I am happy to learn that the Netaji Research Bureau, Kolkata is organizing the Netaji birthday celebration on January 23, 2015, to mark the 118th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose (January 23, 1897) along with an International Conference on “Asia in Bengal and Bengal in Asia”.

I was a small child when Netaji led the Indian National Army. I distinctly remember his powerful voice and enthralling words to the nation, calling on the youth to march, shoulder to shoulder, with the Azad Hind Fauj for the liberation of the country.

Netaji had a deeply spiritual nature and was a rebellious, independent spirit. At school, he was a brilliant student, but his hungry soul was not satisfied with text-books alone. At first, he sought solace in the beauty of Nature. Then he discovered Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and the practice of Yoga. Even at the height of war activities in Singapore, whenever he had time, he used to visit the Ramakrishna Mission there and spend some time in meditation. Bose joined a secret group of students who used to go the villages to bring relief to victims of epidemics like plague, cholera and small-pox. As a young man, he resigned from the Indian Civil Service to join the Indian National Congress and further the cause of freedom. He was a disciple and follower of unceremonious king of Bengal Congress.
The place of Subhas Chandra Bose is unique in the history of India's freedom struggle. Netaji was unanimously elected *Rashtrapati* of the 51st session of the Indian National Congress held in Haripura on the banks of the river Tapti in February 1938. His Presidential address at the session was a masterpiece of vision and action. He talked not only of freedom but also of reconstruction and the need for planning by setting up a Planning Committee. He called for the gradual socialization of the entire agricultural and industrial system. He reminded delegates that "*our chief national problems are eradication of poverty, illiteracy and disease*". Netaji as Congress President wrote a letter to all Congress Premiers advising them on how they should administer their provinces. The ideas contained in this letter were the precursors of the principles enshrined in the chapter on Directive Principles of our Constitution.

Netaji took over the leadership of the Indian National Army in 1943 and reorganized it into a powerful force comprising around 75,000 men and women. He infused these men and women with intense patriotic fervor and a burning desire to free their enslaved motherland. Netaji expended tremendous energy and organizational skill in recruiting, training and financing the Indian National Army. The Indian soldiers and civilians in South-East Asia at once declared their allegiance to him and began to call him *Netaji*. He gave them the inspiring call of *Jai Hind* and *Dilli Chalo.*
Netaji believed that free India would become, by example, an alternative model for a post-colonial world through economic equity and a social revolution inspired by harmony between communities that had been misled into hostility. Propelled by freedom of faith, gender equality and economic justice for all, India will become a modern nation.

It is amazing how much Subhas Chandra Bose was able to achieve and accomplish in a short span of time. Netaji’s entire life is a story of service and sacrifice. He was a doer as well as a thinker. He was a fighter and a natural leader of men. His writing, exceptional oratory and persuasive reasoning won him an impassioned and loyal following. He set an example through his actions and ideals and inspired the younger generation to dedicate themselves to the service of the nation. His proud and independent spirit mocked at ill-health and ill-fortune. He took exile and imprisonment in his stride. He appealed to the people of our country “Give me blood, I will give you freedom”.

On the occasion of his birthday, it is appropriate to dwell on the contemporary relevance of Netaji and his message. The life and sacrifices of Netaji serve as beacon light for future generations. Our true homage to Netaji would be to work with dedication to make our country for whose sake Netaji sacrificed his everything, so strong, prosperous and progressive that it may one day become a great power in the world.
I conclude calling upon the youth of our country to once again adopt the slogan of *Ittefaq Itmad Kurbani* or *Unity, Faith, Sacrifice* as the clarion call of our nation.

I extend my heartfelt greetings to Prof. Mrs. Krishna Bose, Chairperson and all members of the Council of the Netaji Research Bureau as well as all participants in the International Conference. I wish Netaji’s birthday assembly as well as the discussions in the Conference every success.

(Pranab Mukherjee)

New Delhi
January 22, 2015