**Inauguration of Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Auditorium,**

**Ruhuna University, Matara**

[9 October 2018]

**Vice Chancellor & Faculty Members,**

**Distinguished invitees,**

**Dear Students..**

*Namaskar… Ayubowan.. Vanakam,*

* Today, we are dedicating the largest University Auditorium in Sri Lanka. This State-of-the-Art Auditorium joins Ruhuna University in its Ruby Jubilee celebrations (40 years).
* This modern auditorium is named after Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, who was an intellectual giant among men. Gurudev’s contribution to literature, art, music and education are unparalleled. He was the first non-European to win Nobel Prize for Literature.
* The auditorium has been built confirming to the design of Geoffrey Bawa, one of most famous architects, Sri Lanka has ever produced. We have always believed in delivering as per your choices and priorities.

*Dear Friends,*

* I am happy to be back in a University. I am particularly happy to see today many students and the youth in the audience.
* Prime Minister Modi has said, “*we should remain students for lifetime. We should yearn to learn from every moment in life*.”
* Universities are not just lecture theatres, these are meeting places of minds, where new ideas are born, where all boundaries that differentiate one man from the other are transcended.
* We are proud owners, of the legacy of Nalanda and Vikramashila, the prominent centres of learning in ancient days. Medicine and Mathematics were taught side by side with Buddhist studies and Philosophy there, centuries ago. Scholars from Sri Lanka like Lanka Jayabhadra adorned these Universities. To get admission, the gatekeepers asked questions, and only those who could answer were allowed to enter.
* We want all the youth to be able to answer the questions of modern gatekeepers of knowledge and enter a ‘brave new world’ through technology, talent and teamwork.
* Gurudev was a great educationist. He set up the Visva Bharati University in Shantiniketan. Gurudev said, “*The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence*.”
* Gurudev penned the National Anthem of India and Bangladesh. While he was a nationalist and fought for India’s freedom, he was also a true internationalist.
* Today, we honour the author of the National Anthem of Sri Lanka, Ananda Samarakoon, who had been a student of Rabindranath Tagore at the Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan.

*Dear Friends,*

* It was Gurudev who gave the title of ‘Mahatma’ to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. I take this opportunity to remember Mahatma Gandhi, the brightest star of Modern India, who visited Matara in November 1927.
* We have just commenced the 150th Birth Anniversary celebrations of Gandhiji on 2 October. We organized a series of events as a tribute to Gandhiji. You will soon see a special Video “Vaishnav Jana To”, a bhajan liked by Gandhiji, sung by popular Sri Lankan artists and youth icons– Bathia, Santhush and Umaria. We believe in working together with you. We believe in genuine partnerships.
* I urge the students to connect with the youth of India and take advantage of scientific and educational developments in India.
* India of today, is very different from yesteryears. There is a lot happening out there. How many of you know that India launched 107 satellites into space last year, in one go, the highest ever by any country? India’s Mars Mission, Mangalyan, costs less than making the Hollywood movie, “Gravity”. We are planning to send a human to space in the next four years, to coincide with 75 years of our independence.
* India currently has the third-largest scientific and technical manpower in the world. More than one-third of the top 1,000 global R&D spenders have centres in India. India’s internet user base is now the second largest in the world. In mobile data consumption, today, India is in the first position, ahead of US and China put together. India is world’s youngest country, with 64% of its population in the working age group. The tech start-ups in Bengaluru and Hyderabad have changed the face of modern India.
* Technology-enabled governance has indeed come a long way in India. Prime Minister Modi crowdsources ideas from people for every single speech of his. Aadhaar, the unique identification system, has become the largest and most successful IT project ever undertaken in the world.
* Sri Lanka also has a strong tradition of innovation. The magnificent rock fortress in Sigiriya is a stellar example of this tradition. The traditional irrigation systems in Sri Lanka are another example. It is also interesting to note that futurists like Arthur C. Clarke made Sri Lanka their home. The Human Development Indicators in Sri Lanka are comparable to world’s most developed countries. There is a lot that we can achieve from each other.
* India and Sri Lanka have been jointly funding S&T research and innovation programmes. This has further strengthened innovation and techno-commercial partnerships.
* Government of India offers 750 scholarships annually to the Sri Lankan students, for Undergraduate, Postgraduate and Doctoral studies.
* From last year, we have opened up our premier Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) to meritorious Sri Lankan students. The IIT Joint Entrance Examination was held in Colombo for the first time in May last year. Sri Lankan students have also now been allowed to take National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to Medical and Dental streams in Indian medical colleges.
* We will soon conduct the Graduate Aptitude Test for Engineering (GATE) for the first time in Sri Lanka, which will allow the students in Sri Lanka join various post graduate programmes in Engineering and Science in some of the prestigious institutes in India. We hope that Sri Lankan youth would make full use of these opportunities.
* As some of you may know, Sri Lanka is the first country in South Asia to join the National Knowledge Network (NKN) Network, through which the Sri Lankan Universities will now have digital access to around 1600 universities in India & beyond. I am delighted to note that Ruhuna University is an active partner in the NKN.
* As High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka, I would like to reiterate that India remains committed to walking with you in this journey towards development.
* It is heartening to note that we have undertaken several projects in the Southern Province. We have partnered with you to build more than 1200 houses here. We are also building additional 1200 houses in all districts in Sri Lanka under the Model Village Development Programs.
* We have also provided livelihood support to as many as 70,000 people from fishing and farming communities in Hambantota.
* After the devastating Tsunami of 2004, we rebuilt the Southern Railway Line in Sri Lanka under Indian assistance. We helped to establish the popular Emergency Ambulance Service 1990.
* We are always ready to offer our expertise and skillset. We can look at exchange programmes between Universities in both countries.
* Whatever we do, we believe in touching the lives of people; we believe in making a real difference to their lives.
* It was Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, who said, “*age considers; youth ventures*”. You have to venture out, venture out into your world of dreams. Your optimism and hope, courage and confidence, and passion and perseverance will hold the key not only to your happiness and well-being, but also to global peace, security and prosperity.
* As Lord Buddha has said, “*Just as the great ocean has one taste, the taste of salt, so also this teaching and discipline has one taste, the taste of liberation*.”

Thank you, very much.

*Oba Semata Stuthi..*

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