



Director's Address

First Convocation of IIIT-Delhi
November 3, 2012

Respected Chief Guest, Mr. Murthy, an icon for modern India,
Our Chancellor, Honorable LG,
Our Chairman, Mr. Karnik, whose unflinching and ever available support has been of utmost importance to our Institute,
My faculty and administration colleagues,
Dear students,
My dear graduates, our very first alumni, and their parents,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great pleasure and honor for me to be standing in front of you to give my very first convocation address as Director of this young, but already strong, Institute which is aspiring to soar high. Let me start my address with a brief yearly report.

This year, IIIT-Delhi started its operations from its main campus at Okhla. With this year's admissions, our total student strength is 550 with over 100 MTech students, and about 40 PhD students. In the next 3 years, our plan is to approximately double the student and faculty strength – the most the current infrastructure can support. However, I am happy to report that in the campus inauguration earlier this week, Hon'ble CM has already announced Rs 250 Crores support for phase II of the campus.

To our existing academic programs, BTech, MTech and PhD in Computer Science and Engineering, we added BTech, MTech, and PhD in Electronics and Communications Engineering. We now have specializations in MTech in Mobile Computing, Information Security, Data Engineering, and VLSI and Embedded Systems.

Our faculty strength has crossed 30, including accepts. We continue to organize selections frequently, and have also held two in the US – perhaps the only leading Institute in India to take this route.

Our faculty and PhD students continue to pursue top quality research and have received various awards last year: IBM Faculty Award; three best paper and poster awards; IBM PhD Fellowship, Microsoft PhD Fellowship, IJCB Doctoral Consortium Fellowship, and three TCS PhD Fellowships. In the last two years, we have over 10 best paper or poster awards and 12 TCS PhD fellowships – both perhaps the highest in the country.

For the first time placements took place as the first batch – you – graduated. We focused on high end companies and with difficulty convinced some of them to visit us. Finally, all the companies that came were happy with the talent they saw and recruited. Companies like Adobe, Microsoft, IBM Research, Paypal, TCS Innovation labs, Infosys Labs, came and recruited our graduates. Most students got jobs with compensation of over ` 5 Lac/yr, which compares favorably with most top Institutions in the country. This record in first placements is remarkable by any standard.

The construction of permanent campus is now reaching the final stages. The academic buildings and a hostel were handed over in Aug. The rest of the campus is likely to be handed over by the end of the year. Of the approx. half dozen major Government Institutions that started in 2008, I believe we are the only ones to have our own permanent campus today.

After this brief formal report for the year, as this is the first graduation from the Institute, please allow me to look back at the creation of the Institute and the journey so far, and share some personal thoughts.

When I was offered the position of Director in 2008 of an on-paper Institute called IIIT-Delhi, initially I was tentative about the job. I was a Chair Professor in IIT Delhi and was doing rather well. But, the more I thought about it, the more I saw possibilities of creating a great institution in India from scratch and implement some of the ideas I had been promoting over the years. The academic and administrative autonomy built in the Act allowed me to dream and envision and eventually take innovative measures in academics and its governance. Soon the vision of a research-led, globally respected Institute out of India, took complete hold over me. I have worked hard in various phases of my life – each of the five books I wrote entailed a year or two of hard and dedicated work – but let me assure you that I have never worked harder than I have done in the last 4 years – my wife here will testify to it. But she will also testify that I have never felt weighed down with it – when you are progressing well, and have strong support supportive Government, Board, faculty, students, and staff, what's a little extra work?

Both you, the graduates of the first batch of BTech students, and your parents, may remember the counseling on Aug 26, 2008. I was selling an idea, a dream, to you with no infrastructure and zero faculty. I am extremely grateful to you for buying into the vision and taking the decision to join IIIT-D. For this reason alone, the first batch, which is called the pioneering batch for all the right reasons, has had a soft corner in my heart – to the extent that some have complained that “2008 Batch can get away with anything as the Director will not act against them.”

We started the classes in rooms of NSIT, with guest faculty primarily from NSIT. We had an empty floor and three large rooms – one of which became the Director's office. When the first few visiting faculty joined, for the first few weeks, all of us sat in the Director's office till some faculty cabins got constructed. It was only in only after a year we had sufficient facilities in our transit campus to host all our classes and our labs. I am grateful to NSIT for their support initially and for all the four years we were there.

Since the early days we have come a long way. Not only do we have our own campus, we have thriving education programs taught by an extremely competent faculty. Our faculty can compare favorably with the best in the country – all of them have PhDs with about two-thirds having PhD from US or Europe. We have been able to create, in small ways, an environment to host bright and young faculty who want to make a difference in India, from India. So, while even the top Institutions in the country struggle to find CS faculty, we have over two dozen CS faculty members in just three short years.

While we have been fortunate to have a good start, much more remains to be done to reach closer to our vision of becoming a globally respected institution. In my early

days as Director I had reached out to some people I respect for advice. Some of those pearls of wisdom I had stuck in my office so I can see them regularly. One by Prof. SN Maheshwari is most apt for the Institute: "Creation of an institution of excellence is like a marathon run. The run [for IIT Delhi] has just started, and has started well. The toughest middle miles are still a long distance away. I am confident they can be run provided the Institute does not lose sight of the objectives and goals it has established." And the one I have for myself is a quote by none other than NRN Murthy: "Our legacies will be written in our actions, not in our words. It will be written in the outcomes we generate rather than the intentions we start with."

Let me now take this opportunity to put before you, the first set of alumni of IIIT-D, a few suggestions, as trends you and your families set will guide others to come in later years. But before that, let me mention the important role of alumni for an Institute.

To a large extent what alumni do with their lives define the stature of an Institute. And we have provided a strong foundation for you to do well in life – good education from a dedicated faculty, and a strong value system of academic honesty, hard work, and professionalism. Alumni form a special stakeholder for an Institute as their only interest is to see the Institute flourish and grow in stature – the more the Institute grows in stature the better it is for the alumni. This makes them a unique stakeholder as all other stakeholders like students, faculty, staff, and administration, have other stakes as well. I have two specific suggestions for your consideration to play your role as a responsible and important stakeholder of IIIT-Delhi.

First, stay engaged with the Institute. This is extremely important. Visit the Institute when in Delhi and meet with faculty and students, respond to our emails, ensure that your contact information with us is correct, visit the Institute website regularly to keep abreast of what is happening, give suggestions, etc.

Second, give back to the Institute, financially and otherwise. For an Institute to be strong and protect itself from interference from outside, financial autonomy is essential. Towards this, as has been shown by great Universities of the world, a strong endowment/corpus is necessary. We have set a goal of Rs 100 crores corpus in 10 years – we have made a good start and have about Rs 2 Crores corpus, with at least six people contributing around Rs 20 Lac each. My suggestion to alumni is to contribute 1% of your income yearly to the Institute, and increase it when you are well-off and can afford to contribute more. If each alumnus does this, this support will enthruse others to contribute, creating a strong support base. To be with you in this drive of giving back to your Institute, and to walk the talk, I have instructed our finance department to deduct one month on my salary every year as contribution to our Institute. And this has already started – before you graduated one month of my salary was donated as the initial contribution by your batch.

Besides giving yourself, there will be opportunities for you particularly when you are senior, and for your parents now, to have corporations, philanthropists, agencies to establish Chairs, Fellowships, Scholarships, Awards etc at the Institute. Please help bring such opportunities to the Institute. I can share one personal example of this. When I was spending my Sabbatical from IIT Kanpur at Infosys as Vice President, Mr. and Mrs Murthy wanted to set up a Chair. I quickly worked with them and provided all the help, resulting in the Chair getting established in IIT Kanpur.

Later when you are senior and have more experience and knowledge to share, there will be other possibilities of giving back, particularly if you have remained engaged. E.g. offering some courses, giving lectures, conducting short programs/workshops, facilitating placement and internships of our students, etc.

To end, dear graduates, have a successful and satisfying life. We have given you a good launching pad in very difficult initial circumstances – make the most of it. And while excelling in your own pursuits, keep engaged and contribute to the Institute's pursuit of excellence and global stature.

My heartfelt best wishes to all the graduates.