

Hon'ble Speaker of Lok Sabha, Shri Om Birla ji
Former Presidents
Distinguished Guests
My colleagues in the Committee and
Members of the Chamber
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In celebration of the 125th Anniversary of Bharat Chamber of Commerce, it is, indeed, with profound respect and heartfelt pleasure that I also wish to extend to you, Sir, our warmest welcome.

It is a rare privilege for me to be in this glorious Chair on such a momentous occasion and to recount the story of an institution, spanning over twelve and a half decades. It is even more challenging to distil the triumphs of 125 years into a few minutes, because all of us are eager to hear your thoughts, Sir.

Today, we are reminded of the rich history and legacy of this esteemed institution and the different eras and structural changes in the business landscape it has witnessed, endured and adapted to over time, since 1900.

We pay our tribute to the foresight and courage of our founders, who laid the foundation of an organisation for local businesses in Calcutta in 1900, at a time when colonial voices dominated public life. Bengal was the hub of the 'Swadeshi Movement'. Perhaps that ambience in this city encouraged our founders to establish the powerful affirmation of our identity. Their successors upheld and sustained those Swadeshi initiatives in manufacturing and trading activities.

From the decades immediately after Independence, the Chamber stood beside the Government in shaping India's economic foundations. Through the years of industrial licensing, quota, controls, high taxation and nationalisation, the Chamber engaged with policy makers for rationalisation and encouraging enterprise, and helping members through such challenges.

Remarkable initiatives of Bharat Chamber in that era included pioneering the instituting of 'National Awards of Excellence'. Our Rural Development Programme earned wide recognition and admiration from the eminent agricultural scientist, Dr. M. S. Swaminathan. Following his declaration of this initiative as a role model, the project site attracted a number of visitors of eminence, including the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narasimha Rao.

With the advent of liberalisation and globalisation in the 1990s, as the Indian Economy opened up, the Chamber prepared its members to become competitive. We also advocated suggestions that would open markets, attract investments, and strengthen India's position in the world economy through our Memoranda to the Central and State Governments.

At the turn of the new millennium, the Chamber completed its centenary, marking 100 years of dedicated services. The centenary celebrations were graced and blessed by Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India.

The saga of our Chamber in the new millennium has been one of renewal and relevance. We have embraced the forces of liberalisation, globalisation, and rapid technological change, while remaining anchored to our founding ideals.

Aligned with national priorities such as Make in India, the Chamber has championed innovation, entrepreneurship, and self-reliance. At the same time, we have continued to advocate sustainability and inclusive growth, ensuring that our voice remains contemporary and influential in shaping India's economic journey.

A landmark to provide infrastructural facilities for our initiatives was the inauguration of our new building premises, 'Bharat Chambers', in 2016, blessed by Shri Pranab Mukherjee, Hon'ble President of India.

During COVID-19, the Chamber responded with agility by swiftly transitioning its activities to online platforms, ensuring that services, consultations, and policy advocacy continued seamlessly and without interruption. At the same time, it went beyond its core role by organising extensive sanitisation and vaccination drives, in collaboration with the Government of West Bengal, thereby, safeguarding the community.

At our premises in Kolkata, we have set up the Africa Desk to facilitate bilateral trade with and investment in the African continent and established the Defence Sector Facilitation Centre to provide initial hand-holding support to entrepreneurs in manufacturing defence requirements. Over the last three years, in partnership with the Department of Defence Production, we have been undertaking outreach programmes in various cities, nationwide, to encourage MSMEs in defence production. As India advances towards becoming a global hub, under the Make in India initiative, we are committed to workplace safety through our programs, in collaboration with global experts and establishing a 'Centre of Excellence' to achieve zero occupational safety hazards at the workplace.

Sir, as we stand at this historic milestone of 125 years, memories of the Chamber's long journey come alive — of generations who built, nurtured, and guided it through challenges and triumphs. We shall build on our rich legacy as we prepare ourselves for the next era in the future history of Bharat Chamber – our journey to our 150th year in 2050.

Interestingly, this period coincides with Bharat's 'Amrit Kaal' – its journey towards transforming India into a developed economy with a GDP of USD 30 trillion and a per capita income of USD 20,000 by 2047, aptly titled 'Viksit Bharat @ 2047'. To partner our Government in this exciting initiative, participate in it and help members avail the emerging opportunities, the Chamber will remain contemporary and future ready, meeting the rapidly emerging needs of the emerging business fraternity. We shall continue to foster innovation and growth, empower our members and collaborate with them to promote business, support entrepreneurship and advocate for policies that benefit business, society and our country, in its journey towards 'India @ 100'.

Ladies & Gentlemen, Bharat Chamber is not just an institution we celebrate today, but a legacy of service and resilience that has become part of the very fabric of our city. With gratitude for the past and hope for the future, Bharat Chamber looks forward to carrying this rich heritage forward and build a brighter future for our business, for our community, for our state, for our region and for our nation – Bharat, inspired by your guidance and blessings, Sir.

Thank you.