

Text of the Vice-President's interaction with Indian Statistical Service (ISS) Probationers of 2024 and 2025 Batches (Excerpts)

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Good afternoon, all of you.

Being with you for my wife and me is optimal utilisation of time. We are therefore grateful for your gracious presence with this confidence, cheerfulness and giving us assurance that India's future is bright.

Dr. Saurabh Garg, a senior IAS officer, Secretary, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, a critical ministry, a man who loves to grab innovation, takes strides in new areas with methodical approach and I'm sure under his leadership this very important Ministry which at this juncture is having very critical role will help the Nation evolve policies that can take this country Bharat, home to one-sixth of humanity, to the status of Viksit Bharat at 2047, if not earlier.

Shri P.R. Meshram, Director General, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, has an equally critical role. Officials of the Ministry, Indian Statistical Service Probationers batch 2024 and 2025, you will be called a very important batch associated with Amrit Kaal, associated with the 75th celebration of the adoption of the Indian Constitution, and I therefore take it as a privilege for the position I hold to share my thoughts with you all.

I must first take note of anchor Riya. She will always have a role to play, and Soniya Mishra and Mridul Maheshwari, respectively belonging to the 2024 batch of probationers and the 2025 batch of probationers, were very articulate. One in English, the other in Hindi.

Let me, at the outset, tell you something very important. India is uniquely positioned in the world when it comes to languages. We have multiple languages that make us proud. Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Bangla, Sanskrit, Hindi, several languages, I forget some. Eight of them are classical languages. Our languages generate unity. Some of them have a global impact. Their literature is a goldmine of knowledge. Our inclusivity is reflected in our languages, and if you go to the constitutional scheme of things, it is provided in the Constitution that for official work, there will be a progressive decline in the use of the English language and a similarly incremental trajectory for Hindi.

Our National Education Policy stands out for giving primacy to the mother tongue. Technical subjects like medicine and engineering, the education is now being imparted in the vernacular. Our languages are our spinal strength. Our languages can never be a source of divisiveness. Our languages are a unifying force. I appeal to everyone in the country to have a soothing approach with wholesome motivation to this fundamental cultural aspect of our nation. If you go to any part of this country, the language of that particular region is mellifluous, impressive, and that is why you'll find, in recent times in particular, recognition has been given to scholars of various languages. We have amongst the probationers .

I recall Tashika for a good reason. She is the daughter of Siddharth, who is helping the Rajya Sabha Secretariat significantly, but more importantly, a programme which was initiated by the Rajya Sabha Secretariat during my tenure, Rajya Sabha Internship Programme.

Boys and girls, it gives me immense pleasure to meet probationers. They are drawn from several services. There was a time when some services held primacy and some services were not so recognised. But now I find all services are occupying public space, contributing equitably. You can take pride in being part of a bureaucracy that will drive a population of 1.4 billion, and more importantly, that population belongs to the

oldest, largest, and most dynamic democracy on the planet. I therefore congratulate you on your selection in this prestigious service, and you know it more than I do. It was rigorous. It was challenging. It was a tough competition. You made it. You made your parents proud. You glorified your teachers and alma mater. You know that.

Can you imagine for a moment the satisfaction in your families when you got into this service? That defines where you are. You have to live up to the highest standards of Indian bureaucracy. You have to exemplify your conduct all throughout with transparency, integrity, and accountability. However tempting the allurements may be, you must never take shortcuts. Shortcuts in times of need, in dire need, are the longest distance between two points. Only on paper is the shortest distance. Taking a shortcut means you are activating four lines of law. You are engaging in transgressions. You will have good health if you believe in integrity and remain totally committed to serving the nation. In the vast canvas of India's progress, civil servants function as the silent yet formidable architects contributing to the socio-economic development and progress of our dynamic nation. Thanks to the vision of the Prime Minister, his mission, the execution has taken place in the bureaucracy.

The performance of our bureaucracy will always be optimal if the political leadership is in the right framework, with the right policies. We are living in those times where the political framework is indicating hope and optimism. We are on the right path. And that is why India is a nation at the moment with an unprecedented economic upsurge, phenomenal infrastructure growth. This is a mix of political vision and bureaucratic execution. I therefore say that India takes pride in its bureaucracy. It is the finest in the world. That is why our aspirations get fortified. This service, your service, has a rich legacy of nation-building.

You are part of a very distinguished cadre that has played a vital role in shaping evidence-based policy and governance in our country. It is very difficult to find a thing when the room is dark. If the room is dimly lit, it will strain your eyes, but if it is well lit, the task is easier. Connecting with your destination is seamless. This is what you shall be doing for the rest of your life: changing our lives, including myself.

It is a service that will give you immense opportunities to serve the country, but you will continue to learn new things when you apply it to your work. That will be a great revolution. You will come to know Bharat like no one else. And the kind of input you will get and you will share, and that will be analysed, will lead to great results. Therefore, during your career, as you go up the ladder, you will be serving in multiple ways. Each one of them will be critical for the nation.

The role of this service has never been so critical and important as in the present times. Never! India now takes pride in being the most populous country in the world. For the last decade, India can legitimately be proud because it has been accoladed by institutions like the IMF and the World Bank. Therefore a decade, India has been in terms of economic growth at number one amongst large economies. People, for the first time, have tasted development. People-centric policies have reached the last person. A gas connection in the house, a tap connection, a toilet, internet, a road close by, and easy accessibility to the railroad. That being the situation, a health centre close by, an education centre close by.

During my time and during the time of Mr. Garg, we never had that good. So, people have now tasted development. This has converted India into the most aspirational nation on the planet. And its youth demographic dividend is the envy of the world. Your dividend. The median age is 28. For the US and China, it is around 38, 39. When a nation is aspirational, there is always potential for people to be restive, to engage in restlessness. Having tasted freedom as never before, they want more.

Therefore, it is imperative that the Government delivers. Now, the Government can deliver only by right policies. The right policies have to be firm on data. Their data, you are the custodians. After the data is made available, you are the sharp postdocs of its analysis. Your contribution, therefore, will strengthen the backbone of our economy. It will advance our social equity and ensure that the most marginalised voices are heard and represented in our national discourse. Democracy has meaning only when there is equality all around in every aspect, and that requires inequities to be curtailed, curbed, and finally decimated. For that, it is vital to notice where the inequality is that requires addressing. Your role is fundamental.

Statistics is the science of learning from data. Statistical tools and quantitative techniques are essential to effective governance because governance ultimately has to be optimally performing. You perform optimally when you are in the right course. You can be on the right course only if you know which area has to be

attended, and that is your job. You, therefore, provide a solid empirical foundation for informed policy decisions. firm decision So there is no possibility of averting disaster. Uninformed decision making, ad hoc decision making, is a recipe for growth that is antithetical to sustainable growth. The world today is a changed world.

Disruptive technologies are much beyond the Industrial Revolution. Artificial intelligence, internet of things, machine learning, and blockchain have entered into our lives, our office space, our governance patterns, and our roles. These are challenges, but every challenge is an opportunity in it. For your job, it is a great opportunity. It will help you massively. The world today is driven by data and digital technology. You must have come across data that has been stolen quite frequently. There has to be privacy of data. So you know, data is very important.

The role of Statistics, the role of your service in particular, has expanded now beyond traditional domains, not like earlier days. From economic planning to health surveillance, from agricultural forecasting to social development programmes, data is central to every aspect of growth. As a matter of fact, the first priority requirement for planning is a database. Statistics is not merely about numbers. It is much more than numbers. It is about identifying patterns and drawing insights that inform wise policy decisions. Data must be in sync with contemporary situations. Otherwise, it has a tendency to be stale, outdated.

It is about identifying patterns and drawing insights, having full policy decisions based on data, which is currently acceptable. A delayed or misguided policy can have serious consequences, and a timely intervention, well-informed decisions can yield results that are exponential, not just incremental. A stitch in time saves nine. That is what you will be doing every time. There will be no nine stitches. Your one stitch at the right time will do the trick.

Policy makers are important, their vision, their expertise, and whether they are qualified. But the tool is your data. In the absence of your data, there will be a dark room, and therefore, you can't see even when they forget about the landscape outside. Policy makers can design, implement and evaluate programmes effectively and meaningfully only if they have a data platform that is authentic. Even citizens, to enforce accountability and transparency of the government.

How would a citizen know what my government is doing? They rely on assessing the government, its performance, and the impartiality of work, only from data. Data will indicate to citizens whether it is balanced, equitable development or not. In today's rapidly evolving technological landscape, you, dear students, probationers, I say students because learning never stops. Learning is lifelong. You are students forever. It is crucial for you to adopt and master the latest tools, latest technology.

What you have learned so far is good, very good, but it will never be enough because the world is changing every moment. You will be finding yourself.

The importance of data is global. In all nations, the U.S. has a very strong mechanism of data analysis. India has improved it massively in recent years. We are in league with the big nations that analyse data after gathering it. The United Nations plays a crucial role in collecting, analysing, and disseminating global statistical data, primarily through its division, which you must be aware of, the United Nations Statistics Division. Because the United Nations, as a global body, is required to know global trends, this agency will also be considerably helped when your work is at a higher benchmark. It is destined to be a higher benchmark, I have no doubt about it. And let me caution you, effective policy planning without robust statistics you can compare it like a surgery in the dark. You can imagine how relevant your work is.

Every digit in our national database represents a human story. Let me give you a small illustration. MPs and MLAs have funds at their disposal. It's five crore, if I'm not mistaken, for an MP every year. MLAs also have. How is it spent? Is it part of structured economic growth? Or is it generating situations that we need to address? Is the representative merely using this amount to carry favour with his chosen favourites? Is it not placating a particular kind of vote bank? All this has to be analysed. I was extremely delighted when a very senior member of parliament, Professor Ram Gopal Yadav, raised the issue.

His demand was very righteous. He said, either increase the amount phenomenally or get rid of it. Because in the present state, it cannot be equitably distributed in the constituency, and if that is the situation, the utilisation will always tend to be inequitable. This is only to slightly digress.

Statistical data serves in times of need. North Star guiding us through the labyrinth of competing priorities. Funds are always limited for the government. That is why we have taken public-private partnerships to a very high level. But to optimally utilise those funds and to see in a particular time frame, it has to be utilised; data is the North Star. Statistics help us understand not merely what is happening, but why it is occurring, and what is important for our future.

You will have a rich experience every moment of your service career. What you took for granted, you will find, is on a fragile premise. It is a mirage because data does not lie. This diversity precision transforms reactive governance into proactive stewardship. Otherwise, we will always be in reaction mode. Reaction mode is the weakness of policy. It reveals a void in farsightedness, but proactive stewardship is fundamental.

Young probationers, statistical cartography reveals the hidden geometries of inequality. I have reiterated on a number of occasions. Democracy has a meaning only if those who cannot help themselves are helped. They don't have to caution others that I need help, which means you must bring about equality and sublimity. Your cartography helps. Governance is enabled by your efforts to craft targeted interventions where interventions are most needed, because those are the areas that address root causes rather than symptoms.

Let us not be guided by symptomatic emergence. This destroys the root of the malice. The data with which you will be concerned 24x7 over your service career and thereafter maps geographical pockets demographically, enabling truly equitable, integrated development. This conceptualisation is fundamental.

Execution is not difficult, execution can be brought about. Just take the construction of a house. If you have the right map, you have the right permissions, everything is approved. All designs are there, structural and otherwise. The contractor can do the job, and there will be many in line to do it. If you go to the Preamble of our Constitution, that is the heart and soul of the Constitution, you will find social justice most predominant. Far-fielding division, thoughtfully collected caste data will be an instrument of integration. Some people are debating it.

We are mature minds. How can information collected by itself be a social problem? It is like taking your body MRI. You will know about where you stand. People will realise. And this mechanism will transform abstract constitutional commitments to equality into measurable, accountable policy outcomes. There is another facet with which you will be involved, and that is transparency. You will cut down favouritism. You will decimate patronage. No longer will a person say, My area is more developed than the other area, because I happen to operate the levers of power more than the other person. You are, therefore, a bulwark, an impregnable fortress against those who work with opacity, who create islands of development.

We want a Bharat where all areas are equitably developed. In such a scenario, statistics serve democracy not merely by informing policy, but by empowering citizens. A citizen will raise their voice, and voice rationally, effectively. Once the citizen comes to know, I am backed by the power of data. This vision of a statistical democracy strengthens both government effectiveness and democratic accountability.

We, as a nation, are looking for a Viksit Bharat, which is not our dream. It is our object, defined destination, our goal. Bharat is no longer a nation with potential. It's a nation on the rise, and the rise is unstoppable. And, therefore, the path to a developed India is built with statistical insights, marked by evidence-based milestones. In togetherness, we must create a nation that thinks empirically, as I indicated earlier, but is driven by hardcore evidence.

Let me conclude, and I am sure I will find a smile on the face of everyone. The conclusion is always good, because you will have the opportunity to have a good lunch here. Numbers are not cold abstractions, but are warm testimonies to our collective aspirations. These are the numbers. The future belongs to those who master the art of leading societies in statistical signatures, and only you make available those signatures. In the convergence of statistical science and democratic values lies the secret to India's continued rise.

Thank you so much.

JK/RC/SM

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