



36th Convocation

Monday, 17th August 2015

**Tamil Nadu Agricultural University
Coimbatore**



Acceptance Speech

Dr. Susan R. McCouch

Professor, Department of Plant Breeding and Genetics,
Cornell University, USA

Dr. Pedro Medrano Rojas

Former UN Assistant Secretary-General & Former Director,
World Food Program, New York, USA.

Thiru. Ashok Bakthavathsalam

Chairman & Managing Director,
K.G. Information Systems Pvt. Ltd., Coimbatore

**Acceptance Speech of Ashok Bakthavathsalam
on Conferment of Degree of Doctor of Science
(*Honoris Causa*)
at the 36th Convocation of the
Tamil Nadu Agricultural University**

August 17, 2015

His Excellency, the Governor of Tamil Nadu and the Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Government of Tamil Nadu and Pro - Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Vice Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Dr. K. Ramasamy, Dr. Susan R. McCouch, Cornell University, Dr. Pedro Medrano Rojas, Former UN Assistant Secretary-General, Members of the Board of Management and the Academic Council, Faculty Members, Students, Representatives of the Media, other Dignitaries, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I want to express my heartfelt thanks to the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) for bestowing upon me the great honour of receiving the honorary degree of Doctor of Science during this 36th convocation here in Coimbatore today.

I have always had the highest admiration for TNAU, one of the crown jewels of the city of Coimbatore, especially whenever I have passed by this campus on my infrequent

trips to Maruthamalai. Only recently I realized that TNAU was the first ever Agricultural college to be started in India (as early as 1906). Over the past 100 years, it has grown in stature to arguably become the #1 Agricultural University in the country. It is internationally acclaimed and the students from this university have made their mark all over the world. An alumni of this institution's Biotechnology department is a member of the team which has been recently awarded the Nobel Prize for the peaceful use of Atomic Energy.

Most importantly, throughout its 100+ glorious years of history the University has had a tremendous and positive impact on agriculture by transforming the lives of millions of farmers in the state of Tami Nadu and across India for that matter. And so, this makes the honour that you have conferred upon me that much more overwhelming and meaningful.

TNAU Excellence

TNAU has several firsts to its credit. First and foremost, thanks in great measure to the dynamic and able leadership of the current Vice Chancellor Dr. K. Ramasamy, TNAU has brought about the much needed focus and paradigm shift to organic farming, the 2nd green revolution, which should bring sustained and improved prosperity to the farmers.

The present agrarian crisis is a result of dwindling profits from traditional agricultural practices accentuated by rising cost of inputs and dwindling human resources. I am sure this crisis will be mitigated by innovations from this University in the field of biotechnology, bio-fertilizers, bio-pesticides, farm

mechanization and increasing the profitability to the farmer through value addition of farm produce, thereby aiding the producer and providing the consumer with a healthy and nutritious diet. I am sure this Institution will bring glory to the state and the nation by its continued contributions.

Secondly, something that caught my attention (coming from an IT background), is the **Agricultural Portal** which covers all aspects of farming which is a boon to the farmers. The marketing and weather advisory activities and the electronic extension greatly aid the farmers in the state and for this alone TNAU is a role model for other agricultural universities in the country and Asia.

I truly believe we have only scratched the surface regarding the adoption of technology. It still has huge potential in accelerating not only the agricultural productivity in our country but the productivity of all other sectors as well.

- On one side, we have seen farmers benefiting from price discovery, thanks to cheaper smart phones and pervasive mobile networks. In addition to anecdotal stories, quantifiable evidence of the tangible impact of technology has begun to emerge. Here's one case in point: the rapid adoption of mobile phones by Kerala's fishermen has resulted in improving their profits by 8 percent accompanied by a 4 percent decline in consumer prices!

- And on the other hand, we are already witnessing the ominous signs of technology's dark side. Take the case

of killer drones. A group of world-renowned entrepreneurs, scientists and innovators of the likes of Elon Musk, Stephen Hawking and Apple's co-founder Steve Wozniak have signed an open letter calling for a ban on the use of autonomous weapons. If proper regulations are not put in place, artificially intelligent devices that could "search for and eliminate people meeting certain pre-defined criteria" could be deployed within a matter of "years, not decades," the group's letter states.

For the Love of Technology

Nevertheless, it is the love for technology that has driven most of my own pursuits as an entrepreneur.

I am extremely fortunate to have been blessed with a supportive family who have constantly pushed me to pursue great things. My father Dr. G. Bakthavathsalam, a surgeon by profession, strongly backed my decision to pursue engineering studies instead of medicine. And subsequently, he would fully back me in all my entrepreneurial adventures, knowing fully well that any one of those adventures had the potential to wipe our family's net worth many times over.

I have also been extremely fortunate to have a wonderful team of trusting and trustworthy colleagues at KGiSL who have helped cause impact in diverse settings, including but not limited to:

- establishing Coimbatore's first and fastest growing medical transcription company at that time,

- establishing KGiSL as Coimbatore's biggest and longest running international BPO centre and leading BFSI software solutions provider to global investment banks and insurance companies,

- establishing one of the largest special economic zone (SEZ) in the rural villages of Saravanampatti and Keeranatham. The zone has attracted 1500+ crores of investment in world-class infrastructure including water, power and roads, generated direct employment of 20,000+ jobs, crossed cumulative exports of more than 7,500+ crores, and now accounts for at least 75% of all annual IT exports from the city,

- establishing the 6500+ strong KGiSL educational institutions, including KGiSL-IIM, KG College of Arts and Science and KGiSL Institute of Technology

- and last but not the least, establishing KG Design as the first solar thermal R&D Centre that has been recognized by the Government of India; since then it has won several National Level Awards for Innovation. KG Design's desalination system is 100% indigenous, and can be fueled by a mix of thermal sources (including solar, biomass) to generate potable water from the oceans in the most ecological friendly manner to serve the needs of coastal communities.

In all the above endeavours, the DNA of team KGiSL's operating culture is best summed up as follows: striving in areas far beyond our "comfort zone", a strong conviction even

in the face of unnerving uncertainty and a creative flexibility to adapt the right strategies, all in the single-minded pursuit to make IT happen.

Dedication

Once again, I offer my most profound thanks to His Excellency, The Governor of Tamil Nadu and the Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University; the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, the Government of Tamil Nadu and Pro-Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University; the Vice Chancellor and Members of the Board of Management; and the Academic Council for conferring this honour on me. It is a day that I will never forget.

At this juncture, I recollect and offer my thanks to all my teachers who instilled in me the yearning for learning. I am also fondly reminded of a great soul, a great teacher for the entire nation, who was a teacher literally until his last breadth. When he passed away, the entire nation grieved deeply that "Bharat has lost its Ratna".

As this honour deeply motivates me to do more in the coming years, I humbly dedicate this honour to the memory of our former President Bharat Ratna Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, probably the greatest People's President we will ever have.

We had the privilege of hosting the great man on five different occasions at our KGiSL's Saravanampatti campus. Every time, he would leave a deeper and indelible mark on

all of us. I still vividly remember the time when he had come over to inaugurate KG Design's Solar Thermal Research Centre. He seated me beside him and triggered me with the powerful question: "What is your dream?" And as if to answer what he had asked of me privately, he would publicly remind me, as he has done of millions of Indians, that "A small aim is a crime."

Therefore, to all the graduating students here, I have this to ask of you: Starting today, may you start dreaming those big dreams, may you rise to overcome challenges bigger than you, and through your heroic struggles may you accomplish big things far beyond your own imagination. Most importantly, every time you feel the fear, "feel the fear and do it anyway!"

My heartiest congratulations to all the graduating students for your well-deserved degrees and awards - I wish each of you the very best of health, happiness and prosperity in the years to come.

God Bless!



Tamil Nadu Agricultural University
Coimbatore

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