

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE
AT THE 9TH ANNUAL CONVOCATION OF MOTILAL NEHRU
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**

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I am happy to be here in this historic city of Allahabad to deliver this Convocation Address.

2. Situated as it is at the confluence of three rivers, Ganga, Yamuna and the mythological Saraswati, Allahabad has traditionally been the seat of spirituality, knowledge and learning. It was also the epicentre of India's movement for independence and citizens of this city formed the vanguard of our freedom struggle.

3. The foundation stone of Motilal Nehru National Institute of Technology (MNNIT), then a Regional Engineering College was laid on 3rd May, 1961 by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru while Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri formally inaugurated the College building on 18th April, 1965. The institution they helped to create and nurture has today grown into one of India's finest in the field of technical education. The Government of India, recognising MNNIT's efforts, has accorded it the status of an Institution of National Importance. It is heartening to note that all 14 Departments of the Institute are today offering Ph.D. programmes. I would like to congratulate all the bright young minds who are passing through its hallowed portals and hope that over time they shall leave an indelible mark on the country's progress.

4. Ladies and Gentlemen, our country is fast becoming a major economic power. In terms of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), we are the third largest economy in the world. The growth rate that our country

enjoys is second only to China among the major economies in the world. In six out of the last nine years, we managed a growth rate in excess of 8%. Though the growth rate had slightly contracted since 2010-11 in the face of global economic meltdown, India has been able to withstand the crisis and has shown a remarkable resilience.

5. One of the key factors behind India's economic resilience is the strong foundation it has established since independence **and in the early implementation of our plans** in the field of higher education. It is through education that we build intellectual capital and create a skilled workforce which can contribute directly to the nation's output. Research is an advanced product of education. Research leads to innovation, technological advancement and process perfection, which in turn shifts production frontiers and creates capacity for future growth.

6. This is an important moment in the evolution of the higher education framework in our country. We have reason to be optimistic. At the end of financial year 2011-12, the overall figures revealed a total of 659 degree awarding institutions and 33,023 colleges. Enrolment to higher education institutions in the country increased from 1.39 crore in 2006-07 to 2.18 crore in 2011-12. The Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education is targeted to increase from nearly 18% at present to about 25% by 2016-17.

7. However, despite **these** achievements, it is widely recognized that our country's education system is burdened with demands of both quantity and quality. We need many more universities and technical institutions to be able to address the higher education needs of our increasing number of students. **What** we need most is to provide good quality education. I want to share with you my sense of disappointment on seeing, in recent reports,

that not a single Indian University or Institute of higher learning figure in the list of top 200 Universities in the world. Whether the Survey reflects the true position of our Universities and Institutes is beside the point. Befitting our growing economic power status, we must raise the standards of our higher education to a level that we reach undisputedly among the top ten or at least top fifty in the world **in the coming years**. In a globalised world, Indian institutions should aim not only at becoming top universities in India but also establish themselves as world class universities with international standards of research, teaching and learning. To maintain high standards, institutions must constantly upgrade themselves. They must not only invest in infrastructure and use the latest technology in the imparting of education, but also engage outstanding faculty and update their courses and curriculum constantly with changing times **and requirements**.

8. There is urgent need to develop a curriculum that will encourage the growth of research and innovation. To provide greater access to quality higher education to larger number of students, the financial assistance offered must increasingly **include** a mix of scholarships, education loans and self-help plans such as 'earn while you learn' schemes. Flexible models such as 'open', and 'distance' learning also needs to be encouraged and supported.

9. Research is a key area where there is tremendous potential and need for a concerted drive. Last year, for an estimated 260 lakh students at the under-graduate level and above, there were only one lakh PhD students in our country. We lag far behind many other countries in research and innovation. The total number of patent applications filed by Indians in 2010 was only around six thousand, which pales in comparison to over 3

lakh applications filed by Chinese, around 1.7 lakh filed by Germans, 4.64 lakh filed by Japanese, and 4.2 lakh filed by Americans. The number of applications for patents filed by Indians comprised only 0.3% of the total applications filed in the world.

10. The Government of India's 12th Plan Strategy includes a series of initiatives in the field of higher education. These include the establishment of more Central Universities, greater emphasis on technical education and distance learning, academic reforms, interest subsidy on education loans, establishment of innovation universities, expansion of existing institutions and a focus on better quality in research, infrastructure, faculty and curriculum content. The strategy gives due emphasis to greater outreach and more opportunities for all sections of our society. Governance reforms and restructuring has also been **priority**.

Ladies and Gentlemen

11. Progress of a country cannot be guaranteed unless all sections of society take part in nation building to their full potential. Women must be accepted and seen as equal or more than equal partners in our progress and prosperity as a nation. The participation of women in higher education is, in general, lower than men, and in engineering, the situation is even more acute. I am told that in MNNIT, the percentage of female students in the last ten years was around 8%. This is woefully short of what we should envisage as a nation of equal opportunity. I am hopeful that engineering as a discipline and a career of choice will attract many more girl students in the future.

12. I take a moment here to express my deep distress over the recent incident of brutal violence against a young girl in Delhi. The Government is alert to the situation and is taking necessary action to ensure that such unfortunate incidents are not repeated in future.

13. I pray for the speedy recovery of this brave young girl. Criminal attacks against women often happen in backdrop of negative perceptions about women harboured and propagated by certain elements in society. This must change. We must inculcate in every member of our society the highest of respect for women and the youth of the country, particularly students of prestigious institutions like MNNIT must take the lead in this regard.

14. I appreciate the justified anger of the youth over this ghastly incident but at the same time I humbly remind them that reason should not be thrown to the winds. Youth must learn to control emotions. Violence is not the solution. I am told that one of the security persons on duty passed away today. I express condolences over the sad demise of this man who passed away in the call of duty. I share the agony of his family. I hope this will not be repeated in future.

15. Throughout the history of mankind, engineering and technology have proved to be the strongest driving forces in the cause of human development and culture. In addition to the duty towards the academic and technical community, graduating students have a larger social responsibility that they should strive to fulfill. I am confident that graduates of MNNIT will contribute in abundant measure, to the task of nation building.

16. I would like to congratulate the degree recipients once again and wish them all success in life and their careers. I call upon the graduates to uphold the dignity of their education and carry out their responsibilities towards society and the nation. **I call upon graduates to be true to the pledges they have just taken.** The route to success may be a rocky one, but the person who completes the route has actually finished a pilgrimage – his roots are firm, and his foundations are strong. Keep the flame of innovation alive; never be lulled into complacency and never be lured by short-cuts.

17. I end by quoting two lines from Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's poem:

"The traveller has to knock at every alien door to come to his own, and one has to wander through all the outer worlds to reach the innermost shrine at the end"

I wish you all success. The whole world belongs to you. Move on steadfastly. The country is yours. The society is yours. You are at helm of affairs.

Jai Hind!