

His Majesty The King's Address at the 14th RUB Convocation - 24 May 2019



I am very happy to be here with all of you today to celebrate the 14th Convocation of the Royal University of Bhutan.

As always, I will begin by reflecting on our past. Knowledge of our past is important as it helps us to understand where we are today as a nation and perhaps also develop a sense as to where we may be headed as we look to the future.

It is well known that our forefathers, under the leadership of successive Monarchs, have worked tirelessly through the generations to bequeath to us a strong and successful nation. When I reflect on our achievements, it is evident that our success as a nation can be attributed mainly to the wisdom, foresight and courage of our forefathers to always take the right decision at the right time.

For example, when the global development agenda was focused largely on enhancing material wellbeing, measured solely by Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Bhutan introduced the novel concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH), a holistic perspective that looked beyond the narrow confines of economic growth and material development.

Similarly, in the 1960s, when the global ecological movement was still in its infancy and the natural environment was viewed largely as an extractive commercial resource, our country recognized the importance of the natural environment for its intrinsic worth and as a precious resource to be sustained for our future generations.

Further, in a period when economic development and modernization were perceived as being synonymous with westernization, our country placed immense value on the preservation and promotion of traditional culture and values. For a small landlocked country, located between two large countries, our culture and traditions have provided the basis for our national identity and thus bolstered our security and sovereignty.

Our pursuit of balanced and equitable socio-economic development brought about immense prosperity for our people. For example, enlightened economic policies ensured that benefits from valuable national resources such as hydropower was neither captured by a narrow economic elite nor influential foreign investors. Instead it was judiciously developed by the state to strengthen our economy and benefit the nation and people at large.

Similarly, when Bhutan opened to foreign tourists in the 1970s, our leadership resisted the temptations to harness the quick fortunes from mass tourism and instead was prescient to formulate a visionary policy of High Value - Low Volume tourism. The wisdom of our tourism policy has led to the emergence of a strong Brand Bhutan – an exclusive destination.

The wise and timely decisions of the past have strengthened our security and sovereignty and enabled us to build a peaceful and unified nation where our people, despite religious, ethnic and linguistic diversity, live harmoniously like members of one family.

The policy of pursuing balanced and equitable socio-economic development has brought peace, progress, and prosperity that enabled the successful transition into a democracy about eleven years ago.

Today, as we inherit a strong and secure nation, the sacred responsibility of nation building has been bestowed upon the people of our generation including me as your King.

At this critical juncture, it would be important to reflect on and understand the timeless values and intuitive attributes of our ancestors that enabled them to achieve phenomenal success.

Firstly, it is the values emanating from Tha Damtse, the sublime trust and bond among the unique concept of the Tsa Wa Sum.

Secondly, it is Dremba, the innate sensibility of the Bhutanese, which has contributed immensely to our achievements as a nation.

Thirdly, it is the concept of Tendrel, which transcends our common understanding of auspiciousness to also include interdependence and collective efforts to meet our collective goals and aspirations.

Moving on to the future, I reflect, with some concern, the uncertain global environment arising from rapid population growth which is likely to exacerbate poverty, growing economic disparities, demographic shifts, wars and crises, diseases, natural disasters, etc.

On one hand, I feel we need to be more vigilant and work harder if we are to successfully navigate the complexities and overcome the vulnerabilities in an interdependent and globalized world.

On the other hand, I am highly optimistic and confident when I look towards the future with all the opportunities and prospects that modernization will bring for us.

As we know, Asia is in the midst of a historic transformation. Within the next 30 years, it is projected that Asia's share of global GDP will be more than half of the world's GDP, thus regaining the dominant position it once held. This will lead to an exponential increase in Asia's middle class and along with it, rising purchasing power, and as a result huge markets that will provide great opportunities for Bhutan.

We also hear about dramatic changes brought about by technological advancements, growth of e-commerce, expansion of social media and the immense power of search engines. It is estimated that in 2018 alone consumers spent more than US \$2.8 Trillion in online sales and a single social media platform like Facebook has 2.5 billion active users.

The question I have is how are we able to leverage technology for education; job creation; good governance; effective, timely and efficient delivery of services to our people; private sector development and growth; for accountability and transparency? In addition, there are emerging new developments such as Artificial Intelligence, Quantum Computing, Blockchain, Machine Learning, Big Data, IOT (the Internet of Things), Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality, etc.

These technologies excite me as they present immense opportunities for the future. Among the many countries in the world, those which prepare for this change and build the foundations to take advantage of such technological advancements will prosper and develop. Those which are not able to do so will invariably be left behind.

As a small country, unencumbered by the complexities faced by much larger countries, we can do things faster and better than others. Our institutions can be smart, flexible, responsive, dynamic and efficient. It is my aspiration that, when my son Jigme Namgyel, grows up and when his generation, which includes your children, come of age, they will be able to actualize their full potential and contribute to nation building.

Finally, I would like to share three messages to set us apart from other, larger countries. Given our realities, we cannot match other countries in terms of numbers and can easily be overwhelmed. Therefore, we cannot be content being able to do what others can. We must strive to achieve what others cannot and be better than others at all times.

With that in mind, one of the key attributes that will set us apart from others is the value of integrity. We must be a nation of honest, reliable and trustworthy people. Secondly we need to focus on creativity - for what we lack in numbers we must make up in talent. Thirdly, we must emphasize quality in whatever we do so that we can strive for perfection.

When I think of the future, I cannot help but feel concerned because of the uncertainties inherent in an ever changing and complex world. However, with our determination and drive to succeed, reinforced with hard work and responsibility, and inspired by the right values, I am confident that we can succeed as a nation.

I would like to share my happiness in meeting our young people as you are the custodians of our future, and there is nothing I enjoy doing more than being with you and celebrating your achievements with love and pride.

Tashi Delek