusively preserved for human beings alone. It is for all living beings, flora and fauna. Therefore, we have to be extremely careful. Prime Minister of the country, Narendra Modi, gave a clarion call. This has become a moment now but, why only one, why not more? Planting a sapling is not the end of it, it is the beginning. You have to nurture it. I'm sure it is there.
- Swadesi, I'll focus on that. Sometimes people wonder how can we contribute. Swadesi is closely connected with economic nationalism. Economic nationalism means we must consume Swadesi. We must always take into consideration being vocal for local. This will inspire our people also to cater to our needs. But if we start importing from other countries items that are generated in this country, that can be made in this country, we are immediately inviting three troubles:

1. One trouble, there is an avoidable hole in our foreign exchange reserve and this is in billions of dollars.
2. Second, when we import items that can be made in this country, we are snatching work from our own people. We are depriving them of work. And;
3. Third is more importantly, we are blunting entrepreneurship. So every individual can contribute what cloth he wears, what he eats, what he wears, his shoes also, everything. These are consumables. We fancy what is abroad, unmindful of the situation that we are injuring our national economy.

- I therefore assert economic nationalism is business of the people. They can moderate it. Secondly, I appeal to trade, industry, commerce, and business. What I tell them, please don't export raw materials, add value to raw materials. If you export raw materials, you are declaring to the world two things. One, that you are not capable of adding value, which you are. And similarly, all three things happen. We can have more foreign exchange. If value is added, our people will get jobs. Our entrepreneurship will blossom. So if these five results, which obviously are meant to awaken national consciousness are practised by you, the nation will rise.

A nation is defined also by discipline, dedication, nationalism of its citizens. And I'll tell you, how can we have public disorder? Public disorder has become out of the day. People take to the streets even a court notice is issued. Why? We should use our social media to rebuff this sinister thinking.

Secondly, how can we set fire or destroy public property? We need to shame these people who engage in unconditional activities. What a painful sight it is when some people engage in wanting destruction of public property. Pelt stones at Vande Bharat and other aspects that are symbols of our growth.

You, therefore, boys and girls, have to be ambassadors of New Bharat with new ideas. Ideas that are meant to blossom democracy, generate progress, and enhance our reputation globally. I would urge you, to get out of the groove. Right now our youth is, by and large, not aware of the opportunity basket it has. The basket is getting fatter and fatter. If IMF said, India is the destination of investment and opportunity, it is surely not on account of government jobs. It is on account of the opportunities beyond government jobs. We have to get into the modern field. Blue economy, space economy, disruptive technologies offer challenges, but the opportunity more. The government has affirmative policies, look to that. I'm sure we'll do that.

On this occasion, I seek to make a policy announcement also. Not one, but two. Boys and girls, this is the

seventh batch of Rajya Sabha Internship. We are thinking of having it on one platform, so that you get to connect with your earlier colleagues also. We are going infrastructure mechanism. We'll soon have a platform that will connect alumni in every part of the country, and some are outside also. This will give rise to a community that will freely exchange ideas, share thoughts for national welfare.

Second, Rajya Sabha will have an autonomous institution that will help elevate and inform the public discourse through research and dissemination. Research is fundamental to industry, fundamental to growth, but there has to be research in other areas also. I have focused on several occasions. Research has to correlate to ground reality, to ground impact. Research is not for self, research is not something to be put in the self to get the dust. Research must be authentic, research must impact ground realities. It must be people-centric.

When we are having this new mechanism, it will engage in capacity building programmes for MPs as well, in due course. It will have transformational impact, obviously, on the legislative ecosystem, because underlying your work will be how you handhold an MP. That is your assignment fundamentally. You can handhold an MP only by being thoroughly involved with the law process concerning parliamentary work.

Thank you so much.

JK/RC/SM

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