

Text of the Vice-President's address at the 65th and 66th Convocation Ceremony of International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) (excerpts)

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Boys and girls, I'm very happy and delighted to be with you all.

Distinguished members of the faculty, proud parents, and my dear students, it gives me immense pleasure, great satisfaction on this momentous occasion, 65th and 66th Convocation Ceremony of International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai.

The Hon'ble Minister has given details of your activities. Let me tell you, you are very relevant. With each passing day, your role will be increasing. This is a day certainly of celebration of academic achievement. But my dear young students, boys and girls, it is also invocation of deeper responsibility. The nation, as indicated by the Hon'ble Minister, Anupriya Patel, is bristling with hope and possibility. The nation is on the rise, the rise as never before. The rise is unstoppable.

To all the students receiving degrees and diplomas, and to whom I have extended my invitation, this is a very special day for you. Congratulations to you all, but dear students, this is not your own achievement. It's a moment of collective pride for you, your families, your mentors, and for those who have worked alongside with you in this journey.

My request to you, my appeal to you, please remain in connect with your alma mater. Always take pride for your alma mater and never lose connect with your colleagues lifelong. Friends, as we reflect on the future of our country, it is imperative and instructive to recall the powerful triad, demography, democracy, and diversity. These 3Ds define the soul of new Bharat. These three pillars encapsulate the essence of India's identity and aspirations.

Boys and girls, India at the moment in the world is the most aspirational nation because of you. Demography represents the dynamic human capital that fuels the engine of progress. Democracy provides robust framework for collective decision-making. In any other governance, there is no participation of the people in decision-making. Democracy from that perspective is unique and, diversity, India represents to the entire world what is diversity. We have resplendent landscapes, a spectrum of cultures, traditions, and perspectives that make our great Bharat unique in the world.

Friends, demographic trends are not mere statistics and you know it more than I do. Demography is much beyond that, demography is the pulse of a nation. Defines the transformation of a nation. Understanding these figures, these statistical figures, equips policymakers to harness strength. Without this data, policymakers are helpless. They will be groping in dark and also it will help give direction and explore the potential of a young population. Simultaneously, your data helps those in governance to challenge the challenges very seriously. Daunting challenges are addressed including in the field of unemployment, healthcare disparities, regional imbalances. If I may say so, demography is the compass guiding India's journey towards sustainable development which is a global need.

My young friends always remember Bharat is the world's oldest, largest, and most vibrant democracy. Bharat offers a participative platform to 1.4 billion people with diverse voices, different opinions, sometimes conflicting opinions, platform to address national challenges and solutions. These solutions emerge through dialogue, debate, and consensus. Diversity is our strength. This is amply reflected in our varied culture, our rich languages, our ethnicity that make India very special in the entire world.

Always remember inclusivity in human race is fundamental and inclusivity in Bharat is in our civilisational vein, inclusivity is in our blood.

Dear students, as students of population sciences, you are uniquely positioned at the intersection of these three pillars demography, democracy, and diversity. As students of population sciences, you stand at a critical juncture where demography, democracy, and diversity converge. It will be your expertise in analysing population trends that will equip an informed mind in decision-making. This will also help, mark my words carefully, to thwart the dangers. Democratic changes due to demographic changes are very challenging, alarmingly worrisome, a cause of deep concern. These challenges which are very daunting can be thwarted by your efforts of data analysis.

You are the bridge between raw data and meaningful governance because you analyse the data, you study the data, and that data is very helpful in translating numbers into narratives that shape India's future. Our nation holds the distinction of being the most populous nation in the world and therefore, population research is much beyond academics. It is nationally imperative. Understanding population dynamics, its growth, distribution, and composition is fundamental to crafting policies that ensure sustainable development, economic growth, social harmony. This aspect is critical for national security and harmony also.

I know you are aware of the challenges. Your data will awaken those who need to address these challenges that have taken monstrous dimensions and, let me remind you boys and girls, we have to understand and appreciate the potent power of our youth demographic dividend. India takes pride and that is envy of the world with median age of just 28 years. China and US are 38 and 39.

Therefore, our growth engine will be driven. It will fire on all cylinders because of your participation. Never ever forget you are the most vital stakeholders in governance. You will charter path for Viksit Bharat at 2047 but I must have a word of caution. This youthful energy must be guided and harnessed effectively through policies that promote skilling, entrepreneurship, innovation and health security.

None of this is possible without data analysis by you. The recent decision by Government of India, a game-changing decision, a milestone in governance is to include caste-based enumeration in upcoming decadal census. This will be transformative, this will help us satisfy aspirations equitably to bring about equality and will be a decisive step towards social justice. This will also help us when data will be available and enrich our understanding of inequalities because if inequalities are there they generate and breed inequities that is not the essence of governance and therefore this caste-based census, the data that will emanate will guide us for targeted development. Development will reach in sectors where it is needed, I can say with pride. Institutions like IIPS are uniquely positioned to play crucial critical role in interpreting such data and proposing inclusive solutions.

Boys and girls, in contrast to slow and long-term demographic shifts which is usual, natural demographic changes to take place, they have to take place but they are usually slow and long-term. But there are choreographed, well-structured ill-designed alterations aimed at changing the makeup of certain geographies. These are most worrying trends while natural demographic shifts occur gradually, deliberate and orchestrated changes in the demographic composition of certain regions pose a significant concern.

Young friends these calculated alterations in our demography are often driven by political or strategic motives that are certainly not wholesome for our nation. These disrupt our social and cultural equilibrium. Such menacing trends require vigilant monitoring and decisive action to safeguard integrity and sovereignty of Bharat.

Boys and girls for taking these tough decisions, data is required, your role comes into play there. I must have a word of caution for you, Bharat faces an alarmingly worrisome cliff-hanging situation with respect to demographic shifts driven by unchecked illegal migrants coupled with another sinister mechanism alluring manipulative conversions that distort our social fabric.

Boys and girls these are not ordinary challenges, these are not peripheral challenges, they are existential challenges that demand urgent resolute and effective national response. The time to act is now, time to act with clarity and conviction because this time bomb is ticking. We will have to demonstrate. We will have to demonstrate unwavering unflinching determined commitment to preserving the authenticity, the sanctity and integrity of our civilisation. People must understand what is democracy? why we value democracy? We value

democracy for two things. One our right of expression and second freedom of discourse. Democracy in the real sense is the architecture of equality, it is a solemn assurance that every citizen regardless of origin or means shall have an equal stake in the collective destiny of the nation. For that my dear young friends you must always remember.

Authentic discourse is our core civilisational value, we cannot have rhetoric, we cannot have jingoism, public discourse has to be authentic. Our heritage drawn from Upanishads and Dharamshastras celebrates dialogue over dogma restraint over rage.

I am pained sometimes when dogma and rage prevail, youngsters in the country, the youth of the country, the future of the country, have to play a critical role in making public discourse more rational sensible. I mean in sync with our civilisational ethos. Authenticity of communication with the public is fundamental. There are some exceptions like security aspects but for the rest it is non-negotiable.

The soul of democracy resides in honest sincere upright factually balanced and correct dialogue. Friends certain problems are writing on the wall. Illegal migrants in millions making it no less than demographic invasion, doctored conversions are alarmingly worrisome. Youth of the country has also to change the mindset that reflects that mindset through social media so that a national temper is generated. We overcome these challenges that have the potential to upset our civilisational essence and can be highly challenging for our democratic values.

Boys and girls let me tell you some challenges do not creep in silently they stare at us in the face. When the sanctity of our borders is breached by unchecked illegal migrants, it is not a question of law and order, it's a question of our survival, it's a question of national integrity. These people make huge demands on our national resources. They take work from our hands and make our national security, sovereignty vulnerable. Always be aware of such disastrous challenges when demographic balances are manipulated, not by organic evolution, but by sinister orchestrated design.

Then, friends, it is no longer a question of migration. It is a question of demographic invasion. Bharat has suffered it. Can you imagine official data? And I say it is much more now. Over millions of illegal migrants in this country. Can we suffer them? We need people in this country who are committed to our civilisation, who believe in Bharatiyata, who believe in our nationalism, who are prepared to lay down their lives for the nation. How can we have such kind of people living in the country? We must deal with it very urgently.

As I said a while ago, equally disturbing, worrisome, of deep concern is the weaponization of faith through coerced or induced conversions, where belief is replaced by inducement. Every belief has to be voluntary, optional. It is induced by allurements and choice by agenda. These are not isolated incidents. They erode social harmony, cultural coherence, compromise of national security. Always remember, and Bharat is known in the world for this, democracies must be compassionate, as was indicated by the Hon'ble Minister. But democracy cannot afford to be complacent.

Secondly, recently, as indicated by the Hon'ble Minister, Smt. Anupriya Patel, Operation Sindoor, we are proud of our armed forces. Their achievement is remarkable. Just imagine, deep inside the enemy territory, crossing international borders, Bahawalpur and Muridke, bases of Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba, they were demonstrably destroyed. So much was the impact that coffins were accompanied by their military, their ministers and terrorists.

I therefore assert, peace is quintessential, fundamental for survival of democracy. Never forget, peace is secured from opposition of strength. Democracy can blossom and prosper only in peace that is earned through strength, effective security, economic resilience, internal harmony. The history is proof of it. Invasions can be thwarted and peace secured only when we are ever ready for war.

Bharat has sent a global message. No longer shall we tolerate terrorism. We will liquidate it and destroy the source of it. Peace is not a sense of conflict. It is presence of preparedness. Democracy is a delicate bloom in its fertile soil of security. Democracy cannot prosper if there is no security. The sunlight of economic opportunity and the steady rain of social harmony also require peace. Coming to democracy, without peace, democracy widens into fear, mistrust and chaos. But let us not mistake peace for passivity.

Lasting peace, my dear friends, young friends, is never given. It is earned and it is defended. A nation secures

its borders by decisive policies, by being resilient in its economy. Then the nation becomes a fortress of peace. We have to emerge as a powerful military force in the region. Emergence of recent combinations that were decisively defeated by us, we have to be ever cognisant of them. We must embrace the ancient wisdom. And mind you, India is global knowledge of treasure because of our ancient scriptures.

There is Shanti Mantra, if we believe in peace, the nation has never believed in expansion. But we must never forget the wise counsel of Kautilya. I quote him "A king who is prepared for war secures peace on his own terms." Friends, our democracy is firmed up on our civilisational essence.

India's foundational ethos springs from timeless wisdom of Sanatana Dharma which inherently embraces inclusivity and harmony. Which nation in the world can boast of inclusive growth, inclusive life and harmony? The Hinduism majority deeply rooted in the civilisational spirit has never been guided by majoritarianism. People mistake it. Hinduism majority is not majoritarianism. These impulses are antithetical to us. And see the difference in other traditions across the world. Level of their intolerance, level of their fundamentalism.

They determine the mission to control through demographic explosion. For centuries, this defining distinction has shaped India's pluralistic identity. Expansionism has no place in Hinduism. No place in Santana. This is a thought because we seek not to conquer but to coexist.

Boys and girls, in conclusion, your education is not just a credential. It's a moral compass. Your learning doesn't stop here. Learning is lifelong. You now stand at the confluence of knowledge and nation building. Your data will influence policies. Your insights will shape futures. Your conscience will decide how equitably India rises. Progress is fundamental. But the only progress that brings happiness is equitable progress.

Let your work reflect not just academic excellence but democratic responsibility. Remember that the true measure of a society's progress is not how fast it moves but how compassionately, how in togetherness it moves. Carry forward the values of IIPS rigour, humility, courage, and commitment. Lead with empathy, govern with insight. And always remember numbers matter. Numbers decide governance but people matter beyond numbers and that is your job. Your numbers are not to define who is elected. Your data analysis numbers will define how happiness will spread all over, how people will have sound sleep.

Once again, congratulations. May your intellect illuminate, your integrity endure, your journey inspires. Again, I am beholden to the dynamic Minister Smt. Anupriya Patel Ji for affording me this great opportunity. And I am beholden to Indra Devta also. I was slightly delayed but I could make it.

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