

His Majesty's Address at the 12th Convocation of the Royal University of Bhutan

It is extremely comforting and satisfying to meet so many of you today. When I think of the future, I am particularly reassured because you are all so qualified and capable. We are gathered here – representatives of the clergy, the Prime Minister and senior officials of the government, and the faculty members of our tertiary institutions – to celebrate your success.

My first thought is that your parents and family members must be very proud of you. Having supported you until now, they must be content with your clear achievements and success. Their prayers and aspirations have been met, having nurtured you from infancy into qualified and capable young women and men.

All parents have the same hopes and dreams for their children, from the moment they are born– that our child will stand amongst others as an equal– that they are capable, well educated and of sound mind and body. You have not only realized their dreams, but also arrived at this stage, ready to serve and better your country. I congratulate you warmly for getting here.

We are living in extraordinary times– both around the world as well as within Bhutan. There are opportunities today that couldn't have been imagined in earlier times. But we also live in uncertain times- a world full of unprecedented risks and challenges.

Most of you were born after 1990. 1990 was an important year, the year that Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web– that enabled the creation of the Internet.

Today, 3.7 billion people use the Internet– that's half of humanity. 2.5 billion people use social media, and about 7 billion people use mobile phones.

Facebook was founded in 2004. It has just been 13 years, and Facebook today has 1.94 billion users. There are 5 new profiles being created every second, half a million comments being posted every minute, and 136,000 photographs being uploaded every minute.

Then there is e-commerce; websites like Flipkart, AliExpress, Amazon, and E-bay, many of which are being used by Bhutanese. It is possible to purchase almost everything online. In 2016, worldwide retail e-commerce sales was 2 trillion USD.

Medical discoveries are being made each year, technological advancements, engineering marvels, and now social media and the Internet, are changing the world that we live in, and they continue to shape the way we communicate with each other, the way we learn, the way we run our offices, conduct businesses, and even entertain ourselves.

So these are exciting times. For a small country like ours, such advancements hold a lot of promise. We can use technology to help achieve our national objectives.

But at the same time, I worry. As I said before, there is a lot of uncertainty in the world today. New difficulties arise one after the other.

To mention a few: the world is faced with resource constraints, as the world population continues to grow. It is estimated that the world's population will touch 9.7 billion by 2050. Climate change, mass migration of people, inequity and income inequality, political polarization and instability, war, disease, famine, natural and man-made calamities– we live in a VUCA age, of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

Closer to home, India has a population of 1.34 billion people, and China 1.37 billion. That is 37 percent of the world's population, and together account for 16 percent of the world's GDP, or about 13 trillion USD. Our small landlocked, mountainous country sits between these two populous and powerful countries.

Over the years, Bhutanese have steered our country with great skill, intelligence, and a deep sense of responsibility, and have given us a peaceful, harmonious, and sovereign nation.

Bhutan is blessed— our waters are holy, and our land sacred. Known in ancient times as the Southern Land of Medicinal Herbs, our country has been not only fertile and bountiful, but the land of medicines and healing. Bhutan is Baeyul— hidden paradise— blessed by Ugyen Guru Rinpoche, and consolidated by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel.

As you inherit this country, and take on your responsibilities, I would like you to remember three things:

We are the guardians of the peace and unity in our country. Our true strength comes from the peace in our land and harmony amongst our people. We must preserve this with sincerity and dedication.

It is our responsibility to preserve our distinct culture and national identity. We must not lose this uniqueness so that we are always able to proudly say “We are Bhutanese”.

The wealth of our country is our human resources. Our future will invariably be shaped by the talent and skills, disposition for hard work, commitment, and dedicated service of our young generations.

In conclusion, I would like to share my own observation. We have five extraordinary qualities that define us as Bhutanese. These are five extraordinary qualities that you possess.

Tha Damtshi or unwavering loyalty, is a natural and instinctive trait. Bhutanese are Sincere. We have integrity. No matter what we do, there is a degree of sincerity that is worthy of praise.

We are Mindful. We are always mindful of our duties, responsibilities, obligations, and wellbeing - not just our own wellbeing but the wellbeing of everyone.

We Bhutanese are very Astute. That is why we have been able to build a country like Bhutan. We have worked with great ingenuity, perception, and wisdom. We have the intelligence and skills to be able to strengthen our country. We are clear minded and competent people.

We are Resilient. We are well-tempered and strong, not afraid of suffering, not averse to hardship, ready to face problems and risks. Since time immemorial we have not been overcome nor destroyed. We have had the resilience to withstand the biggest challenges and threats.

We do not just live in the present but are aware of the future. We care, not just for this generation, but for different eras and generations to come. We understand that whatever we have has to be Timeless. We realise that we are impermanent, that our children will inherit what we leave behind, and our country will be there for all times to come.

The acronym for these extraordinary qualities of the Bhutanese people - Sincerity, Mindfulness, Astuteness, Resilience, and Timelessness - is SMART. Bhutan has always been a smart nation. That is why we must continue to build smart institutions, and that is why it is imperative that our people remain smart. We must nurture these wonderful qualities and remember every day, how they have defined us as a nation and as a people. We must remember that these qualities will help us navigate the 21st century and build an even better place. Our country has an extremely bright future and that future is in your hands.

I am profoundly happy that I had this opportunity to meet you and speak to you today. I feel reassured, comforted, and satisfied meeting qualified, skilled and smart citizens like you, who are ready and able to serve your country and make a difference.

Tashi Delek.