

## Chief guest's address at the Annual Conference of AIMT on 30th January 1988

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CHIEF GUEST'S ADDRESS AT THE ANNUAL  
CONFERENCE OF A.I.M.T. ON  
30TH JANUARY, 1988

**J. H. Van Lint**  
*University of Technology, Eindhoven. The Netherlands.*

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be here in India for the first time and to attend this meeting. The trip was made possible by the sponsorship of UNESCO and I.C.T.P. for which I thank them.

As I told your president some time ago, I actually could not spare the time to come here but I feel that the cause of mathematical education is so important that I came anyway.

In the first place let me say that I like the name of your association, the improvement of mathematics teaching is a worthy goal. Not that mathematics teaching is so bad that it continuously needs improvement. On the contrary, it is my experience from many travels that everywhere in the world, mathematics is taught a lot better than most other subjects. But a *change* in curriculum or in our point of view on mathematics can also be an improvement. It is with this theme that you have gathered here in Calcutta to look at the area of *applicable discrete* mathematics.

We are all aware that a few centuries ago the tremendous *development of science* and especially physics led to a lot of beautiful mathematics. Much of this has become standard in our curriculum, even those parts that are not particularly relevant today.

It is clear to many of us that new developments in our society, new technologies and the needs of modern industry have caused a need for mathematically trained people who know subjects far removed from mathematical physics, ranging from economy to mathematical biology and who are willing to use their talents to solve challenging problems presented by these areas.

One of the great job markets today is statistics, but if there is one country that has been producing good statisticians for years, it is India. However, *discrete mathematics* is another newly flourishing area and there are only a few places in the world where it is an important part of the curriculum. It should be so everywhere.

You will concentrate on applicable discrete mathematics and the fact that mathematicians are concerned with applications is a good thing. However, I should stress that nearly all mathematics is applicable and this obviously holds for discrete mathematics. What we should mean is that we wish to *show* our students these applications using today's problems. What we should try to teach is a *way of thinking*, that is rather different from the one we are used to from continuous mathematics. There are many roads that lead to this goal and it is wise to pick one that has appeal to the students. We obviously all *like* mathematics and we should put concentrated effort into making our students like it too. A new curriculum has to be thought through carefully and we should not rush ahead. The teaching itself for instance must be doable for our teachers.

I sincerely hope that your discussions will be fruitful and that an attractive programme for our future students will emerge from this conference. Mr. President, if your discussions leave questions open with which you feel that I could help, please write to me. To further mathematical education I will give you all the assistance that I can.

I wish you all luck with this meeting.