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Distinguished members on the dais, guests and my friends and colleagues from TIFR and elsewhere who have gathered here. I am indeed very grateful that you have remembered to invite me and asked me to say a few words.

In order to introduce a bit of levity in this august proceedings, I wish to remind you that I now live in Calcutta and that explains my white and blue attire. If you have a house in the state in these colours you don't have to pay taxes and I am hoping that continuous wearing of these colours will similarly exempt me from paying taxes. Having said that, I also have to tell you that being a Bengali I cannot begin... it's mandatory for a Bengali to begin everything by quoting Tagore. So Spenta, I looked for an appropriate quote – *“There is a beginning before every beginning like oiling the wicks in the morning for the lamp you will light in the evening”*.

In this spirit I have very little new to add but I thought it might be interesting to tell you how tortuous a path one takes to get anything done. So perhaps I can recount a little bit of prehistory for you. So when High T_c superconductivity broke on our horizon, I attended a teaching workshop in ICTP, Trieste, where I met two theoretical physicists – one from Calcutta and one from Dhaka. They meet every year in Trieste even though it's a three-hour bus ride between Calcutta and Dhaka. But they meet in Trieste to do their collaboration and as good Bengalis they talk about the food. It seemed rather strange that this ought to be the case and over the years – Prof. Gross is here – I have to say I have met more of my colleagues in scientific collaborations and discussions in Santa Barbara than I have met either in Bangalore or in Bombay. It seemed that this peculiar situation needed to be addressed and this had been in the back of my mind.

Then a third coincidental thing happened. TIFR had a building on the IISc campus and my predecessor Prof. Jha asked me once that after NCBS had moved out of that building what could be done with it. I suggested 'why don't we do something like ICTP, Trieste?' What better thing could there be than IISc and TIFR to do something together and he thought it was a great idea. But nothing much happened. But in 2004, K.R. Sreenivasan, who isn't here... I wanted to acknowledge that during another visit to Trieste I mentioned this to him. He said, 'go for it and I will do everything I can to help you set this up.' So these are the people who are in the background, who helped in many different ways to shape the concept of ICTS. Actually I didn't

think of ICTS – I left the ‘I’ part out, knowing that it is ambiguous. It could be both Indian and international. That’s how we started.

Then I broached this subject to the Planning Commission in 2005. And to my great shock, the Planning Commission immediately thought it was a very good idea. Perhaps because this has a very interesting history – Jawaharlal Nehru figures in it but there is too little time to get into this. The idea was to have something in south Asia which could also serve the rest of our part of the globe – south Asia, Africa – perhaps a little better. The Council approved this in principle and then all the hard work, as Sampath has said, has been done by Spenta, Avinash and their team. I watched from a distance, gave moral support and little else. I just wanted to say a few words about the thoughts we had when this was presented to the Council. It would be a tragedy if institutions are held hostage to an original vision. Institutions are dynamic things and they ought to respond to the needs of the times. But I thought it would be a good idea to recall, on this occasion, what it was that we wanted to do. Number one – connect with the world. Number two – serve the local. Third – in our country the institutions are stratified analogous to our caste structure and therefore we need to serve that part of our community that is less fortunate, given fewer resources. Yet they are our peer group, that’s where the students come from, that’s where the future is. So we thought this should also serve as an inter-university centre like the one that Prof. Narlikar built in Pune. The other thing that we thought was – TIFR as we all know is a place for fundamental research and that means the conventional disciplines like physics, mathematics, biology, chemistry and so on. But it is also very important in a country like ours and increasingly throughout the globe to bring rigour to other disciplines. Disciplines that are of vital interest to our existence like the environment, energy, water, natural resources, diseases etc. And there ought to be a place that will break down the silos between institutions, between disciplines, between modes of research. Finally, as an experimentalist, who has a record of never having written a single paper in theory, I would like to say that unfortunately we have a divide between theory and experiment. This has helped neither theory nor experiment in my opinion, in my judgment after all these years. It would be great, and I know it has been very much on the mind of the builders of this institution, to bring in people of my sort here. And let us hear the latest on theory and hopefully some theorist will look at our data and think about them. This will be good for all parts of science.

So once again with those hopes and the prehistory, I thank all of you again for being here. This is a great beginning and I hope it will have a great life forward.

Thank you very much.