

ANNEXURE-VIII

Full Text of Speech by Minister of Science & Technology and Ocean Development during Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize Award Ceremony held on 28th September, 2005 at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi

1. It is indeed an honour for me this morning to welcome Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India to this CSIR Awards function. The scientific community is enthused by his un-flinching support and during the last one year has demonstrated that it is not only capable of producing world class science, but given the opportunities, can produce men of such scientific talent and excellence, who have the potential to be world leaders. The mere presence of the Hon'ble Prime Minister today is yet another example of his support for the scientific community. Today, we celebrate our achievers, our future Navratnas and in yet another sense celebrate the triumph of science. An English Chemist, Sir Cyril Herman Hinshelwood, who received the Nobel prize in 1956 once said "Science is an imaginative adventure of the mind seeking truth in a world of mystery". On this day of celebration, all of us are in some sense participating in that adventure. We thank you Sir, for being on this special day with us.
2. At the outset, my heartiest congratulations to the Bhatnagar Prize awardees. This is surely regarded as India's Nobel Prize. You all have joined the elite club of Bhatnagar Laureates today. This recognition imposes an onerous responsibility on you. You are expected to build on what you have achieved and be role models for our youth. Congratulations to Mr. Purohit, the winner of CSIR Diamond Jubilee Technology Award. I am sure in course of time this award will also come to command the same high prestige as Bhatnagar Prizes do today in science.
3. I commend CSIR for recognizing the best in Indian science and technology for decades now. We need to publicize these 'heros' on the national stage. This will inspire, motivate and attract some of our brightest youngsters to science.
4. I must applaud CSIR for not only recognizing achievements at the 'top of the ladder' but also in spotting and nurturing 'young bright minds' at the first rung too. Like the CSIR Diamond Jubilee Technology Award, CSIR has also instituted a CSIR Diamond Jubilee Invention Award for school children. The intention is to create awareness and arouse interest of school students in Intellectual Property – which I believe will in course of time be India's major asset and to encourage inventiveness and out-of-the-box thinking. Just two days ago, on CSIR Foundation Day on the 26th September, Dr. Mashelkar announced the winners of this year. I was pleasantly surprised to hear that the top two awardees, children from affluent schools, had inventions that reflected social sensitivity – one was an inexpensive lower limb

prosthesis – artificial leg and the other one was for a much improved cycle rickshaw to reduce the pedaling effort.

5. I was so impressed that I wanted to know more about the past awardees. Dr Mashelkar told me that the first awardee was Madhav Pathak, a Jabalpur school boy who developed an improved Braille slate to make writing and reading easier for the blind. This invention later received an international prize. This reassures me that our future is in the hands of youngsters who have a social conscience and are thinking of improving the quality of life of their unfortunate brethren.
6. We have seen the wonderful work that Media Communication Technologies has done to connect the unconnected. This has a huge significance for India. When you have to deal with large distances, a huge population and lack of resources, technology is the only tool through which this connectivity is possible. But I also heard stories on how tough they found it to get this technology accepted in India. Surprisingly this technology was first accepted abroad and then here. We need to learn from our past. When Cray denied us the supercomputer, Shri. Rajeev Gandhi took the initiative to create our own supercomputers. This 'denial driven' innovation drive finally helped us to join the select club of countries capable of manufacturing teraflop range supercomputers. The same Cray Company wanted to set up shop in India a few years ago. I therefore strongly believe that we need to support indigenous technology at the earliest and not wait for others to embrace it before we do.
7. I am happy to see 21 Bhatnagar awardees amongst us – they are our super stars – the very best that science has to offer in India. In turn, I assure you on behalf of my Ministry that you will get the very best we can give you to compete with the best in the world. Indeed the very best must be retained in India and return to India.
8. The other day, Dr. Mashelkar told me about how Mrs. Indira Gandhi sent Dr. Nayudamma, the then DG, CSIR abroad to pick up the very brightest and the best and offer them jobs on the spot. No formal interview, no application, no form filling. That is how Dr. Mashelkar was brought back. But he lamented the fact that what a Nayudamma could do to a 'Mashelkar', today a Mashelkar cannot do to another Mashelkar. Society has become so litigative. Appearing to be right appears to consume so much energy. I wish to assure you that in science, meritocracy is not only necessary, it is essential. I can assure you that we will leave no stone unturned to bring the very best back to the country. We have started this process by instituting Ramanujam Fellowships. But this is only the first step. We will do a lot more.

9. I am happy that our Prime Minister is releasing the India Science Report today. I am happy that Indian National Science Academy (INSA) took up this challenge. INSA, with its 750 distinguished Fellows, represent – the very elite – the most accomplished of Indian scientists. I find that in other countries government depends greatly upon the ‘academies’ for policy advice and other matters connected with science. I have heard that the US government’s thinking is strongly influenced by the study and advice that it receives from the science academies. I believe we need to create a similar ‘connect’ in India too. To the distinguished fellows of INSA, that are present in this audience, I wish to assure that my Ministry will be most happy to create such a bridge.
10. The India Science Report, that will be released by the Hon’ble Prime Minister today, is truly revealing of the state of science and technology in the country – it will help quell the many myths that are spread about Indian S&T. At the same time, it has given us ample food for thought and analysis as to what needs to be done either by executive actions or remedial policy measures. May I suggest Sir that to begin with, if you consider it appropriate, remit the report to SAC-PM for their study and recommendations so that we could incorporate their findings in the Eleventh Five Year Plan. We need to act now, and act decisively.
11. I can assure you that much has happened during the last year to put Indian S&T on the world map. Initiation of much higher levels of funding to basic scientific research through the creation of an overarching NSF like structure, institution of Fellowships, not only to attract the very best talent from abroad but also to encourage talent within India, initiation of the process for creation of new institutes of science, education and research, evolving new policies and strategies for bio-technology, creating new public-private partnerships, facilitating ‘hassle-free’ regulatory processes, which will help the creation of enterprises in emerging technologies represents some of the path breaking decisions taken. We have stepped up funding in frontier areas, such as in nano-technology. I assure you that with the unstinted patronage of our Hon’ble Prime Minister for science and technology, we will not be found wanting in supporting any new initiatives to strengthen and safeguard our Science and Technology infrastructure.
12. Finally, next year we will celebrate the Awards function with yet another set of scientists. We will celebrate their achievements and the triumph of science. As long as the scientific community continues to get the support of extraordinary leaders like Dr. Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India, the cause of science will always serve India well. I welcome all of you and thank you all for being with us today.