

(Text of the speech delivered by Mr. Mahboob Hussain, Vice President (Technology), Four Soft Limited on the occasion of congratulating Mr. Palem Srikanth Reddy on his decision to enter public life.

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Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Mahboob Hussain, and I am the Vice President (Technology) at Four Soft Limited. Ladies and gentlemen, I wanted to speak extempore, but given the importance of the person and the occasion, I did not want to miss any point that I wanted to say. Hence I prepared a written speech and I will be talking from that.

I did my engineering from regional engineering college, Nagpur now VNIT and in 1998 I went to the United States. Four years ago, I returned from the U.S after working there for six years in a Fortune 100 multinational company. I was really not keen in jumping into a job after having spent in the working life for 13 years. When I got the interview call from Four Soft Limited, I wanted to give it a try and came for a face to face interview with the M.D. And the interview was the first day that I met Srikanth. Up to that point, I had a different perception of entrepreneurs. I joined Four Soft in the first week of December and on the first day I went to the training centre. On the next day I got a mail offering me a job in the middle east from a petroleum company. The salary and perks were good, like no taxes, family accommodation and one month paid vacation to India. The next day, the whole day, the job offer was on my mind. Chakravarthy Yadav was running the 4S training center in those days and he was taking some sessions on the company and the product and I had no clue what he was talking about, because the middle east job offer was so tempting and it fully occupied my mind.

But I resisted the temptation. What held me back was the simplicity of the founder. The way he had conversation with me shattered my mental views of entrepreneurs as reserved, proud and overbearing. So I continued with Four Soft. And it was this simplicity that I saw on so many occasions later: I would watch Srikanth talking to investors, overseas colleagues, but then he was equally at ease with trainees and the office boys. He would have lunch with us in the pantry and we used to crack jokes, sometimes at

him, sometimes with him and he would also join in the fun and would take part in those lighter moments.

As the founder of a product development company, he is a pioneer when there were very few product development companies in India and he brought advanced technologies to the logistics domain that was fragmented and using technologies that were quickly running out of time. To the product development space, the industry is only waking up now: for example, Nasscom formed its product forum only recently and on their website, they say: “Of the existing 371 software product start-ups since 2001, over two-thirds have been formed in the past three years – of which ~100 companies have started their operations in 2007 alone.” In one of the interviews on the Nasscom website, one venture capitalist opined that these are “extremely early days for Indian software products.” Dear friends, thinking ahead of times is a very rare and exalted quality. And I have had a great sense of pride in being associated with Four Soft and Srikanth.

As a student of existentialist philosophy, one central theme that I read was about passion. We can always lead a life with reason and rationality, but the emphasis is on passionate commitment. Whatever I used to read in literature was personified by Srikanth and I used to see it daily: To live is to live passionately. And this quality, I am sure has been imbibed by many other managers in Four Soft Limited as well as other companies that Srikanth was associated with.

An acquaintance once told me that amongst the many qualities that leaders should have, one of the most important is fairness. In his classic treatise, “On Leadership” John Gardner says: “For leaders seeking to win trust, another requirement is fairness – fairness when the issues are being openly adjudicated, and, equally important, fairness in the backroom. Contending elements seek private access to the leader, and if it is widely believed that such offstage maneuvering works, the system is in a constant turmoil of suspicion.”

Fairness is interlinked with justice. And for Srikanth, this must have surely come from home. For those of you who are not aware, Srikanth is the son of Justice P.C.Reddy, the former Chief Justice of Andhra Pradesh High Court. I’m sure that when one is the son of a Chief Justice, the values of fairness and justice get built into one’s DNA.

Srikanth has a mannerism while speaking. Quite often, he used to start with the phrase: “there are two things” and show the two fingers – a gesture, if you follow politics closely is the one used by Mr. N.Chandrababu Naidu, the president of the Telugu Desam party.

Which brings us to the political arena: It is indeed an extension to social service and Mr. Srikanth, you have chosen a fine platform, sir: Telugu Desam party. The two things that the party did was usher in the I.T wave and ensure the rapid growth of engineering colleges in the state. This building, the Cyber Towers, is the hallmark of the I.T boom in Andhra Pradesh. The presence of a large number of engineering colleges has ensured availability of abundant local engineering talent and that has been a positive factor in the I.T. growth in the state.

I.T. and education. As part of his social service, Srikanth is extending these accomplishments by bringing I.T and education closer, that is, spreading I.T. education to rural school children. We will hear about this from Srikanth himself.

We in the software development industry are aware of what is called as “gap analysis.” And I have taken some liberty to do a brief gap analysis of the current political scenario and have thought about three relevant things: One is empowerment – it’s a very important aspect of corporate management that can be taken to the society. There are vast sections of the society that are not empowered well. Second, there are threats to National Security where evil forces are increasingly going hi-tech. Three, and this is a personal opinion: there are not too many articulate people from our state at the national scene. I hope that these are some of the areas in which Mr.Srikanth will play a major role in the years ahead.

I quote once again from John Gardner, incidentally John Gardner is from Stanford University, the same university that Srikanth went to, and he went on to join the federal administration in America: “The greatest asset of any society is the talent and energy of its people. Yet no society has ever fully recognized or honored that asset; indeed, most societies have effectively stifled both talent and energy. The release of human possibilities is one of the most basic of social objectives and leadership goals.”

We in the IT community, congratulate Mr. Srikanth on his decision to enter public life. Sir, we offer our best wishes and support to your endeavors. As we wrote in the invitation to this session: "It is but rare that after a distinguished career in the corporate and IT world, that some one takes a leap to serve at a higher level beyond the confines of board rooms.

As a proud member of the IT fraternity we are delighted about your active involvement to improve the lives of rural school children through IT education.

We will benefit by listening to your views on corruption and poverty alleviation and play our part through corporate social responsibility in making a difference to our own community and society."

So ladies and gentlemen, without taking any more time, with great pleasure and honor, I invite Mr. Palem Srikanth to address the gathering. For all of us and particularly for the younger sections of the members here, it is an occasion to cherish and remember for a long time to come.