



Namaste! Ayubowan! (meaning “Long Life!” that is the Sri Lankan way of greeting people).

Srimati Rita Goradia, President of FGI

Dr. Mrunalini Devi Khoa, Chancellor the University of Baroda, representing the Royalty of Baroda

Gentlemen on the dais

Special invitees

Ladies and Gentlemen

It’s a fortunate occurrence for me personally that I was invited to grace this occasion, when FGI is having this important conclave in a landmark year of celebrating the birth of an eminent South Asian, Maharaja Siyaji Rao Gaekwad III.

After listening to Dr. Mrunalini Devi, I have learnt more about him and his contribution to this region, this city.

I find that I am an odd person among you. I am not a management guru or an academic, nor am

I am an industrialist or a businessman. I am a diplomat of the Sri Lankan Foreign Service, with 33 years of experience. After listening to the very erudite contributions on today's topic, what I share with you will be different. I will take the time available to me to talk to you about two matters: one, about Sri Lanka, India and Gujarat; and the other is my own views about the topic at hand and the way forward in the view of a diplomat and one of your neighbours in South Asia.

First and foremost, I am very privileged to come to Gujarat, and to this special place of Baroda. This is my first visit to Gujarat.

Gujarat today is in the forefront of India's development trajectory. It is well known that Gujarat's growth, Gujarat's social progress, is exceptional, and we in Sri Lanka can understand and share that success because we have too taken a similar trajectory.

Those of you who know about Sri Lanka might observe that like Maharaja Siyaji Rao Gaekwad III promoted education and equality among his subjects, we in Sri Lanka were pioneers, soon after independence and even before, in providing our people equitable treatment and opportunities for education. Sri Lanka, for long years, has provided free education and free health for all the people. As a result, today we have the highest literacy rate in the region and of course, we are a lower middle income country now.

What Gujarat has done under the leadership of the great Maharaja whose birth we celebrate, is similar. In fact today I learnt that his patronage was instrumental in producing a person of the calibre of Dr. Ambedkar whose contribution to the Indian Constitution and Indian social development is immense.

Gujarat and Sri Lanka have more things in common. When I was serving as Permanent Representative in New York, at a particular party, I remember somebody saying, "Oh you Sri Lankans and Gujaratis are all over the world". Then he said that "when Armstrong landed on the moon he found a Gujarati businessman already there". That is the spirit of Gujaratis. They are pioneers; they are frontier people. And in fact Gujarat has been a frontier State in history, just like Sri Lanka. Gujarat's history since the days of Alexander indicates that Gujaratis have been resisting and fighting to hold on to their own and to charter their own progress. We in Sri Lanka are an island nation. Islanders have their own abilities, feel for their own independence but at the same time we imbibe positive influences that come our way. I find Gujaratis have been like that as well. While keeping your own values, own systems you have imbibed what is good

coming from outside. In other words, you complement, you absorb and sift trends and developments in such a manner that you benefit and you create situations that are best for you. Sri Lanka has been on a similar path.

India and Sri Lanka are today in a similar growth trajectory. Our current economic growth is about 8% and India, I think about 7%. Even during the time of conflict in Sri Lanka we have clocked about 4% growth. Despite many achievements in terms of our social development during the last twenty five years, we were subjected to terrorism, violence and civil strife. That is the past in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is no more a violent country. We have eradicated terrorism and today there is peace and tranquility. Therefore, Sri Lanka is now ready to exploit its strategic advantage in relation to the region that we live in, South Asia.

Like Gujarat, Sri Lanka is a frontier State. As one enters the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka is strategically located right at the bottom of the Indian subcontinent landmass where the world's busiest sea lanes lie. And today's world, when it grows, when goods and services exchange takes place, it will be primarily sea driven. The goods and services will travel the world primarily by sea in time to come. And we are in the middle of two of the fastest growing regions in the world, that is China and India. In this context, as we go forward, there is lot that people in Sri Lanka and people in this region can do together to create complementarities so that both countries will benefit.

In this effort, we must base ourselves upon our historical legacies. Sri Lanka and India have many things in common. What are they? We have practiced democracy without any break. Among the South Asian neighbours, these two countries are the only two countries which have had continuous democratic elections and leadership chosen through democratic means.

Our connection with India has several landmarks. Of course it is steeped in history and legend as well. We in Sri Lanka like to think of India from a very important landmark. Exactly 2301 year ago the greatest king of India, Emperor Ashoka, sent his son and daughter to Sri Lanka, and our King at the time embraced Buddhism as a way of life for Sri Lankans. And that tradition actually travelled from Sri Lanka to Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia. Buddhist traditions thrived in this region of Gujarat as well during the Gandhara period. So we in Sri Lanka think of India as a place where there was a great benevolent king who introduced us to a great spiritual way of life. And we still follow that, and for us, a strong, vibrant India is something that we cherish because Ashoka was a great king and he was benevolent towards Sri Lanka. We, as your neighbour therefore, always look to India to be a strong leader who can take not only your country but the region ahead. That's the spirit with which we need to work with India. And in that effort, Gujarat becomes very important.

Location gives Sri Lanka and Gujarat great advantage. If you look at Sri Lanka's location, we have an Exclusive Economic Zone in sea spanning 200 kilometers. Now that's lot of sea and a lot of resources. In time to come, the world's resources will be primarily sea-based since the land resources will diminish. Most sea resources are still largely untouched. Land resources due to mining, and various exploitations have depleted. Having this in mind and having the idea that sea is important, Sri Lanka is developing ports. Today 70% of Colombo Port's transshipment is for India. It is a very efficient Port. A container ship goes from Colombo to New York in 14 days and ship turnover time is about 8 hours to 12 hours. And Sri Lanka has built another Port in the deep South, at Hambantota.

In this context, as we go forward, there will be lot of complementarities that will arise in the economies of India and Sri Lanka. Investing in Sri Lanka will become profitable for the Indian investors; and for the Sri Lankan investors to invest vice versa in India should become profitable too. Already Sri Lankan investors are in India. In Visakhapatnam, there is a substantial Sri Lankan investment called "Apparel City".

We in South Asia need to grow together, and in that, our common values, and our commitment to progress will be very important. And we, India and Sri Lanka, on most issues remain on the same page in terms of politics, and in terms of how we approach society. I would therefore invite all of you to think about Sri Lanka, think about how you can benefit from your relationship with Sri Lanka and to use Sri Lanka as a platform for your business development as well.

India and Sri Lanka have many other things in common. And let us not forget about cricket. Finally we have started beating India again, but that's a cycle always.

Let me now address a few issues with regard to the topic at hand. You are discussing about human resource development and managing growth in that context. I have been a diplomat for the last 32 years. I have served mainly in western countries; 8 years, twice in Geneva, 8 years in Washington and New York and have travelled all over the world. And on all these occasions, there is an issue that has bothered my mind. That is, why is it that those of us in South Asia, Indians and Sri Lankans, who are heirs to great civilizations and whose ancient cities like some of your old cities and our cities like Anuradhapura were the best in the world once in antiquity, there were inventions in our part of the world at that time, and we had great thinkers like Lord Buddha and others; but today, why are we just called "developing countries"? What happened to us? Today we try to emulate the so called "developed world", which was a late comer in development, but now way ahead in terms of many other commonly known development

parameters, like growth and social welfare systems. This has bothered me and I have tried to understand why. I was wondering whether it is something to do with our talent or is it that we lack human capacity. But very obviously, we still have great thinkers but many reside outside our region. If one goes to any western university or any western laboratory one will find enough Indians, and Sri Lankans, working there. They do very well. They are equal to anybody else there. We still have the intellectual capacity. Is it any other talent then that we lack? No, we have that too. Take our cricket teams, both India and Sri Lanka. They are better than, or equal to the best in the world. So talent is not an issue. Is it that we lack resources? No, we have all the resources that we need to develop; we have them in our land. We have more resources than most countries like, for example, Switzerland, which is a very developed country. What is wrong with us? Why we are not getting there?

In my view, there are two things that we lack. One is, for some reason our society has become undisciplined. Discipline is not abundant in our society. Most people in our society, if given a particular time to arrive at, will not turn up in time. Or if one invites them for some function, they will turn up late. Let's say you invite them for a dinner, for example at 8 o'clock; some will come at 10 o'clock. It appears that we don't give a premium for discipline. And there are many other instances which can be used to describe the lack of discipline that pervades our society compared to the western world, as those who have travelled abroad would know. People in the developed world keep time, they keep schedules and they keep to their words.

The other quality that is strikingly absent in our societies is social responsibility. Social responsibility is a very important criteria for the progress of a society. It manifests our concern for other fellow human beings. We need to do things for our community. We cannot throw garbage on to the other person's backyard. Rather, we have to dispose it ourselves. Then, we should drive our vehicles with care and respect for others. It is clear that we lack both these qualities of discipline and social responsibility. However, we have to accept with respect and pleasure that there have been some leaders in our countries like Maharaja Siyaji Rao Gaekwad, who have given thought to the importance of such values. In their times, they emphasized the importance of social responsibility. His Leadership made Gujarat, Baroda, a better place.

And in Sri Lanka as well, some leaders have done that. But as a societal practice, we have not been able to sustain such values countrywide or region-wide in a sustainable manner.

In this region, your Chief Minister, the Chief Minister of Gujarat is one of the best examples of a person who is disciplined, who gives premium to discipline and to social responsibility. I have heard about how he conducts himself and his commitment to social responsibility. That maybe why Gujarat is taking off today. Gujarat is an example for the rest of India in economic and

social progress.

If we are to achieve developed country status, in my view, we need to be conscious of these two factors and mainstream those values into whatever human resources development work at hand. Human resource development without discipline, without social responsibility is nebulous. Some people talk about this twenty first century going to be an Asian century. It is claimed that the West is declining and that we are rising. That is what some people believe. I really have my doubts about that presumption. For us to achieve that status of a developed region we need to have several more attributes. We need to be innovative. Innovation is most important. We need to be productive. As the businessmen here would know if you have a productive workforce, that is the cutting edge with which you will beat the other person in business. The productivity, the innovative capacity of our people is therefore key to success and development. However, such attributes will not come about without discipline and without social responsibility. Discipline and social responsibility will lead towards creating productive and innovative people. And such people we see in plenty in developed countries. Most in the developed world are productive. They are innovative too. And unless we as a people in South Asia change our way of behavior, system wide, we will not be able to make that leap towards making this century an Asian century.

I am fully aware that among you there are people who have such capacities; who practice those values; but that should be all of us. And we think, like your Prime Minister once said, that when the Indian ship lifts, all other country's ships around India should lift too. We believe that India's leadership, and the kind of leadership given by your Chief Minister in Gujarat is very important for our region to take that big leap towards a developed world. But if we are to be developed, then we have to have those progressive attributes of the developed world. Growth should come with inclusivity. What is inclusivity, one would ask. To my mind, if we are socially responsible and disciplined, then inclusivity will come automatically. And we will become productive, innovative people who are concerned about fellow beings. Who feel every human being is equal. These attributes to our people are nothing new. These were said by sages of this country very long ago. Buddha said this 2600 years ago and there were several others who have said the same. We have forgotten about what our own people have told us.

The time has come my friends, that we take a leap forward. May be my generation has failed. But there is another generation, the next generation, and I think they should not fail. They should take us to that promised level of development with social responsibility. And I have a vested interest in that so that I get my pension. Otherwise our governments will go bankrupt without sustained development. We need to have sustainable and inclusive development. That is the message I want to give you today.

Before I conclude, I want to invite all of you to Sri Lanka. We would like to welcome all Indians. We in Sri Lanka feel that we are the old Indians. As you know, a majority in Sri Lanka speak Sinhala, which is a combination of Sanskrit and Pali; Pali as you know is the language spoken by the Buddha. And some in our country therefore feel that we are the old Indians who left this land long years ago and we want to reconnect and grow with you. And let's make that growth story a win-win situation.

Thank you very much.