

1. SPEECH DELIVERED BY KUSHOK BAKULA
RINPOCHE, AT THE 11TH COLLOQUIUM OF THE IALS,
LEH, 21 JULY 2003

Hon'ble Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Syeed, Shri Thupstan Chhewang, Shri Nawang Rigzin, Dr Henry Osmaston, Shri Balwant Thakur, Secretary, J&K Cultural Academy, participants of the colloquium, and dear friends.

Let me first of all express my warmest greetings to all the participants of the 11th colloquium of the International Association for Ladakh studies (IALS). I am happy to see many delegates including foreign participants attending this colloquium. In my capacity as the patron of the IALS, I welcome you all to Leh. I am especially grateful to the Hon'ble Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed for finding time to inaugurate the colloquium. I welcome Dr. Henry Osmaston the founder-president of the IALS who has come all the way from London, and Sati Sahni-ji whom I have known since 1949. I was also looking forward very much to welcome participants from Baltistan, now in Pakistan. I am now sorry to know that they are unable to come. It would indeed have been a pleasure to meet our brothers from across the border.

Ladakh is today becoming a popular destination for tourists and pilgrims interested in Buddhism. The heavy influx of visitors in summer has transformed Ladakh, and in particular Leh town, into a busy and crowded place. As you see today in Leh town, the local population is outnumbered in the crowd of visitors and labourers from outside Ladakh. Fortunately for us, this trend is prevalent in Ladakh only in the summer months. However, some factors such as the growing influence of Western culture and the changing social attitudes among the people like abandoning agriculture, architecture and traditional and social customs, are worrying. It would be extremely unfortunate if in the grab of development and modernization we abandon our traditional lifestyle and transform our land into

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unorganized housing plots as is being done today in Leh. While Ladakh cannot close its doors to outsiders, there is an urgent need for introspection and to make people aware of the consequence of such unhealthy trends.

This Colloquium, as we all know, is purely academic in nature. But the presence of so many distinguished scholars and experts on Ladakh, I am sure, will help us understand Ladakh's changing trends better. I hope our friends from abroad and those from outside Ladakh will have useful deliberations in the coming days, and that this will help us in the preservation of Ladakh's unique cultural heritage and thus contribute to ensuring sustainable development in the region.

Ladies and gentlemen, Ladakh has significantly transformed today from the land of *Tattu*, *Sattu* and *Pattu*, as it used to be called in fifties, into an autonomous region of the state of J&K. However, the five decades since independence have been a continuous struggle for our people on all fronts. Fortunately, the people of Ladakh—Buddhists and Muslims—have stood together firmly against all the odds. In fact, unity, which has been our mantra all these years, has helped sustain us in those difficult years. Today, the people of Ladakh are fortunate to have a young leadership who are educated, sincere and dedicated.

What hope is there for the future of Ladakh? Despite all these changes, I am afraid Ladakh is still a backward area compared to other regions. People have to queue up for drinking water; the electricity supply in most areas is not available, or only from 7 to 11 pm; there is no employment-generating industry; and there is no drainage or sewage system in place.

The only area where we have made some progress is in the field of education, which happened primarily due to the intense desire among the poor farmers of Ladakh to provide education for their children. I know that people have virtually invested all their meagre income on the education of their children. And with education came awareness among the people, besides making them know their rights and duties as a citizen of free democratic India.

In recent years, although many schools and colleges have been opened and several private institutions have also come up, I feel there is an urgent need for a qualitative change in our educational system

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and a need for more emphasis on our own culture and heritage . In this regard I recall with deep gratitude the warm and personal gesture of the Hon'ble chief Minister when he visited me at Samkar Gompa a few weeks ago. During this meeting the Hon'ble Chief Minister told me about the steps being taken to set up a new university campus in Leh. I was very happy to know this will materialise soon and will prove beneficial for the people of Ladakh.

I would like to thank the Cultural Academy, Leh for their initiative and endeavours in hosting this Colloquium. In particular I would like to thank Mr. Balwant Thakur, Secretary of the Academy and Mr. Nawang Tsering Shakspo, Cultural Officer, Leh.

Let me also take this opportunity to convey my deepest appreciation for the work being done by the Cultural Academy Leh in the preservation and development of Ladakhi art and culture. Besides providing an excellent opportunity for the local intelligentsia, the Cultural Academy publishes many books and journals, which are extremely useful. I am sure that the Cultural Academy in Leh will accelerate its efforts and will be able to perform even better in future.

In conclusion, I wish the colloquium all success and wish you all a very pleasant stay in Ladakh. I thank you all once again. Julley!