

**Interaction of CIRS students with
His Excellency, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, President of India**

The Background

Chinmaya International Residential School, Coimbatore (CIRS) was fortunate to be invited to the Rashtrapati Bhavan for an interaction with His Excellency, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, President of India.

This interaction was the culmination of an engagement initiated by CIRS in line with President Kalam's 'Vision for India 2020'. In November 2006, CIRS gave a vacation assignment to its students on this subject and to make it more personal and relevant to the young children, many of whom come from 19 other countries, the topic was redesigned as 'My Vision for Myself, my Family, my School and my Country - in 2020'.

The response and the result of the students work was phenomenal! It was as if their imaginations, dreams and thoughts have got translated into words and pictures. Select projects were forwarded to President Kalam for his perusal and that led to his interest in meeting and interacting with the students of CIRS.

On the appointed day, 32 students from Class VI to XII, accompanied by 1 alumni and 4 teachers and Principal Anurag Sangal had an enriching experience and learnt first hand as to why President Kalam has been able to inspire the young generation and specially caught the imagination of the whole country.

Please read on for the transcript of the interaction -

The Interaction
Monday, 7th May 2007, 4:35 PM
Committee Room, Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi

The President – So you have come to meet me; thank you for coming and I hope you were well looked by the people here; did they give you something to eat ?

CIRS – Yes Sir; we had a guided tour of the Rashtrapati Bhavan and treated to a very nice tea party.

The President - Good; so you must wanting to speak to me and ask questions; I too want to speak to you and ask questions; but the teachers may not answer !

CIRS – Yes Sir

The President - So, all of you are going to the Tihar Jail tomorrow. Good ! unlike others, who usually go sight seeing, visiting monuments like Red Fort, Qutb-Minar etc, you are going to the Tihar Jail. Very well, what message do you have for the inmates of the Tihar Jail?

CIRS (Lipi Mehta) - Sir, we will interact with the prisoners in the most cordial manner possible.

The President - Do not call them prisoners but inmates!

CIRS (Lipi Mehta) - Our message to them would be “Your tenure in the jail is only a phase where you have been given a chance to prove yourself right, and it will soon pass away. If you take this phase of your life for the realization of your mistakes and reflect upon them, you will surely emerge as a better human being and a worthy citizen.

The President - That’s good! Since you are going there, I want you to convey my message to the inmates of the Tihar jail. Do all of you know Hindi?

CIRS (all together) - Yes Sir!

The President - Ok, then tell them, that Uncle Kalam has sent this message for them; All of you note it down.

**“If God is with me,
Who can be against.
I will transform myself
And my inmates around me.
God has given me, now strength,
To become useful citizens,
With beautiful minds.
If God is with me,
Who can be against.”**

Now, your homework today would be to translate this message in Hindi and then convey it to the inmates of the Tihar jail. Will you do this?

CIRS (all together) - Yes Sir !

The President - So now, do you have any questions that you would like to ask me?

CIRS (Taruun Vaidya) - Sir, could you tell us about your interaction with Swami Shivanandji Maharaj?

The President - I was very keen to become a pilot. After undergoing rigorous training at Dehradun for around a week, 8 candidates were to be selected out of 50 and I was the

9th one. I thought to myself, if any of the 8 candidates fail to qualify in the medical test, then only, I would get a chance. **Fortunately**, all of them qualified in the medical test and I was not selected to become a pilot.

So, while returning home, I decided to visit Haridwar which is on the way to Delhi. I took a dip in the Holy Ganges and as I turned around, I saw a beautiful Ashram on a small hill nearby and something within me made me walk - towards it. There I met Swami Shivananda who asked me why I was depressed. I told him about the pilot selection program and how I could not make it among the top 8. To answer this, he referred to the 12th chapter of the Bhagawad Gita, where Lord Krishna reveals his 'Vishwaroopa' and told me, **"In life, you will face many failures and few successes; Never allow problems or failures to defeat you, rather you must win over them"**. With this I started afresh.

CIRS (Keshav) - Sir, we all dream about India becoming a developed country by 2020. But scientists all over the world have warned us about climate change and its devastating effect by that time. Sir, what do you think is India's stake in this and how can we combat this emerging problem?

The President - Industrialization has led to more pollution and considerable increase in CO₂ levels in the atmosphere. This CO₂ traps the sun's heat and leads to rise in temperature. Thus, **to reduce pollution, we have to reduce dependency on petroleum. In transportation, diesel can be replaced by bio-fuels using the seeds of a plant called Jatropha and Petrol can be substituted by Ethanol. By 2020 India should become energy independent** for which I have proposed a three dimensional approach to the Government through the use of :

1. Solar energy
2. Wind energy
3. Hydel energy

At the moment, the efficiency of solar cells is only 8-10% which shall be increased to 30-50 % by 2010 ; with the coming of CNT – Carbon Nano Tube from the US. More windmills shall be established by evaluating regions which have winds throughout the year. India is not rich in Uranium which is the main nuclear fuel, yet it has abundant reserves of Thorium. **Our Scientists are already working on building a Thorium Reactor. With this, we have to reduce dependency on petroleum and other such exhaustible sources of energy.**

CIRS (Thanmayi) - Sir, as a part of my Science Congress, I did a project on windmills. Contrary to my expectations, we see many wind mills in India which work only for 3- 4 months. Can scientists design wind turbines which can generate electricity with less wind velocity so that they can be installed on top of multi-storied buildings?

The President - I cannot say whether such wind turbines can be invented. But we are working on establishing more number of windmills at the sea shore and high altitude regions where the wind velocity remains the same throughout the year. We shall do it.

CIRS (Nishant Agarwal) - Sir, India is undergoing rapid industrial growth; But what about the labourers who are employed in traditional handicraft industries?

The President - With the growth of industries, there will certainly be a rise in employment opportunities. So these people who may not have enough scope in the handicraft Sectors can avail other employment opportunities which are generated.

CIRS (Hari Om Jani) - Sir, what is the source of your firm faith in God?

The President - We all live in this small part of the world which is present in the vast and wonderful solar system. When we look at the Galaxy, this little fellow Earth seems to be like a speck of dust somewhere in the corner and the Milky way itself is quite insignificant in the huge cosmos.

When I behold the beautiful twinkling stars and the Milky way, I start wondering with curiosity as to **“who am I”?** and my mind automatically slips into thoughts of a much higher, more potent and an unimaginable entity which has brought about such a faultless creation. **I strongly believe, there is someone up in the skies above, or deep here within the heart, or rather everywhere around us; This wonder and curiosity makes me close my eyes and believe that entity.**

Epilogue

President Kalam graciously guided the delegation to the lawns for photo session; and even during that time, kept on talking to the younger students on matter of their interest – guiding, inspiring, joking, laughing with them – making them feel comfortable and at home. Each participant felt we were with an inspiring teacher and a loving elder of the family.

Earlier, CIRS received the President with a bouquet of flowers and presented him with a CIRS Memento and some books published by the Chinmaya Mission which were graciously accepted with reverence by His Excellency.

It was a memorable occasion for the young minds of CIRS to have been so ignited by the President APJ Abdul Kalam.