

**Remarks by Hon. Dr. Harini Amarasuriya, MP.,  
Prime Minister of Sri Lanka  
at the Hindu College, New Delhi  
16 October 2025**

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Shri T.C.A. Rangachari, Chairman of the Governing Body of Hindu College and  
Distinguished Members of the Governing Body,

Respected Prof. Anju Srivastava, Principal,

Distinguished Members of the Faculty,

My Dear Fellow Alumni,

Dear Students,

Honoured Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ayubowan! (which means May you Live Long)

Vannakkam,

Namaskar,

Good Morning!

It is a deep personal joy and a profound honour to stand before you today at Hindu College, a place that holds a very special place in my heart.

When I walked through the gates of this College as a young student from Sri Lanka in 1991, having arrived in Delhi on an ICCR scholarship, I carried with me a mixture of dreams, uncertainties, hopes, questions, and also a little nervousness.

As I entered the College through the very same gates today, over three decades later, I was filled with nostalgia, and also admiration.

What was once a charming College but with slightly worn-out buildings as I recall, has since transformed into a vibrant, world-class institution. I am told about the smart classrooms, advanced laboratories, and thriving research initiatives, that have propelled Hindu College to keep pace with the Indian nation that has become one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

Thirty something years ago, when I was a sociology student navigating the vibrant yet somewhat overwhelming streets of Delhi, the city was on the cusp of transformation. It was pre-liberalisation India. I remember the conversations that we used to have at the time, not just in the classrooms but more on the lawns over endless cups of chai, about social structures, inequality, human development that felt both urgent and necessary, politics, and

a myriad other subjects. Of course, as young people, starry-eyed, and idealistic, we naturally thought we knew it all, and that changing the world was an easy task.

I also recall some of the discussions in sociology, and the deep realization that understanding society meant understanding people – their struggles, their aspirations, their resilience.

Just as much as I am thankful to the Government of India for making it possible for me to study at Hindu College, I am grateful to all my teachers here who didn't just teach me theories, but encouraged me to think critically, to question, and to never accept injustice as inevitable.

The Delhi I knew at the time was different from the metropolis you experience today. But even then, it pulsed with energy, diversity, and the promise of what India could become. To my mind, however, what makes Delhi truly unique still remains unchanged. And that is Delhi's ability to absorb people from everywhere, to embrace diversity, and most importantly, to teach resilience.

After graduating in 1994, I carried the lessons I learned here to Australia where I studied for my Master's Degree in Applied Anthropology. I researched female migrant workers. Later, at the University of Edinburgh, I completed my PhD in Social Anthropology, focusing on child protection and complex relationships between state and society.

Reflecting now on my academic journey, whether it was teaching sociology at the Open University of Sri Lanka for over a decade, or conducting research on dissent, social justice, discrimination, youth issues, and human rights – I think it was the values instilled in me at Hindu College that perhaps remained my compass.

I spent years in the humanitarian and development sector, working with marginalized communities, female-headed households, and children trapped in exploitative labour. I engaged in trade union activism through the Federation of University Teachers' Association, fighting for education rights and academic freedom. Each of these experiences reinforced a truth that perhaps formed in my mind at Hindu College: that knowledge without action is incomplete; and that education obligates us to serve those who have been left behind.

When I made what many call my "leap" into politics in 2020, it was not an abandonment of academia but an extension of it. It was a recognition that sometimes, to create the change we study and advocate for, we must step into the arena ourselves.

Now, as Prime Minister, I carry with me the lessons of every classroom, every research project, every conversation with my teachers, my fellow students as well as my own students who dared to dream of a better world. I have not forgotten them and I have not abandoned them.

I want to say to the students who are here today that your education is not just about securing your individual futures. It is about equipping yourselves to transform the futures of others. It is your power to shape the world.

The world that you are inheriting faces complex challenges. These include climate change, inequality, social injustice, technological disruption, economic issues, and political polarisation. But it is not just your generation. Every generation faces its own share of complex challenges. What is important is to develop the skills to not feel overwhelmed by

challenges, not fear complexity. and to realise that challenges and complexity also present opportunities for those who are prepared, who are thoughtful, and who are committed to making a difference.

You must never underestimate the power of asking difficult questions. Learn – not what to think, but how to think. Challenge assumptions. Question established narratives. Seek truth even when it is uncomfortable. Be curious. Learn from disagreement.

I believe that education, compassion, and empathy must go hand in hand. Understanding societal structures matter little if we don't understand the human beings within them. Whether you become a doctor, engineer, astronaut, civil servant, entrepreneur, politician, or anything at all, let compassion and empathy guide your expertise. Let your learning serve life. The most intelligent mind is incomplete without a compassionate and empathetic heart.

Sitting in sociology lectures in this College in the early 1990s, or walking the grounds of this College, “hanging out” with friends, I never imagined that I would one day serve as Prime Minister, or that I would one day return to this College to speak to you as the Prime Minister and Minister of Education of Sri Lanka. The point I want to make is that life's path is rarely linear. Be open to unexpected opportunities and have the courage to step into roles that may sometimes feel bigger than you think you are ready for. That is where growth happens. Don't fear challenges. Remain open to life's opportunities. Never think that you know how your life is going to unfold. You cannot ever know.

Also, remember that democracy is not a spectator sport. Active citizenship means more than voting. It means engaging with your community, standing up for justice, and contributing to the common good in whatever capacity you can. The beauty of democracy, something that India and Sri Lanka share in this region as unbroken democracies since Independence, is that ordinary citizens like me, shaped by public education and shared struggles can rise to serve their nations.

I want to also urge you to always build bridges in whatever context you are placed in. Don't build barriers. Whether it is within educational institutions, homes, offices, between nations, or communities, remember to always find ways to collaborate and partner. The sustainable future of our countries, regions and Planet itself depends on collaboration and partnership.

For me, returning to Hindu College is also so much about the India – Sri Lanka relationship. Twenty-two nautical miles of ocean, the Palk Strait, separates our two countries. But what unites us is so much more.

Our relationship rooted in civilizational, cultural, religious, and historical ties stretches back more than two millennia. And strange as it may seem, our civilizational bond is also so much about education, teaching, and empowerment of the individual. Sri Lanka's written history records that in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC, Emperor Ashoka sent his son Mahindra to Sri Lanka to share the Teachings of the Buddha. His daughter Sanghamitra followed carrying a sapling of the Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya under which the Buddha attained enlightenment. She established the women's monastic order in my country, empowering women both spiritually and socially.

India and Sri Lanka are bound by a common heritage of tradition, values, and mutual respect. These cultural ties are woven into the fabric of our societies.

But what I want to emphasize today is the modern dimension of this ancient friendship. India has been an unwavering partner in Sri Lanka's journey, supporting our economic recovery, providing crucial assistance during times of crisis, and standing with us in our pursuit of stability and growth.

When Sri Lanka faced her most severe economic crisis in 2022, India extended credit lines, fuel, and essential supplies. These are not forgotten. They are written in the memory of our people. This wasn't just diplomatic assistance, it was the hand of a true friend extended in our darkest hour.

Sri Lanka, for her part, has consistently upheld a solemn pledge: never to permit her soil to be used in a manner that threatens the security of India. This principle remains sacrosanct.

Our partnership, as you can see, is clearly not episodic. It is structural. It is not a temporary convenience of today. It is a necessity of tomorrow.

The recent high-level visits between our nations (our President visited India in December last year, and Prime Minister Modi visited Sri Lanka just four months later in April this year) signal a deepening of this partnership at all levels.

The Government of India's generous support for educational infrastructure in Sri Lanka has been transformative. From English language laboratories in our provinces to vocational training centres, and support for financially disadvantaged university students – these initiatives are not just about infrastructure; they are about investing in our shared future and in the potential of our young people.

The bilateral cooperation in human resource development, including training programmes for teachers and officials, reflects our mutual understanding that education is the foundation of national progress.

As Sri Lanka charts its course for the future, we see India not just as a neighbour, but as a trusted partner in our quest for development and prosperity.

The Government of Sri Lanka recognizes education as a primary responsibility and is committed to reducing the financial burden on families while ensuring equal access to quality education across the country. We are working to eliminate disparities that result from unequal resource distribution, particularly in underserved communities.

Vocational education is being mainstreamed as a national priority to bridge the gap between classroom learning and the demands of the job market. In a rapidly changing economy, technical skills and professional development are essential for creating productive, fulfilled citizens.

As we enter a new era, it is important that our two countries strengthen our economic ties, enhance people-to-people connections, and advance regional and global cooperation. The future holds immense potential, and we must work together to realize it.

The strength of the Sri Lanka-India partnership lies in our collective action: in our shared commitment to addressing challenges that transcend borders, whether they involve environmental concerns, economic development, counterterrorism efforts, maritime issues or ensuring growth that benefits the peoples of our two countries.

For India and Sri Lanka, opportunities are boundless. What is required is the wisdom to seize them. Today, India is Sri Lanka's largest trading partner; largest source of tourism; and a significant investor. A little-known fact, perhaps, is that Sri Lankan companies have invested in India as well. Sri Lanka's flagship investment Brandix India Apparel City in Visakhapatnam provides employment to about 20,000 Indians of whom roughly 18,000 are rural women from villages in Andhra Pradesh.

The India – Sri Lanka partnership is also an opportunity for people like you, because you are tomorrow's leaders and entrepreneurs. Whether it's collaborating on renewable energy projects like solar and wind, digital services, technological innovation, or sustainable agriculture and food security, the opportunities are limitless.

Although in population size, at 21.9 million, we are smaller as a country than the size of the National Capital Region of Delhi, and we are only 65, 000 square kilometres in land area, our deep-water ports and our location can make Sri Lanka an important partner for India's growth. Sri Lanka's Colombo Port, for example, already handles a significant portion of India's transshipment.

For this reason, I urge you to think regionally as well as globally. The future of the Indian Ocean Region depends on young people like you who can see beyond borders and build partnerships rooted in trust: leaders who can help build an even more inclusive, prosperous, connected and mutually beneficial India – Sri Lanka partnership so that future generations in both our countries can thrive in an interconnected and interdependent world.

I want to say to all the students who are here today: you stand at the threshold of extraordinary possibilities. The education you are receiving at Hindu College is a gift, but it is also a responsibility. Use it wisely. Use it to build bridges, not walls. Use it to heal divisions, not deepen them. Use it to serve, not just to succeed. And I invite you to look South across the Palk Strait. Consider Sri Lanka not as just a neighbour but a collaborator and partner. We are a country of ideas and a resilient people.

In terms of UNDP's Human Development Index, Sri Lanka ranks in the "High HDI" category and is the highest-ranked in South Asia. We are a country that is rebuilding, eager to learn, teach, and co-create with India. It would be a pleasure to see increasing student exchanges with Indian and Sri Lankan students and researchers working and researching together in institutions, start-ups, art and culture and other fields.

All of you have access to knowledge that my generation could only dream of. But don't measure success only by titles or salaries. Measure it by how many lives you touch, how much injustice you challenge, and how many bridges you build, not just in societies and communities immediately around you but regionally and globally. Work to build a better, kinder, world for all. Be global in your imagination; be regional and global in impact. Be conscious of our common humanity. And remain deeply human in your values.

Thank you for having me here today. I wish you all a fulfilling journey ahead and a bright future.

Thank you.