

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB  
MUKHERJEE ON THE OCCASION OF THE 26TH CONVOCATION  
OF THE INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY**

New Delhi: 12-04-2013

1. I am pleased to be here today to address the 26<sup>th</sup> Convocation of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), which can be called a “People’s University”.
2. This convocation brings together learners from a large cross-section of society. I congratulate all the students at the different regional centers of IGNOU who have assembled here to receive their degrees, diplomas and other awards.
3. The learners enrolled with this University represent knowledge seekers in conventional and innovative areas, and competency-based programmes. The programme profile of the University is reflective of an innovative system of University education that promotes learning and encourages excellence in new fields of knowledge.
4. Ladies and Gentlemen, the demand for higher education in our country far exceeds its supply. The density of educational institutions in India has no doubt increased from 10 to 14 institutions per 1,000 square kilometer during the Eleventh Plan period. But educational institutions are still absent in many places.
5. This has resulted in a low enrolment rate in higher education. 7 per cent of those in the 18-24 years age group enter higher education in India, as compared to 21 per cent in Germany and 34 per cent in the US. Increasing the reach of higher education to students, especially in remote areas, is critical to boosting the enrolment rate.
6. I am happy to know that IGNOU, in a span of 27 years, has become a pioneer for Open and Distance Learning in the country. It meets the education demands of 30 lakh students in India and 43 other countries through a network of 67 regional centres, around 3,350 learner support centres and 82 overseas centres.

7. I compliment IGNOU for generating study material for 477 learning programmes offered through 21 Schools of Study. The quality of its self-learning material has been its strength, for which it was awarded the Certificate of Excellence by the Commonwealth of Learning. IGNOU has demonstrated that quantitative gains in terms of enrolment can be meaningfully combined with quality education.
8. IGNOU has led the popularization of the 'Open and Distance Learning' movement in our country. The enrolment to such programmes in India has increased from 27 lakh in 2006-07 to 42 lakh in 2011-12.
9. The establishment of IGNOU was a huge moment in the history of Indian education. It has provided opportunities to a large number of people who were unable to access formal education or who wanted to diversify their academic portfolio or those who wanted to study for self-enrichment and up-gradation. It has taken higher education to the masses and has learners from a wide range of age groups, including teenagers and working adults.
10. At the same time, IGNOU like any other institution also faces certain challenges. These range from technical or managerial to structural and systemic. For example, it needs to be ensured that students receive or access their materials within reasonable time. There is need to harness technological advancements, particularly in IT and communication, to improve programmes and course content as well as cater to the growing size of student enrolment. I am glad the University has established over a hundred video-conferencing centres and signed over 600 Memorandum of Understanding with other stakeholders to effectively deal with these challenges. I hope the University will also make special provision to assist students from remote areas or with social or economic backwardness, make optimum use of technology.
11. Friends, IGNOU was started with a mandate of providing need-based education at different levels to all those who need it. But, it must be kept in mind that needs keep changing over time. The curriculum must reflect these changing needs and mores. Knowledge creation is

happening at such a tremendous pace that things become obsolete and even irrelevant before we realize it. Continuous updating and review of existing material with new information is, therefore, absolutely essential.

12. Another important phenomenon which IGNOU should address is globalization. Globalization has affected society in profound ways. IGNOU with its expanding global presence, needs to develop an international perspective to its programmes. Global studies could be combined with interdisciplinary perspectives. IGNOU should be a vehicle for taking Indian and third world agendas to international arena with a view to influencing the global discourse.
13. At the national level IGNOU should also contribute to creating a cohesive polity where citizens participate in crafting a common future on an equal basis. IGNOU should create interactive spaces which would allow students from across the nation to engage with and inspire each other. IGNOU can thus synergize its students for nation-building.
14. Ladies and Gentlemen, life long learning is an imperative in today's demanding world. The higher education sector must respond to this new opportunity. As learning has no terminal point, 'career learners' will be a new demand entity. Our universities should design programmes that assist such life long learners.
15. In the future, academic programmes that support multiple career goals will be more in demand. Learning systems will have to adjust to the pace of the learner. Learning is locating itself off campus, to the home, the workplace and the field. For these set of emerging realities, open and distance learning is a perfect fit.
16. IGNOU, the world's largest Open University system, should pride itself for having emerged as a system leader in open and distance learning. IGNOU and the network of State level Open Universities are a consortium addressing the knowledge requirements of the remotely-placed, disadvantaged, marginalized and deprived learners of the country.

17. The 1.5 lakh plus learners of the University who are receiving their degrees, diplomas and certificates today are torch bearers for promotion of development in different parts of the country. I congratulate them and wish the University and all the graduates of today every success in their endeavours.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.

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