

**Welcome Address at Inaugural Session of the North Zone-1 Regional Conference, on “Contemporary Judicial Developments and Strengthening Justice through Law and Technology” (September 24, 2022)**

Respected Justice Abhay Shreenivas Oka, Judge, Supreme Court of India, Justice A.P. Sahi, Director, National Judicial Academy, brother Justice Magrey, sister Justice Sindhu Sharma, Members of Organising Committee, and other Judges of the Host High Court and participant Judges from other High Courts, Mr. D.C Raina, Learned Advocate General, Mr Achal Sethi, Secretary, Department of Law & Justice, participating delegates of all ranks from six High Courts of the northern region, Officers of the High Court Registry, Officers of the Government, Ladies and Gentlemen, very good morning to all.

It is really a proud moment for the High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh to host North Zone-1, Regional Conference on “Contemporary Judicial Developments and Strengthening Justice through Law and Technology” organised by the National Judicial Academy under the able guidance of Justice A.P. Sahi. I feel it to be a personal privilege to be part of this renewed initiative of the NJA which comes after a long time, having remained stalled by Covid-19 Pandemic for about two and half years. Last time we had an Academic gathering in the North Zone Conference at Srinagar in the year 2017. Of course we had hosted another North Zone Conference in the year 2018 also but that was in Jammu. We are looking forward to successfully organising this conference again at Srinagar. It is a

matter of great satisfaction that the NJA has reposed confidence in us and provided this opportunity. On my behalf and on behalf of the High Court I would like to place on record my gratitude to the NJA and its Academic Council for giving us this chance.

I can bet that there could be no better place than this to restart the academic discourses. I say so for few obvious reasons; one that Kashmir has historically been a destination of learning and spiritualism, second that climatically there is no parallel to Kashmir and thirdly that Kashmir is clamouring for new beginnings to be made after a long turmoil. Not very long ago Mahatma Gandhi had found 'a ray of hope in Kashmir' to show a path to the rest of India. Time is now to rekindle that hope. This land is an abode of innumerable Saints and Sufis, and many of them are believed to be positioned in the state of deep meditation for centuries. Mother nature has always been very kind on this part of the world. Though the people here have suffered tough times and have gone through uncountable miseries, we shall all pray and make sincere efforts to ameliorate the sufferings and reclaim the heaven on earth. Let us all be witness to a positive and pleasant change.

Justice Oka is with us today to guide us in this conference and to lead the academic discussions in various sessions. His Lordship has come all the way from Delhi despite his busy schedule and multifarious commitments. We all know that his Lordship has great flair for academic discussions directed towards judicial

excellence and betterment of the judicial institution. In many of such conferences we have all been benefited by useful interventions of Justice Oka. I heartily welcome your Lordship to this beautiful part of the country. Your presence has added grace to the occasion. We are very keen to seek benefit from your vast experience equally at Bar and Bench.

It gives me immense pleasure to welcome Justice A.P. Sahi, Director, NJA. I have been lucky to have worked with Justice Sahi and to have had a long association with him. I am a great admirer of Justice Sahi's knowledge of law, literature and philosophy, and above all his skills of meticulous planning. He was instrumental in organising many events at Allahabad High Court successfully and I also had the opportunity to learn from him. Sir, you will surely inspire us all in these two days of academic feast. This opportunity of hosting this conference, I take it as a personal gift from my brother.

I feel it is my good fortune to welcome the resource persons of this conference Justice R.C. Chavan, Justice R. Basant, Justice P.N. Prakash, Justice Raja Vijayraghwan, Mr N. Venkataraman, Additional Solicitor General of India, Mr Shekhar Naphade and Prof. Vinod Kumar Dixit, who are acclaimed for their unmatched ability, competence and skills. These resource persons are endowed with rich experience of guiding many such academic discourses and providing useful inputs for enhancement of judicial excellence. Your presence with us for

two days shall be helpful for all of us to sharpen our skills and learn to use technological tools effectively for taking the judicial institution to new heights.

I extend a warm welcome to all my brother and sister Judges from six North Indian High Courts who are participating in the conference as delegates. It gives me pleasure to serve you as a host. Your presence in the conference shall be inspiring for other participants from District Judiciary. I am sure you all will share your experiences during the sessions and guide our younger colleagues in the judiciary.

When the Constitution of India was adopted, major nations in the world were wonderstruck by the ideas and ideals the framers of the Constitution who wanted India to be carried forward with it. The ideals were lofty and were felt to be a distant reality for a nascent republic. We lived through the testing times and marched forward from strength to strength. With the passage of time we dwindled in our resolve and faltered in working on the basis of core constitutional principles. The governance of the country strayed away from the path shown by Gandhi Ji, to quote "I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it

lead to swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and yourself melt away.”

The Constitution has not failed us so far; rather it has held us together, constantly reminding us of our unique characteristic - Unity in diversity. The Constitutional Courts have contributed enormously to strengthening the Constitutional resolve of creating an egalitarian democracy and developing scientific tempers. Realistic interpretations by the Constitutional Courts have allowed the Constitution to retain its dynamic character. After all the Constitution is what the judges say.

We are standing at the cusp of history as far as the institution of judiciary is concerned. Many real challenges are staring at us and time is running out fast. We should find a way forward without losing much time. Our glorious past should not detain us from thinking out of the box solutions, obviously within the constitutional and lawful means. We need to take stock of the things and events of the past in judicial history and to make course corrections for the situations that have not gone well. We shall have to take tough measures to see that the judicial institution lives up to the trust and confidence reposed in it by the citizens of this great nation. The Supreme Court and the NJA are shouldering an onerous responsibility and I am very much confident that they will lead a way forward.

Contemporary developments taking place in the judicial institution are of far reaching consequences and would decide the future course of history.

When it comes to technological advancements, the judiciary cannot keep itself aloof. We need to reap the dividends of the developments in Information and Communication Technology and apply the technological advances in earnest. ICT is making the flow of information unbelievably fast and lives smooth by applying the knowledge effectively in all walks of life.

To rise to the practically achievable heights it is requisite that we make progress by leaps and bounds. It would be possible to do so only if we all join our heads together, put our best foot forward and devote our time and energy. The task is herculean but not beyond our capabilities and abilities. Once we have decided to tread the path of judicial excellence, the problems of Himalayan magnitude shall not be too difficult to overcome. In the words of Swami Vivekanand - awake, arise and stop not until the goal is reached.

I welcome all the other delegates of the conference, be it Judicial Officers or the officers handling technical aspects of the eCourts. Please avail best benefits of the discussions which will be held in various technical sessions of the conference. I also wish you all the best for your judicial careers ahead. I hope and trust that take-away from this conference shall enrich you in knowledge and experience, and help you in achieving professional excellence. But do not forget to enjoy the heavenly

beauty of this place. Do visit the historical and scenic spots around and take home the cherishable memories. Our officers shall provide all support and service to make your stay pleasant and comfortable. We have installed help-desks at the places where you are staying and at this venue of the conference. Do not hesitate to ask our officers for any help.

Presence of the Advocate General in this inaugural session is laudable. I welcome you Mr Raina and hope that you will give your useful inputs to make this conference a success.

I welcome Mr Achal, Secretary, Department of Law and Justice who I think is one among us and is directly concerned with the organisation of this conference. He being an important stakeholder in the judicial system is always interested in better outcomes of such conferences. He has helped us with all financial and logistic support.

I express my sincere gratitude to the UT administration for facilitating the High Court and extending full cooperation to enable us to organise this event of national importance. We assure the Government that efforts put in by them shall not go waste. I expect that the UT administration shall keep on supporting us in all our endeavours of creating a vibrant judicial institution in this UT.

I would urge all the stakeholders in governance to contribute their bit to make Kashmir again an educational and spiritual hub and revive the

lost/overshadowed glory of Shree Shardha Sarvagya Peeth located in Neelam Ghati from where all the knowledge and wisdom flows, enlightening one and all. I hope and trust that all the organs of democracy would leave no stone unturned to achieve this cherished goal. Many conferences, conventions, seminars and talks of national and international importance would surely be organised here. I take this opportunity to request Justice Oka and Justice Sahi to include Kashmir in the priorities of the Supreme Court and the National Judicial Academy, and keep on providing us reasons to contribute to the upliftment of educational and spiritual standards of the country.

While concluding, I again welcome each and every person present in this session and those who would participate in further sessions of the conference as delegates.

Thanks and God bless you all.

Jai Hind, Jai Bharat.