

SUMMARY OF REMARKS
by
Win Aung, Ph.D., P.E.
At 1999 Convocation of VSB - Technical University of Ostrava
Upon Conferral of Doctorem Honoris Causa

Ostrava, Czech Republic
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I feel deeply honored by the conferral of Doctorem Honoris Causa by the VSB Technical University of Ostrava, and accept with gratitude and humility. I am very appreciative of the goodwill and friendship of Rector Prof. Dr. Vaclav Roubicek, and of all of the people in this university community.

In the audience today are many of these friends and some of the members of my family.

There is my wife, Mrs. Annie Aung. Our daughter, Mrs. Maybelle Jordan and her family cannot be present today but our son, Robert Aung, is here along with her friend, Ms. Linnea Hasegawa. I am grateful that these special people have taken the time to come to Ostrava to be a part of this festive occasion.

I must tell you one more thing, and it is about my 1-1/2 year-old granddaughter, Caroline Anne Jordan, and that is that she is 25% Czech. Caroline's grandmother on her father's side is 100% Czech. Caroline's great grandmother, Dr. Marie Holecek, is a healthy 93 years "young" who now lives in the U.S.

Dr. Holecek, a remarkable woman who is a descendent of prominent intellectuals in the Czech Republic, is herself is a writer of note. As a young woman, she came to Prague to study and received a Doctor's degree in history from Charles University. Upon hearing that I would be traveling to the Czech Republic to receive an honor, she wrote:

"Dear Win and Annie:

I hear that you are going to the Czech Republic next month. I wish you a happy trip and Win; I congratulate you on the well-deserved honors that await you. I am proud that we are related in the person of our darling little Caroline!.....

I wish I could be there to witness your success....

Bon voyage and continued success!

Sincerely,

Marie"

My professional interaction with the Czech Republic and your University has been mainly through our common interest in furthering international cooperation in engineering research and education. Your University signaled its sincere commitment to partnership with the international community this summer when it -- your University -- hosted ICEE'99, the 1999 International Conference on Engineering Education. Delegates from over 30 nations attended ICEE '99. More than 55 delegates from the United States came. Countries in Central and Eastern Europe were well represented at ICEE'99.

It was the vision and hard work of Prof. Dr. Vaclav Roubicek, you Rector, that brought ICEE'99 to the Czech Republic. The results of the conference last August show that the International Steering Committee made the right decision in awarding the privilege to Prof. Dr. Roubicek and the Technical University of Ostrava.

This year your University is celebrating the 150th year of its founding. On this special day in which many students are being honored for their achievements, Prof. Roubicek has asked me to say a few words to them.

To all you honorees, I say: Today belongs to you. I hope you will remember this: Soon, you will leave this great university to seek your fortune outside its walls. Your own destiny and that of your country will rest on your shoulders. Dedicate yourselves to the betterment of your own future as well as that of your newly energized, young democratic republic.

In this fast-paced world, you can be forgiven if you are impatient with what seems like slow changes taking place in the Czech Republic. But, many of my countrymen do admire the progress your country has achieved since the velvet revolution 10 years ago, a revolution won not by guns but by the pen of the intellectual.

The Polish writer Adam Michnik, who spent years in communist prisons for his views, and who is now editor-in-chief of the leading daily newspaper in Warsaw, Poland, called 1989 "the most successful revolution since the American Revolution."

Many in my country, the United States, respect the people of Central Europe all the more for their courage and grace in the face of adversity. We must not underestimate the challenges that lie ahead for the Czech Republic; at the same time, we should not minimize the strides that have been taken. It has been said that, along with the other countries of Central Europe, you are better positioned today than the Asian Tigers.

According to reliable statistics, compared with 10 years ago, this year:

Your country's per capita gross domestic product (the GDP) has more than doubled to \$5,300.

Inflation has been cut to 10% of what it was – to 5%.

The number of cars per 1,000 people has gone up from 200 to almost 350.

Foreign investments are up to the point where your country is now ahead of Hungary, the long-time leader in Central Europe in attracting foreign investments.

The beginning of your career will coincide with the beginnings of the new millennium. Your career in the 21st Century will be intimately tied to the technological revolution that is taking place around us. This is the revolution in information technology – sometimes called the second industrial revolution. Nowhere is the impact of this revolution more visible than in the United States. There, according to a recently published study by the University of Texas, the Internet economy grew 68% during the last 12 months.

For all of 1999, the Internet economy is estimated to be \$507 billion, an increase of \$200 billion over last year.

The birth and growth in new technologies does not happen by accident. Often, behind each major technology innovation is long-term fundamental research funded by government organizations such as the U.S. National Science Foundation where I am a member of the senior staff.

Since its inception in 1950, this agency has supported fundamental research at universities across the U.S. International cooperation is one of our emphases. Like most sectors in our economy, the information technology industry – companies like Motorola, Hewlett Packard, America Online -- rely on research carried out at U.S. universities, which is frequently linked to research and development programs in industry. At the same time, graduates from project research funded by the National Science Foundation supply the highly trained new leaders needed by industry to fuel its economic growth.

Recently, the National Science Foundation has increased its investments in research crucial to the next generation information technology, such as Microsystems, Scalable Enterprise Systems and Wireless Technology.

As your country's new leaders in this fast-paced world, you must appreciate and understand the technological developments taking shape around you. This is the fundamental requirement, but you will need more.

In your work you will need to be nimble and be able to adapt to change. You will need to have a broad appreciation of history and of its implications for our world today. This is not all: You will also need to acquire a good understanding of the political processes, and a healthy respect for the diversity of cultures.

As I end my remarks, I would like to have a solemn pledge with you. Because I

received a diploma today, I have become a “graduate” of VSB -- Technical University of Ostrava. Starting today, you and I are bonded as men and women of VSB. Let us pledge that in whatever we do for the rest of our lives, we will uphold the honor of VSB.

Thank you and good luck.