University of Birmingham News Release

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**Former Indian Cabinet Secretary receives Honorary Doctorate from University of Birmingham**

Mr Ajit Kumar Seth, former Cabinet Secretary of the Republic of India, has received an honorary doctorate from the University of Birmingham, UK. Mr Seth was named Doctor of the University (DUniv) yesterday (Wednesday 15 July) in the University’s historic Great Hall, in the presence of hundreds of graduands and their families.

Mr Ajit Seth, who hails from Uttar Pradesh, was the 30th Cabinet Secretary in the Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India from June 2011 and was superannuated in June this year. Mr Seth has the unique distinction of being among the longest serving Cabinet Secretaries and the only Cabinet Secretary in India to have served in two successive dispensations.

Prior to this appointment as India’s principal bureaucrat, he spent two years as Secretary for Coordination in the Cabinet Secretariat. Mr Seth is an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of the 1974 batch (Uttar Pradesh cadre).

Mr Seth is already an alumnus of the University of Birmingham, being awarded a Master’s in Development Finance in 1993, when he was also awarded the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce Prize for his outstanding academic performance. Prior to this he received a Bachelor’s degree and Master’s in Chemistry at St Stephen’s College, New Delhi, and an MPhil in Life Sciences from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), also in New Delhi.

Following Mr Seth’s graduation ceremony, the University of Birmingham’s Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir David Eastwood, said:

*‘The University of Birmingham is extremely proud of its close and longstanding engagement with the Republic of India. For more than a century, Indian students have enriched our campus community while our office in Delhi enhances research and teaching collaboration. The appointment of Lord Bilimoria as our Chancellor underlines further this commitment. Mr Seth’s honorary doctorate supports the strong bonds the University has with India – a truly wonderful country I have had the great pleasure of visiting on several occasions as Vice-Chancellor.’*

*‘Mr Seth is one of our outstanding alumni and it is a great pleasure to welcome him back to his alma mater to receive an honorary doctorate. Mr Seth embodies all that makes a Birmingham alumnus exceptional; using his charisma and confident manner to demonstrate strong leadership throughout his impressive career.’*

The University’s Chancellor, Indian-born Lord Bilimoria of Chelsea CBE, added:

*‘Being admitted to the IAS requires being ranked in the top 200 out of over 500,000 thousand applicants from around India – it is one of the most competitive exams in the world. Mr Ajit Seth, after graduating from one of India’s prestigious institutions, St. Stephen’s College, New Delhi, joined the Uttar Pradesh Cadre of the IAS, where he rose to Principal Secretary and thereafter reached the pinnacle of his profession being appointed Cabinet Secretary to the Government of India for the past four years.*

*‘He has therefore been one of the most prominent individuals in India, with an excellent reputation for playing with a straight bat and being meticulous in his work. It is a matter of great pride that Shri Seth is an alumnus of the University of Birmingham, where he graduated in an MSocSc in Development Finance. I am privileged to confer this honorary doctorate on someone whose achievements are not only a matter of great pride to the University, but also as an individual who personifies the strong links between not only the University of Birmingham and India, but the UK and India.’*

On receiving his honorary degree from the University of Birmingham, Mr Seth said:

*‘I am deeply honoured by the decision of the University of Birmingham to award me an honorary doctorate’.*

He thanked the Chancellor and the Vice Chancellor for bestowing this honour upon him.

*‘The experience of my stay in Birmingham in 1992-93 was memorable, and in some ways transformative for me, and also for my wife and my young daughter, who accompanied me. The University, which I hold in very high regard, evokes precious and warm memories in us. We loved the city of Birmingham and its warm and friendly people.’*

Mr Seth had no hesitation to say that he found the academic faculty, the course content and the overall ambience of the University of Birmingham to be of exceptionally high order. More than anything else, it was the personal – informal – rapport which the faculty developed with the course participants, and the individual attention they gave to all, which made all the difference. *‘I benefitted immensely from the course I studied, and was able to put the learning to good use in my career,’* Mr Seth added

*‘While I am proud to be associated formally with this prestigious institution, I sense that this pride goes beyond just the accolade conferred upon me today. It finds resonance in the warm relations that exist between the Governments and peoples of India and Britain. This highest token of approval given by the University of Birmingham only reinforces the ties that bind us.’*

In his acceptance speech, Mr Seth also congratulated this year’s (medicine and dentistry) graduands, as well as their parents, family and friends. He urged the students to work hard and be inspired by the University motto; *Per ardua ad alta* (‘Through efforts to high things’). He also exhorted them to never stop learning, and to use their knowledge and skills to give back to society, particularly in under-served communities, since they have *‘chosen what is more a* calling *than just a* career*.’*

Mr Seth has enjoyed a long and varied career as a civil servant, enjoying roles in both the Government of India and the States of India. He was Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India for five years. Earlier in the 1980s, Mr Seth served in the Ministry of Commerce and was the First Secretary in the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations at Geneva, Switzerland.

Within his home state of Uttar Pradesh, Mr Seth has served as Principal Secretary (Rural Development), Principal Secretary (Vigilance) and Secretary (Home and Confidential), besides stints in both the Industries and Cooperatives Departments. He also served as Divisional Commissioner of Kumaon Division in Nainital and District Magistrate of Mainpuri and Lucknow districts.

**ENDS**

**Notes to Editors**

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* The University of Birmingham is ranked amongst the world’s top 100 institutions. Its work brings people from across the world to Birmingham, including researchers and teachers and more than 4,000 international students from 150 countries.
* The University welcomed the first Indian students to its campus in 1909 to study for degrees in mining and commerce. Since then the University has provided education to more than 1,300 Indian alumni. The University opened a representative office in New Delhi in 2009. From this base in India, the University can understand the needs and aspirations of Indian institutions, maintain partnerships with the public and private sector, support its alumni, and provide local services to those students who wish to come and study at Birmingham.
* The University collaborates with partners across the world to produce ground-breaking research, deliver innovative teaching, and to create opportunities for students and staff to gain international experience. Although Birmingham’s partnerships are wide ranging and span all continents, the University has identified India, Brazil, China and North America as key strategic regions in which they wish to develop more focused engagement.