

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB  
MUKHERJEE ON THE OCCASION OF THE 90TH CONVOCATION  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF DELHI**

Vice Regal Lodge, New Delhi: 19-03-2013

1. It is indeed a privilege for me to be present here to deliver the 90<sup>th</sup> Convocation of the University of Delhi. I feel honoured to be at this Convocation, for which, in the past, some of India's tallest leaders such as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan have been Chief Guests.
2. Delhi University is today a premier educational body of our country. Beginning with a small number of 250 students in 1922, Delhi University has grown in status and eminence. It is now recognised both at home and abroad as a premier impartor of higher education catering to about 5 lakh students. By pursuing quality education, Delhi University has become a treasure house of knowledge. It is a reflection of its increasing eminence that it has had the privilege of honouring many eminent personalities of the likes of Madame Curie, Lord Mountbatten and Dr. Zakir Husain, a few among the many.
3. On this 90<sup>th</sup> Convocation, I congratulate the University of Delhi for marking one more year of success in delivering meaningful, quality education. I have been informed that 400 doctoral, 6,500 post graduate and 65,000 graduate degrees will be awarded today to students in a variety of disciplines ranging from medicine to fine arts. I congratulate all the students on their achievements, and the University for providing them the opportunity to pursue their academic goals.
4. Ladies and Gentlemen, I hardly need to emphasise that education plays a fundamental role in the development of a nation. True empowerment comes only with knowledge. If our country has to continue on its path of higher growth, then the relentless pursuit of higher educational standards is an indispensable requirement for its achievement. If we look at the statistics, the nation has been able to make remarkable progress in this direction. During the Eleventh Five

Year Plan period, 65 new Central Institutions, including 21 Central Universities, were started and the number of Central Institutions increased by about 75 per cent. Except for one State, today there is now at least one Central University in every state of our country.

5. But the question that we should now ask ourselves is whether we are satisfied with the progress that we are making in the educational sector. An honest answer would reveal that we have miles and miles to go before we can say that we have arrived.
6. The education sector is today confronted by problems relating to both quantity and quality. It may be heartening that the density of educational institutions in India has increased from 10 to 14 institutions per 1,000 square kilometres during the Eleventh Plan period. But it is disheartening that many places in our country do not have a higher educational institution that are within the practical reach of aspiring students.
7. Realising that it is time for us to make innovative changes in the educational sector, we had organised a conference of the Vice Chancellors of the Central Universities in Rashtrapati Bhavan in February of this year. During the meeting, we had arrived at some conclusions on the immediate, short-term and medium-term measures that need to be taken to bring in the necessary changes in our education system to address the nation's requirements. The Prime Minister, the Human Resource Development Minister and the Vice Chancellors were agreed on the urgent need to address the challenges that we are facing in the sector. I am happy to note that the Ministry of Human Resource Development has started the implementation of the decisions taken in right earnest. We hope to show substantial progress by the time we hold the next conference in February 2014.
8. India has the second largest higher education system in the world, but the gross enrolment in the country in 2010 was only about 19 per cent, which is much below the world average of 29 per cent. Adding

to the woes is the low enrolment rate of the disadvantaged sections which is much below the national average.

9. To make education accessible to more students, our efforts must be directed at bringing higher education closer to our population to particularly those in remote corners of the country. We must remove the imbalances in the reach of higher education across states, regions and sections of society.
10. Open and Distance Learning can aid in enhancing the reach of higher education. The enrolment in such programmes in our country increased from 27 lakh to 42 lakh during the Eleventh Plan period. The time is now ripe to deploy innovative technologies for greater coverage and for improvising modules that can enable better learning.
11. Inclusivity in higher education should be based on affordability as well. Various student aid programmes such as scholarships, education loans and self-help schemes should be appropriately structured into the academic system.
12. Ladies and Gentlemen, affiliated colleges are the core of our higher education system as they enrol about 87 per cent of all students. But affiliation alone would not suffice. The affiliating universities must be particularly careful in guiding these colleges to ensure high standards in the curricula and evaluation systems. Particularly, the Central Universities which are seen as the centres of excellence, should promote high standards and act as centres of inspiration to other institutes of learning.
13. If we are to redefine the way education is imparted by our educational institutions, the time is now. According to an international ranking of universities, no Indian university finds a place amongst the global top 200 universities. This you would agree, is simply unacceptable. We must develop our universities into global leaders, and for that, the best practices in other countries should be carefully studied and adopted with necessary changes to suit our conditions.

14. Shortage of faculty and low standards of instruction are at the core of our concerns. In Central Universities, close to 51 per cent of posts of professor are lying vacant. While we take urgent steps to fill the vacancies, new ways of employing technology-based learning and collaborative information and communication sharing should be evolved.
15. Lectures by eminent professors could be transmitted to educational institutions situated away from the main towns and cities using the facilities offered by the National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (NMEICT). Refresher courses for teachers conducted by the Academic Staff Colleges can also be similarly transmitted.
16. Every university should identify a group of 10 to 20 'inspired teachers' who can ignite the minds of the students to learn beyond the text books. If such teachers interact with each other as well as with the students, the quality of teaching could be enhanced. Their lectures could also be relayed to remote educational institutions through NMEICT Networks.
17. Innovation holds the key to future progress. India's record in innovation is not very encouraging. The number of patent applications filed in India in 2011 was around 42,000. This is far below the 5 lakh plus applications that China and the US each filed in 2011. With 17 percent of the world population India's share in the number of patent applications filed world-wide is only about 2 per cent.
18. The thrust on research and innovation in our higher educational institutions is lacking. Out of the 260 lakh students who were enrolled at the under-graduate level and above in 2011-12, only one lakh or 0.4 per cent had registered for PhD. Therefore, innovation has to be aggressively promoted by our institutes of higher learning, apart from research and development centres.
19. We must set up industry incubation parks, increase the number of research fellowships, promote inter-disciplinary research through

inter-university and intra-university collaboration, and adequately empower our centres of excellence.

20. Our academic and research positions in important institutions of higher learning suffer from talent deficiency. Our systems are not conducive to retaining talents, and hence, lose many of them to organizations within and outside the country.
21. By an adequate system of incentivization, we should be able to discourage this outflow of intellectual capital and at the same time encourage scholars of Indian origin working abroad to return to the country for determined periods of time. Such a policy could yield higher results in the form of transmission of ideas and new methods of teaching and research.
22. Ladies and Gentlemen, there are many grass-root-level innovators in our country whose ideas could be developed into marketable products through technological and commercial support. These innovators need mentoring and our universities, as the fountain head of knowledge, should take the lead.
23. I am happy to note that the University of Delhi has established an inter-disciplinary platform called 'Cluster Innovation Centre'. I hope the students undertaking hands-on projects find the journey from the grassroots to the classroom worthwhile and are able to focus their education to the needs of the country more effectively.
24. The founder of post-Apartheid South Africa, Nelson Mandela, had once observed and I quote: "*Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world*" (unquote). I am delighted to learn about the initiative of the University of Delhi to use the challenges faced by our country as a core theme in creating new syllabi.
25. It would also be necessary to promote a culture of excellence in our universities. A beginning in this direction could be made by identifying at least one centre in each of the universities. The Ministry of Human Resource Development, the University Grants Commission and each

university could join hands for creating such centres within one or two years.

26. Topics such as water, environment, health, education and urbanization require in-depth data collection, analysis and research. The University's efforts at providing an academic framework to these issues would significantly contribute to the understanding of our policy makers and the formulation of effective schemes.
27. Experience from around the world has shown that the alumni interest and involvement in the development of their alma mater has shown great results. I am confident that this University's alumni would be encouraged to actively participate in this effort.
28. I wish all the students the very best in their lives and careers and strongly urge you to follow the advice of Mahatma Gandhi who said and I quote: "*Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever*" (unquote). I also wish the management and faculty of this University every success in their future endeavours.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.

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