

ADDRESS BY SHRI VASANT SATHE, HON'BLE MINISTER OF CHEMICALS
AND FERTILIZERS AT THE INAUGURAL FUNCTION OF THE INTER-
NATIONAL EXPOSITION OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT ON 5th FEBRUARY, 1984

The hall has a vibration now of international understanding. There is a spirit of international cooperation. It was present a few months back when the highest level of the head of states met here in NAM (Non-Aligned Movement) and then in CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting). But this vibration, this spirit has now gone down to the grassroot level, to the people whose representatives are seen here in this gathering today. Therefore, I feel that it is befitting that we discuss the problems of local people. Not the concerns that governments as such handle at the United Nations level or at other levels, but those problems which concern the common people of this whole human family, most of whom reside in villages. Maybe, some countries do not have the same type of villages which we may even call small towns. But by and large, particularly in the developing world, we have these villages and hamlets. It is in the villages the world over, where, as Sir James Lindsay has been pointing out, more than 70 percentage of the human population lives. It is obvious if we can solve the problems of these people, the whole quality of life of the human race will improve.

How do we go about solving the problems of our common fellow human being? I have been talking about it with Sir James Lindsay and his colleagues during his visits throughout this last year while the preparation for this get-together was going on. I have seen the solution in very intensive work, in my constituency. The test of whether rice is cooked or not, is you just feel one grain and the lady knows if that rice is ready for service. If that is the test, then I can say what I have experienced in the rural areas of my district, will more or less, apply to everywhere. Situations, of course, change according to local conditions.

So what do we find? When I go to the tribal areas in the interior what are the expectations of the common people of the villages? Do they ask for grandiose programmes or projects? No. All they want are the simple things of life that will make their living just bearable, not even highly comfortable. They ask for drinking water. They ask for electricity, so that they can use pumping devices to irrigate their fields. They ask for road connections. Even today, nearing the end of the 20th Century, a large number of villages are disconnected from the rest of the world during the rainy season. They do not have roads. They ask for roads. There are no bridges over the small rivulets or nullahs to connect the rest of the world. There are no health centres, not only for human beings but to tend to their animals. The forests are being denuded. Contractors come from the urban areas with their army of modern equipment and cut away the forest. The result is that the whole ecological balance is destroyed. I was told the water table was hardly 10 ft. below the surface a few years ago. Now, because of this denudation of forests the water table has gone down to 60 and 100 ft.

Now look at these problems. These are manmade problems. When I look at it 50 % or more of human misery is on account of manmade conditions or conditions which could have been prevented by human effort. If we can just change these conditions - do no miracles, I am sure the necessities of life could be fulfilled. After all, the basic necessities are food, shelter, medicine and clothing to protect you from the inclement weather. Can we not provide even these minimum necessities for a better quality of life with better things? After all, friends, what is it that makes for quality of life?

Even in general economic terms what is the meaning of the word 'wealth'? We say a man's quality of life changes when he is wealthy. We differentiate between human beings as wealthy human beings and poor human beings, that is those, who have no wealth. What is this wealth? Every student of even elementary economics knows that it is nothing but goods and services. So it is these basic real goods, the consumer goods that we describe as the necessities. Then come comforts, the little better things, better furniture in the house, better utensils, more clothing, radio, television, heating arrangements and it goes on. That is what you call the good life. But first and foremost as you have seen in the slide presentation just now, the necessities of life are needed. Can we not ensure these necessities of life to all our fellow human beings?

How can we do that? Pious hope and good wishes declared from all will not do now. You people, gentlemen and ladies who are assembled here today know the problems at the grassroots. There are those human beings who are not in the work force, the children and the very old. Not those, but all that the rest of the people need is work, productive work for two hands to produce goods and exchange those goods in the form of what is known as services. All that is necessary is to allow those hands to produce the goods necessary for life - first food, edible oils, good drinking water, clothing and shelter. We have seen by experience that this can be done mostly from the local material. For housing the soil can be converted into bricks, the wood converted into other items of furniture. It does not require anything more.

But why is this not happening? The main reason is when they produce the goods, where are those goods to be sold? I would request you to pause a moment and consider this. The entire distortion in human relationship today is because of this single factor, what is known in economics as the market as a result of law of demand and supply. Because what you call the economic demand is restricted to only to a few people who are the market. And for the vast majority of human beings even if they produce consumer goods there is nobody to purchase those goods. Because in the rural areas themselves, where you all work all over the world, the rural areas is not the market. They have no purchasing power. How can they (a) produce, and (b) even if produce buy? So markets are those urban pockets where vertical growth has taken place, symbolised by the skyscrapers and where you see sprawling slums into which the people from rural areas have come just to eke out a living. Living in utter penury and poverty. Why? Again no purchasing power.

How are you going to change this universal picture. Dedicated workers are giving their lives to work in the rural areas. Yet friends, this has not brought about this global transformation about which this whole conference of representatives who have come from 55 countries, 500 delegates who have worked actually at grassroot level is aiming at, discussing and deciding. Hence, in my humble opinion with what little experience I have, the crux of the problems is how are we going to convert this 70 % population in rural areas into an effective market with purchasing power. An effective segment which can not only produce goods but buy goods. For some time it may be thought that the goods are not of excellent quality. Although as you all must know the rich handicrafts, even today, when you go round in India are produced in those villages, whether it is Kashmir, Kerala, Assam or Goa. At least our people know, they have the skill to produce the most beautiful things which no machine can produce. Women do this with their deft fingers.

But again the question is of market. We have got this factor of few centres exploiting the whole human race. We land ourselves in a vicious circle of a limited market, more exploitation, more goods produced only for this limited market and

advertized only for this limited market. It is a whole artificial world, a rat race as it were. It is oblivious of the conditions of such a vast number of our vast family of brethren. Then sometimes we feel more emotionally when we are shown some picture or slides of the conditions. Because we cannot really do much to change the conditions, to quench our conscience we think of doing some charity. This charity will not do. It may be conscience tranquillizers, as I call them, for the affluent to take out a little pittance to be given for the hungry in the world. That is not going to change life here though it be a good intention.

But if you really want to change the living conditions of the overwhelming majority of our fellow human beings you will have to change the whole structure of production and distribution. Production must be done by the people in the village, in their habitat. The whole distributive mechanism should be such that those goods and services can be distributed there and then, where they are being produced. It cannot be that first you pool all these things at a centre and then decide how to distribute them. That is one thought which I want to share with you.

Ladies and gentlemen, I know most of you have better experience than I have with the practical problems because you are working daily among the people. But I have made bold to suggest what for years of experience in my life. I have felt are the basic issues, the fundamental problems. It is no use doing superficial patchwork, whitewashing. Because you work at the grassroot level, I am pleading with you to think of the grassroot problem the basic problem, the fundamental problem. How much wastage is taking place in the world today on non-essentials? I am not going to mention the ornaments on which billions of dollars per day are being spent, thrown away, wasted. Even apart from that how much is being spent on non-essentials. An artificial demand created, the so called 'in-thing', day-in and day-out you are told, "Do not wear your dress again. Throw it away. Wear another one." by artificial advertisement.

Why can't we have a system where this surplus known as capital generated by the entire human effort can be so defused, so shared, so spread, that the majority of human beings can have work, can have jobs to produce goods again? If there is a will, I have no doubt that it is you, the people who are here in this hall today, who will do it. If you sincerely believe that the entire human family is one family as you heard, "We can do it". That feeling inspires us. Scientifically and psychologically I believe in the force of vibrations of good thoughts. They go on in the whole universe. The speed of thought is the fastest. It is superior to anything else, electricity, light or anything. We must send these waves. If you think rightly of the whole human family I have no doubt that such waves will spread all over the world. The common people in the villages will then start thinking, of the kind of life they want to have by the turn of the century. By the turn of the century! How far is that? Just fifteen years, that is all. I am sure most of you will be there ringing out a whole century not a year and ringing in a new century. What kind of a world shall we have by that time when the world population will be 6 billion. Today science and technology are capable of providing for this population and of providing work by modern industry which is decentralized.

An example is a factory to assemble modern watches. And who works there? Women, some of whom had never seen a watch in their life. Do you know that factory's record is the best of all watch factories in the whole country. How

does this happen? It is possible when people are given an opportunity." Our women, our men all over the world can do these miracles. All they need is the opportunity to improve their life. With them the life of the whole human race is linked.

Now what is the GNP. Sometimes these terms and jargon are so flabbergasting. Learned people always throw jargon at the face of those who are less learned so that they can really browbeat them. The talk of GNP and all the monetary terms and fiscal terms and how things have to be managed. At least I understand GNP, as gross national product. Similarly it can be GIP, gross international product or GHP, gross human product. Gross human product is the sum total of the product of all human beings. So give these individual human beings of the world an opportunity to produce goods first the necessities of life and then goods which provide a modicum of comfort. That will bring about a change in the basic structure of life and also in the quality of life. I believe, this change, is the objective with which we all have gathered here. In the next few days, I am sure, you will be discussing, sharing your experiences and coming to some concrete conclusions that will benefit all people in future.