

## **37<sup>th</sup> Convocation Address**

**Jahar Saha**

**March 23, 2002**

Mr. Azim Premji, Chief Guest for our 37<sup>th</sup> Convocation, Dr Verghese Kurien, Mr. Narayana Murthy, Chairman, Board of Governors, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, members of the Society, my colleagues, the distinguished audience and the graduating class of 2002.

At the outset, may I say how happy I am that Mr. Narayana Murthy has taken over as Chairman of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad? He has a strong bond with this Institute where he began his professional career. I am sure that under his leadership the Institute will scale great heights. We are proud to have him as our leader.

May I also express our gratitude to the outgoing Chairman, Dr I. G. Patel, for the guidance and encouragement that he gave us during his tenure? In Dr Patel we had the rare combination of an

academician, a leader, and an administrator. We are sure that the end of his tenure does not end his association with the Institute.

On behalf of all of us, I would like to thank Mr. Azim Premji for accepting our request to be the Chief Guest and deliver the Convocation address. The theme of his address, "Success in a Changing World" is relevant not only to the new entrants to the professional world but also to all of us who are trying to manage change. Can there be a better way of learning how to succeed in this changing world than by listening to Mr. Premji who has changed Wipro from a small domestic company to a global giant? Mr. Premji, thank you for sharing your insights with us.

May I use this occasion to highlight some aspects of our activities since the last convocation?

It is a matter of pride for all of us that in their report on 'Which MBA' the Economic Intelligence Unit of the well known British journal, *The Economist*, includes us in the top fifty management schools of the world. According to that report, we are the toughest B-school in the world to get admission to. There are 250 applicants for each place the Institute offers on its Two-year Post-Graduate Programme. The survey ranks the Institute among the top six in

programme content, Faculty competence, and in some specific subjects, namely, marketing, organisational behaviour, statistics, and production/ operations management.

I take this opportunity to publicly applaud the Institute's faculty and the staff for this achievement.

In our efforts to globalise our programmes we have been giving our students an opportunity to work with people from different countries and different cultures. During this year about one-third of our students had summer assignments outside the country; about one-fourth of our students spent a term at well-known universities abroad; and about thirty-five overseas students from about fifteen universities spent a term here. We hope that in the near future about 50 foreign students will be on our campus doing the full two-year Post-Graduate Programme.

We want our Management Development Programmes also to be international. Our executive development programmes do get participants from Sri Lanka, the Middle East, Africa, and South East Asia. This year, for the first time, five participants came from Western Europe. They attended our four-month Management Education Programme. It was gratifying to see these participants

get completely integrated with the Indian participants. The cultural programme done by the MEP group at the conclusion of the programme was a memorable one as European and Indian cultures blended in some inexplicable fashion to produce beautiful creative expressions.

During the year under review, we completed our first programme in Agri Business Management, namely, PGP-ABM. Although we have had a specialised programme in agriculture for a long time, this is the first time we offered an independent programme to meet the specific managerial needs of this sector. We hope that the graduates of this programme will usher a new management era in the agriculture sector.

The Institute's Faculty have played a major role in the annual India Infrastructure Report the 3iNetwork consisting of Infrastructure Development Finance Company, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, and Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur has been bringing out. The current year's report focuses on governance issues for commercialization.

Enhancing Management Education at the universities is one of the objectives of the Institute. As part of our efforts in this direction,

we started Faculty Development Programme in the late 70s. All along, we have been experimenting with the duration and content of the programme to fine-tune it to the needs and convenience of management teachers. This year we reduced the duration from nine to four months but introduced a field visit to give the teachers an exposure to field activities. The objective was to help them identify the nature of research problems in their own areas of interest and to show them how they could organise field visits for their own students. We had 30 participants this year – twice as many as last year. One fourth of the participants were from Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Maldives.

I am happy to report that the placement for the graduating students has gone off well despite the recession in the economy and the disturbances in the city since 27 February 2002.

I note with regret that we will not be able to start an additional section for the two-year postgraduate programme in the coming academic year as planned. Last year's earthquake and certain new restrictions on building construction have led to this setback.

It may not be out of place to conclude this review by highlighting the recognition that the Government of India has given the

Institute's Faculty. Several members were invited by the Planning Commission to join its Working Groups or to participate in the consultative process in preparation for the tenth Five-Year Plan. The Ministry of Finance invited some faculty members for pre-budget-discussions on the economy, the Capital Market, and Science and Technology in preparation for the Union Budget 2002. Two faculty members were invited by the Parliament's Standing Committee on Convergence to give evidence before it regarding the Telecom Policy. The Institute takes pride in getting this rare recognition.

Let me now present a thumbnail sketch of the future activities that we plan to carry out.

We plan to strengthen and deepen our association with industry in planning and carrying out our academic activities comprising teaching, research and consulting. For doing so we plan to form a consortium of different companies that would provide us the infrastructure and the administrative support for offering general management programmes for their senior executives. The Institute would undertake the responsibility for developing and delivering these programmes. An important component of these programmes would be live projects that the participants would undertake. Our

experience shows that such close association with industry would enrich our teaching, research, case writing, and consulting activities. We will of course be on our guard to ensure that offering programmes for consortia in no way affects our independence.

We plan to develop major infrastructure facilities in Mumbai for conducting a one-year programme for practising executives and short duration programmes and seminars for senior executives. The reasons for setting up this base are not far to seek. First, Mumbai offers a fertile environment for newer ideas and a market for sophisticated programmes and services. Second, Mumbai is easily accessible from all parts of India and other countries.

Let me also share with you some personal concern. The happenings in Gujarat during last three weeks make me ask – do we need to pay attention to the task of resolving major societal problems in the country? We may not have addressed to these problems so far.

How should we help people without any skills and knowledge, the group who would suffer most from globalisation? More than half a century ago, Jawaharlal Nehru in his famous "Tryst with destiny" speech took a pledge "of dedication to the service of India and her

people." Yet "the overall success in the task, identified by Nehru, of ending *poverty* and *ignorance* and *inequality of opportunity* has been quite limited," to quote Amartya Sen, an eminent economist of our times. The plight of those caught in the perpetual circle of ignorance and poverty would worsen with increasing globalisation. How much of contribution have we made in resolving this major societal problem?

Another concern I have is in the area of shaping values of the society. The religious bigotry that we have witnessed recently, the intolerance that has taken possession of the people, the greed that even educated and well-to-do people have shown in looting shops, shows the crisis of character that the nation is facing.

In my view, no educational institution, including ours, can shut its eyes to such societal problems. We should address these problems in our way and do so urgently.

Before I conclude I would like to say a few words especially to the graduating students. I congratulate you on successfully completing the programme. You are probably the only batch who faced so many disasters both natural and man-made. First, the earthquake disrupted your studies. Just as you were recovering from this shock you faced another shock of the carnage in Ahmedabad. Perhaps the

second shock was far greater in intensity than the first one. An old adage says that some good always comes out of evil. The shocks you faced must have driven home the lesson that life is not a bed of roses. One must be prepared to face all the odds that one encounters and be prepared to surmount them. As the motto of the commandos says "When the going gets tough the tough get going." If you have learnt and imbibed this lesson, then the shocks played a useful role in your lives. Let me along with the Faculty wish you all the best. We would continue to be interested in your progress and the contribution you make. Keep in touch. Visit us whenever you have the time.