

“Capabilities of Indian Youth”

Mr. Ramanand's speech at Inspire India Launch at Hotel Green Park, Hyderabad
April 30, 2010.

Good Evening friends. It is indeed my pleasure to be among you today and I owe this opportunity to my dear friend Raju Ravitej with whom I am glad to renew association after almost 7 years. I am glad that he was kind enough to invite me to address this august audience.

I have a confession to make, my experience in life, is only a fraction when compared to the cumulative experience in this room and I humbly accept that the thoughts that I am sharing as an individual today are purely personal and based on my experience. I would be open to influence of persons with diverse or divergent views. Also note that the views of the organization I work for or the management of those organizations are not represented here.

I would once again welcome you to this occasion of the launch of Inspire India an organization that in its own right wants to influence and contribute to the progress of India.

Our motherland is a nation of great history and it is widely acknowledged today as a nation whose future can be even greater than what is envisaged today by experts all over the world. Be it in terms of size of economy, our large trained workforce etc.

My predecessors have spoken about their views on:

Attitude of Indian youth to progress

Potential for enterprise in Indian youth

Now I will share my views on Capability of Indian Youth and then we will have the session open for interaction among the speakers here and assembled audience.

I am sharing my thoughts in the following order:

- Understand the elements of the topic
- Look at examples in the public domain of capable Indian youth
- Discuss my views on the challenges facing realization of Capability of Indian Youth

I would not attempt to discuss my views on solutions as I think that is perhaps one of the many mandates that will emerge from the discussions at Inspire India's sessions and group meetings to come and I would be delighted to participate in such sessions whenever such opportunities arise.

Let's look at the topic of discussion first – Capability of Indian Youth. As I mentioned, I would first take you through my understanding of the key elements in this topic before exploring the topic in more detail.

Capability

It is defined simply as capacity of a person and in another context it is defined as a sum of capacity and expertise. I would attempt to define it as performance of an individual that is delivered as the outcome of potential that is originally there which is inspired, guided and honed.

Indian Youth

How do you define youth? In today's age where the life expectancy in India is growing – currently it is 66 up from perhaps around 32 at the time of independence. Our country average age is around 25. Let me attempt to define youth....

If we divide our lifespan as childhood till say our teens, youth, middle age, old age. From an economic point of view we can divide life as student, active contributor to GDP till retirement and post retirement. The definition of age profile or youth of sportsman would be very different from say a politician!

Hence for the sake of this discussion I would keep the range of age to discuss as 20 to 45....this will ensure that I can be counted as youth 😊
By the way in my professional experience I have come across persons who are 70+ and who are actively pursuing their careers in some demanding tasks in infrastructure industry!

With this half successful attempt at defining the elements of the topic let us now proceed to examine our topic Capability of Indian Youth in more detail.

I would like to discuss the capability of a young person in a context i.e. namely the person as an individual, the persons as a team, young persons in organizations and young persons as a National resource. I would also like to discuss this through examples.

Young person as an individual – a few names that come to the mind are:

- Saina Nehwal
- Sania Mirza
- MS Dhoni
- AR Rehman

These are a few young persons that we know are capable – I would like to however talk to you about Ankit Fadia. He is an expert at ethical hacking. At the age of 24 he is acknowledged as a leading thinker in the area of ethical hacking in the world. He defies the conventional logic of capability of having a degree as he is still pursuing his BSc computer science however has authored multiple books in this area and is consulted by top organizations and has trained people in different countries in the area of computer security. In him I find a role model for a capable young person who has used his potential to build himself into a role model of successful youngster.

Young and capable team – We are a nation of avid cricket fans and I am no exception. I would go back in time a little for us to look at the Indian team that won the T-20 world cup. The team had a mix of experience and young talent – more of the latter. This team under the able leadership of the captain, guidance of experienced coach and support staff the team came up on top of some of the best cricketing sides in the world.

Young organization – Internationally I would have talked about Google as an example of a young and vibrant organization that is very capable. However within our own we have had Infosys which today in less than 20 years determines the global outlook towards IT industry in our country. It is ranked as 100th in the fastest growing companies in the world by Fortune magazine. I am sure you all know the story of Sudha Murthy, Narayana Murthy's wife lending him the initial capital to start this company and it stands out as an example of what the spirit of youth can do in building an organization. Incidentally Google is ranked 68th in this list with Cognizant Technologies coming at 90th. Reason I quoted Infosys is that it is on top of the most admired companies in India.

Capable young in a nation – Unfortunately even after thinking hard I could not come across a situation post independence where the nation as a whole has stood up for something and achieved something. Here I would look at our neighbour China as an example of capable young in a nation. With many similarities to India in terms of ancient history, large population, late entry into the developing nations list, movement from closed economy to a regulated/open economy etc. I thought we can draw some examples of how the youth of China have made their nation capable. The Olympics is a great

example of how the country took on the challenge of hosting a world class event and that too in such a spectacular fashion that for decades people will talk about the event and China too is a country that is as diverse as India however I personally think that they have been able to put national interest ahead of personal interests specially more easily to be counted today as a strong nation. In contrast our struggle with the Commonwealth games is well published and I hope that (perhaps with a billion others) that we do not bring our country to shame by putting up an event that will fall short of the expectations.

Having looked at these examples let us now look back and see the challenges that our youth faces today and here I would like to talk about only a few that I thought were key and leave the exploration of more challenges to the open house and later discussions at Inspire India meetings.

Challenges

Lack of focus on National youth:

Our last youth policy was defined in 2003! And the previous one made in 1988!! The policy is defined to focus on 8 areas – education, health, training and employment, arts and culture, preservation of environment, recreation and sports, science and technology and civics and good citizenship. The policy talked about a review in 5 years i.e. in 2008 which is still awaited. It is only in the recent elections that the govt. has realized the potential of youth as a segment that they should cater too and hopefully this would help them put the policies in action.

Changing influences on youth and culture

Today our youth is bombarded with a culture which is new. Like in anything new there are good parts of it and bad parts. Consumerism is the order of the day. 114 Mercedes Benz were sold in 1 day in Aurangabad! People are more brand conscious, not afraid to flaunt their wealth. Governments, legislature and administration are all favourably inclined towards corporates and commercial interests. Labour courts interpretation is more employer friendly is one indicator that I pick up in my profession. Are we equipping our youth with values or discerning skills to help them navigate in this world.

Lack of youth leadership icons

Post independence there is hardly a public figure outside the area of entertainment or politics who is a national figure. The ones who tried to transcribe from their chosen area to politics or in organizations where they could influence more people with their thoughts – have failed miserably.

There is a need for youngsters to get out of a - I, me, myself attitude and do something large beyond their own areas of influence. We sadly miss a Vivekananda today who perhaps was the last youth icon of India.

Information explosion

Youth today have too much to choose from and have so much information that it becomes tough for them to choose. They end up confused on what their priorities should be as they would like to do all things at once and try out different things before they focus on one thing they want to perhaps work on.

Parental pressures

The parental pressures also do not help the youth to strike out on the path their hearts perhaps choose. I recently recall having seen some reputed entertainer speaking on national television that her parents had asked her to complete graduation even though she was doing well in her chosen field. “Pehle graduate ban jao phir jo chahe karo”!

The challenges to the capability of our youth are plenty – however I shared with you a few that I thought were key.

I would like to summarise by saying the following:

Our country is a land of 1.2 billion people. Of whom 30% is below the age of 14 and average age of 25 years. In the coming years we have a huge opportunity of shaping this young group of people to build our nation and contribute to the world.

However I would remain an optimist and would like to end my talk as follows:

When they discovered America – they called it a land of opportunity – it had very few people and lot of land and resources. In our country today we have a 500 million young minds i.e. people who are <20 years. What we should call India if most of these minds are tuned with even few good ideas or at least 1 good idea?

I would also like to add that sometime in the near future our youth will ensure that when on occasions of national importance when the speakers blare out songs like “Jahan daal daal pe sone ki chidiya karti hai basserra who Bharat desh hai mera!” such songs ring true with what we see around us.

Thank you.

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