

SPEECH DELIVERED ON THE OCCASION OF FAREWELL TO DR. R.A. MASHELKAR, ON HIS APPOINTMENT AS DGCSIR

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We meet today on a momentous occasion – to bid farewell and offer our felicitations to Dr. Mashelkar, who is leaving NCL to assume the august office of the Director General, CSIR. I am particularly happy to welcome Mrs. Vaishali Mashelkar today. Till this morning, we were not sure whether she would be able to participate. As all of you are aware, she suffered bereavement, having lost her beloved mother. I would like to offer, you Mrs. Mashelkar, our sincerest condolences on behalf of the entire NCL family. May I say how deeply touched we are by your presence here today.

It is a day of joy and pride to every one of us. For one amongst us is leaving to occupy the high office of DGCSIR. It is also a big loss to NCL. We will have to get used to an NCL without Dr. Mashelkar.

Dr. Mashelkar joined NCL as a scientist-E in 1976 and later assumed the Headship of the Division of Chemical Engineering in 1978. For many of us who knew him then, it was quite apparent that he was not just another brilliant scientist or a head of the division. He was cut out of greater things. We knew that sooner or later, destiny would beckon him to greater challenges. He became NCL's sixth Director on June 1, 1989. And now six years and twenty eight days later he is moving to Delhi to head one of the largest S&T enterprises in the world. Should we say he has met his destiny?

His appointment as DG-CSIR has aroused great expectations. If you read his interview in Economic Times, dated 20 June, you know what I mean. Dr. Mashelkar is seen as an agent of change, a whiff of fresh air. On behalf of myself and all of you, I wish to offer our very good wishes to him on this occasion.

On the very day Dr. Mashelkar, became Director, NCL, in this very auditorium, he articulated his dreams and visions for NCL. That speech, six years ago, set the tone and pace of what he achieved as Director of this laboratory. I am aware, from many conversations with him, that he is acutely conscious of both his successes and shortcomings. But then, let us remember that the mark of a great leader is not how much the vision was realized, but how well it was articulated and how much it has permeated through the ethos of an organization. In this respect, Dr. Mashelkar achieved astounding success, and leaves behind a strong laboratory,

fully aware of its potentials and committed to fulfilling the challenges that lie ahead. And if in this process, there have been shortcomings, it was not his alone, it was all ours too.

I wish to briefly reflect on some aspects of Dr. Mashelkar's leadership.

The first was his quest for excellence, a passion that permeated every activity he touched. He made us lift our head and look us to the stars and seek the impossible. He set for us standards and benchmarks against which NCL could measure up to. The results of this are in front of us to see. NCL today is a highly respected laboratory, not only within India, but even internationally.

The second was his belief in empowerment. He believed that people perform the best when they have the freedom to decide for themselves what is best for them, free of shackles and controls. He provided space for everyone to exploit their potentials.

The third was his deep commitment and respect for the organization. He showed by example what hard work meant. The lights in his office burnt often till the wee hours of the dawn. I often wondered, what this laboratory could become, if each one of us could put in even a quarter of the work he put in every day.

The fourth was his sense of fairness, openness, accessibility, sincerity and transparency in the conduct of the affairs of the laboratory. He showed deep concern for the welfare of every employee.

I have asked myself often, what indeed is the single biggest achievement of Dr. Mashelkar. There are many to choose from. But in my opinion I would like to single out his conception and creation of NCL Research Foundation. It was indeed a stroke of genius. Many of you probably do not know what stiff opposition he faced when he first mooted the idea. But he was convinced that for excellence to thrive, it must be recognized and rewarded. January 3 every year has become an eagerly awaited day when this laboratory says thank you to those who have excelled. Dr. Mashelkar, we say thank you to you for giving us this great gift of tradition.

During the past six years of my very close association with Dr. Mashelkar, I have learnt many lessons. He has been a great teacher, a mentor par excellence. These are best expressed in the very words he often uses and let me quote,

“Be a model, not a critic”

“Be a part of the solution, not part of the problem”

“We cannot reconstruct the past, but we can redefine the future”

“Present constraints are not impediments to future opportunities

It is generally believed that there are two kinds of people in this world. Most people see things as they are and ask why. But there are a few who see things as they should be and ask why not.

I am sure you will all agree with me that Dr. Ramesh Mashelkar clearly belonged to the second category.