

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE ON  
THE OCCASION OF CALL ON BY STUDENTS FROM KING'S COLLEGE,  
LONDON & UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND**

Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi; 09.09.2014

- I am indeed happy to be amidst you this evening to meet students and faculty members from King's College, London and University of Edinburgh, Scotland. India and United Kingdom share a long tradition and history as well as a multifaceted relationship. Your presence here this evening is an important manifestation of the good will and trust which both countries enjoy.
- I appreciate the efforts of the UGC and Delhi University to organise a ten day short term course on 'DISABILITY AND INCLUSION: PERCEPTIONS & ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA', under the Connect to India programme.

- This short term course, I am told is designed keeping in view the concept of inclusion and the needs and support systems for persons with disabilities. I am sure that such linkages would result in an enhanced mutual understanding regarding the challenges and issues in the new millennium. I am told that students of King's College, London and University of Edinburgh, Scotland attending the present course belong to diverse disciplines of study. Coming together of students from various academic interests and backgrounds for this purpose that too in a country different from their own, points to the global appeal of India's fresh educational endeavours.
- Recognizing that the marginalized sections of our society, particularly persons with disabilities are an important resource towards the overall development of our country, India has taken up a number of measures to empower persons belonging to such segments, particularly, persons with disabilities. Our Constitution recognizes, among others, equality, education and life as being fundamental rights of every citizen of India. To ensure social inclusion in the real sense of the term, a two-pronged strategy has been adopted. While on one hand, special measures have been taken to move towards an equitable social order, on the other, we have taken a lead in implementing various international declarations and treaties both in letter and spirit.

- To further strengthen the provisions of ‘The Persons With Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act 1995’, a National Policy document was also adopted in 2006. This outlines specific steps to be taken to ensure full inclusion of persons with disabilities in education, employment and society as well as ways to ensure accessibility through technology and other enabling provisions. India is also a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and to other important international treaties such as the recently concluded Marrakesh treaty aimed towards enhancing access to print materials for the visually impaired.
- Thus, while on one hand, India is committed towards economic development keeping in view the emerging global challenges and requirements, we are equally committed to ensure that the fruits of our development and growth reach all sections of society. I do hope that during your visit to India, you have had opportunities of learning and experiencing first hand the roadmap of development based on inclusion which India has been following and is committed to traverse.

- We do realise the significance of an inclusive society for all and are working towards equity and equality in all spheres. Towards this end, appropriate application of various technologies can prove to be very effective. Realizing this, India is rapidly moving towards the broadening of her educational reach and social empowerment by using advance technologies. Attempts are underway to make the concept of e-classroom a reality in every school of the country. The call of the world today is more towards putting innovative ideas into effective usage so that all can benefit from those ideas.
- We must use education and technology as a means to ensure inclusion and equality for all citizens. Countries which have strengthened their knowledge and educational systems, have achieved much higher levels of development. Social awareness and sensitization programmes, data sharing and preparation of human resource have been some of the areas where technology has acquired key significance. When we talk about education and development, there is no denying the fact that the marginalised sections of our society are an important resource and deserve more focused attention.

- Historically, India has had a strong education system both at the school and university levels. Indian civilization has a long standing knowledge tradition. Our ancient universities - Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramashila, Valabhi, Somapura and Odantapuri – were renowned seats of learning that attracted scholars from different parts of the world. In fact, for almost 1500 years, from the founding of Takshashila university in 3rd century BC to the collapse of Nalanda university in 12th Century AD, India was a world leader in the field of higher education. Through the UGC’s ‘Connect to India Programme’ I invite you to gain insights into our education systems as well as an understanding of our rich cultural heritage and society.
- Hopefully, there will be many more exchanges and collaborative research programmes in future which will serve as an impetus in furthering excellence in higher education across the globe.
- I hope the 10 day course which you are attending will leave imprints of the diverse Indian culture and social potentials of this country on your minds. My best wishes to you for all your future endeavours.

Jai Hind!

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