

IIT DELHI Alumni Association

**Leadership Conclave 2011
Governing India – The Right Way**

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Speech by Shri L.K. Advani

Shri Shashi Munjal, President of the IIT Delhi Alumni Association, other dignitaries on the dais, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be invited to participate in this conclave.

Participating in the alumni gatherings of any institution strikes an emotional chord in me. It reminds me of myself being an alumnus of one such institution — St. Patrick's High School in Karachi, where I studied in the 1930s. My association with my alma mater is one of the strongest emotional bonds in my life. Even after the passage of so many decades, the memories of the time I spent in my school are still vivid in me. I still carry in my heart a deep sense of gratitude towards the teachers who taught me.

I am sure the same must be true about the alumni of this great institution, who had the good fortune of studying at its beautiful campus.

IITs: The Pride of India

IIT Delhi, and all other IITs in India, have a special place in the building of New India that started after Independence. As our ancient nation cast off the shackles of prolonged colonial rule, it had to find a place for itself in the modern world. It had to once again become a creator and intelligent user of knowledge, especially scientific and technological knowledge, without which entry into the modern world would be denied.

India needed to become strong and self-reliant in science and technology not because 'modernity for the sake of modernity' was an ideal worth pursuing. Rather, the newly independent India had gigantic challenges in rebuilding the nation. It had to rid itself of widespread poverty and backwardness, which was a legacy of colonial exploitation. It had to ensure decent and dignified living conditions for its large population. After all, this was both the promise and the dream of the great leaders of our Freedom Movement.

This could not be achieved without India developing indigenous strengths in science and technology.

Self-reliance in science and technology was also needed for India's national security, a consideration that assumed greater importance after the wars of 1948, 1962, 1965 and 1971 that were imposed on us.

All this meant that India to train its own mechanical engineers, civil engineers, electrical and electronics engineers, metallurgical engineers, textile engineers, and so on. It had to train its own its own doctors and other healthcare professionals, its own agricultural scientists, its own

food technologists, etc. India also had to build its own Research and Development capabilities in defense.

Moreover, India needed to build great institutions for conducting basic research in various sciences. After all, technology cannot advance without continuous augmentation of the knowledge of fundamental sciences. Here, India had an obligation not to remain a mere consumer of modern scientific knowledge created by western countries; it had to emerge as an original contributor to the pool of global scientific knowledge.

Above all, these Indian scientists and technologists had to be world-class.

It is in this context of building Modern India that we see the enormous contribution made by the IITs. Undoubtedly, India has also benefited greatly by the work of many other educational and research institutions, such as IIMs, IISc, TIFR, AIIMS, many leading universities, laboratories of CSIR and ICAR, etc. However, no single class of educational institutions has contributed as much to India's national pride and global prestige as IITs have done.

Therefore, it gives me special pleasure to be in the midst of the products of one such IIT located in the national capital.

Concern of the educated class of Indians

There is another reason that makes me happy to be here. And that has to do with the theme of your conclave —'Governing India - The Right Way'. Let me read out from the letter I received from Shri Munjal, inviting me to be the chief guest at this programme.

“The year 2010 has been crowned with the dubious distinction of being the ‘Year of the Scam’. From Commonwealth Games, to 2G licensing, to the revelation of money belonging to Indians in Swiss accounts equivalent to the GNP of the country, the enormity of the anomalies has fazed one and all. Whether it is from the Government, the public sector units or the private sector, it is the Ordinary Citizen who is getting much less than he deserves. In fact, he is the one who is also suffering the horrors.

The one line answer to all the above is Improved Governance.”

I could not agree with his assessment more.

What impressed me is that the alumni of a prestigious institution like IIT Delhi should be seized of the issue of good governance. All of you are well-settled in successful businesses and professions. In ordinary circumstances, people like you are not known to be too much interested in matters of politics and governance. But this conclave demonstrates that you, indeed, are. I see this as an indication of a larger phenomenon of educated Indians getting concerned about the direction in which the country is going, and wanting to do something to correct its course.

This is a highly welcome development.

‘Governance Deficit’ is ‘Ethical Deficit’

Friends, what do we mean by ‘Governing India - The Right Way’? Let me begin sharing my thoughts on this by recalling a saying that made a deep impression on me. It goes something like this: “Far more important than the knack of doing things RIGHTLY is the commitment to do the RIGHT things.”

This contains an ethical principle which applies not only to politics and governance, but to everything else we do in life.

Doing this rightly refers to certain abilities and techniques to achieve an objective, irrespective of whether the objective is good or bad.

Doing the right things refers to one’s readiness to be judged by the moral criterion of whether the thing being done is RIGHT or WRONG, GOOD or BAD.

These days, people are talking about the ‘Governance Deficit’ in India. A very senior minister in the UPA Government has acknowledged this in a media interview.

What is not acknowledged is that at the root of the ‘Governance Deficit’ is the ‘Ethical Deficit’.

The ‘Ethical Deficit’ in India is not limited to any particular field of national life. It has become all-pervasive.

Nevertheless, since politics and governance hog the limelight in India, as also in all other democratic countries, the ‘Ethical Deficit’ in this area becomes more visible.

Those in politics and governance cannot complain about the fact that their misdeeds are highlighted more than those of others. Rather, they should realize that unethical conduct has spread to other spheres of life because it is tolerated in politics and governance.

The rest of society often imitates or follows the standards set by those at the top — ‘Shrestha Jana’, as the Bhagavad Gita has taught us long, long ago.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance that we reform the system of politics and governance at the top.

India’s failure to remove the sources and practices of corruption in its politics and governance could have very serious negative consequences. We are already seeing some of these consequences.

All our achievements in terms of 8-9 per cent GDP growth, and India emerging as the third largest economy in the world in the near future, would mean little if we fail to introduce probity in high places in public life.

2010 was the ‘Year of Scams’.

Let us make 2011 the ‘Year of Accountability’

In our parliamentary system of governance, the highest office that can, and that must, set the right standards is that of Prime Minister. Unfortunately, this is where India has seen the most disturbing sight of 'Governance Deficit'.

It is not that Dr. Manmohan Singh himself lacks integrity. But today nobody can deny that the office he occupies lacks integrity.

Asked about the 2G scam, he blamed the "compulsions of coalition politics". He thereby absolved his own office of the blame in keeping its "Eyes Wide Shut" while the loot was going on.

The Prime Minister's answer was disingenuous also because it seemed to suggest that corrupt practices were limited only to ministers belonging to coalition partners of the Congress party.

Indeed, nowhere was the culpability of the Congress party more evident than in the brazen manner in which the investigation into the Bofors scandal has been closed down. The cover-up of this scandal is more scandalous than the original scandal itself.

After the Supreme Court quashed the appointment of CVC, the Prime Minister said it was an error or judgment. But couldn't the error have been quickly and easily corrected as soon as Smt. Sushma Swaraj, who was a member of the 3-member selection panel in her capacity as the Leader of the Opposition (Lok Sabha), pointed out — *before the CVC was appointed* — that the person being appointed was chargesheeted in a corruption scandal in a previous bureaucratic stint of his?

The UPA Government did nothing about the huge amount of Indian wealth illegally stashed away in foreign secret accounts, even though my party had made this a big issue in the run-up to the last parliamentary elections in 2009. In fact, the Government was trying to hide its unwillingness to act behind the technicalities of international treaties. It was only after the Supreme Court started asking hard questions that the Government woke up from its slumber. The apex court has in fact asked a big operator in this scandal to be booked under the anti-terror law.

An important name in the Commonwealth Games scandal has defiantly said, "I am not on the run; I will make others run."

Let us see how the Government proceeds in all these matters.

As far as the Opposition is concerned, we will keep the Government on its toes. If 2010 was the 'Year of the Scam', we will ensure that 2011 becomes the 'Year of Accountability'.

As a matter of fact, this is not only the job of the Opposition. My appeal to the people of India is to make this a popular demand.

Four systemic reforms for Good Governance

I do not suggest, nor do I believe, that the agenda of 'Good Governance' can be achieved simply by one person being replaced by another in the top executive office in our system. For this, we need deep-going systemic reforms in governance.

Therefore, I would like to put forward four ‘Good Governance’ reforms of systemic nature.

1: Electoral Reforms, with primacy given to state funding of elections:

The issue of Electoral Reforms has been a matter of debate in Parliament since the early 1970s. My senior colleague, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and I can take some credit for being the first ones to initiate a debate on this issue. Subsequently, many committees have looked into this issue — Goswami Committee, Indrajit Gupta Committee, etc. Unfortunately, the Congress party never showed any interest in this subject.

2: Administrative Reforms:

There should be simplification of, and introduction of transparency in, all governance procedures relating to economic matters. This will reduce the scope for irregularities and for irregularities going unnoticed.

3: Wealth creation reforms:

Strict legal measures should be introduced to prevent concentration of excessive wealth in a minority of the population, accompanied by measures to ensure its broadbased distribution. Just as there should be disincentives for making wealth illegally and unethically, there should be positive incentives for wealth creation through legal and ethical means.

4: Fast-track mechanism to probe scams and punish scamsters:

All corruption scandals in the country should be investigated and tried in a fast-track manner, leading to swift and deterrent punishment to those found guilty.

Lastly, my appeal to people like you is to participate actively in the larger societal debate and activity on improving governance in India at all levels. As a political personality who has been active for more than six decades, I can tell you that nothing keeps the political and governance establishment on alert more assuredly than a vigilant and fearless population.

Thank you.