SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE NATIONAL EDUCATION DAY CELEBRATIONS AND THE INAUGURATION OF 40TH JAWAHARLAL NEHRU NATIONAL SCIENCE, MATHEMATICS AND ENVIRONMENT EXHIBITION FOR CHILDREN –2013

GANGTOK, SIKKIM: 11-11-2013

I am indeed happy to be amidst you today on the occasion of the National Education Day celebrations. This day is celebrated to commemorate the birth anniversary of the first Education Minister of India, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a great visionary, freedom fighter, scholar, and eminent educationist.

2. It was Maulana Azad who had woven the fabric of a secular, liberal, modern and universal education system. We owe a great deal to the progress achieved in education in independent India to the direction and goals that Maulana Azad had envisioned for us. Addressing the Conference on All India Education on January 16, 1948, Mauland Azad observed and I quote: "We must not for a moment forget, it is the birth right of every individual to receive at least the basic education without which he cannot fully discharge his duties as a citizen." (Unquote). Maulana Azad, as independent India's first Education Minister, brought about substantial reforms in the education system of our country which continue to guide us in achieving our goal of 'Education for All'. On this occasion, I take the opportunity to salute and pay homage to this great visionary and architect of our education system. We as a nation need to strive hard to turn his dreams into reality.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. The 40th Jawaharlal Nehru National Science, Mathematics and Environment Exhibition for Children – 2013, which has been organised on this occasion seeks to encourage, popularize and inculcate a scientific temper among the children of the country. I am glad to learn that NCERT organizes national level science exhibitions every year where children showcase their talents in science and mathematics and their applications in different areas related with our everyday life.

4. The Exhibition commemorates our first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who was of the opinion that science is capable of bringing about far reaching changes, the most vital of these being inculcation of scientific temper. Panditji once observed and I quote: "It is scientific method alone that offers hope to mankind and ending of the agony of the world." This exhibition, in which potential mathematicians and scientists have put on display their multifarious talents, is an index of the infinite capacity of young men and women of the country to solve the problems the society faces – be it those relating to environment, industrial development, energy or security. I understand that there are around one hundred and seventy exhibits on display in this exhibition, which represent the efforts made by thousands of students through district and state level feeder exhibitions organized last year. Children have converged from various parts of our country to this meet to show case their scientific work. I congratulate the National Council of Educational Research and Training for its endeavour to popularize science and mathematics and inculcate a scientific temper in the children of India. I am confident that organisation of these exhibitions will enable the

students and teachers to generate new scientific ideas for addressing problems relating to the society and environment.

5. The central theme of this year's exhibition, "Science and Society", is an occasion for us to reflect on the issues and problems our society is facing. On the one hand, we face challenges regarding conservation of our resources for future needs and on the other, the fulfilment of basic necessities of the ever increasing population continues to remain a persisting problem. It is high time, we redefine the concept of development in a wider perspective, and try to find innovative ways based on scientific knowledge and mathematical understanding to tackle them. There should be no confrontation between the environment considerations and development requirements.

6. The population of the world has already crossed seven billion and India accounts for about one sixth of this boom. The problem can be compounded further by poverty, hunger, malnutrition and illiteracy, if appropriate steps are not taken immediately. It is imperative to face the situation squarely and adopt a scientific and mathematical approach to the performance of tasks at hand. There is a need to make our children aware of the nexus between problems like unchecked population growth and energy crisis, depletion of natural resources, pollution of the environment, and so on. Towards this end, our younger generation needs to be made not only aware but also responsive to all the issues which have a direct bearing on our society. We should encourage children to visualise the future of the nation and help them become

sensitive and responsible citizens. Science and Mathematics are powerful ways of investigating and understanding the world. It is, therefore, extremely important to inculcate the ethos of science and mathematics in the minds of our young students who are the future scientists and technologists of this nation.

7. The exhibition has been renamed as the Jawaharlal Nehru National Science, Mathematics and Environment Exhibition (JNNSMEE) for Children. This, I am informed was done keeping in mind the celebration of the 'Year of Mathematics' and in order to give more emphasis on environment-related issues. Sikkim, where the exhibition is being held this year is well known for its rich biodiversity and the pro-conservation policies followed by its Government. I urge our young participants to regard the five elements of life: Earth, Water, Energy, Space and Air as something that we have inherited and that we have to pass on to the next generation. We have no right to squander or pollute them because we do not own them. This does not mean that we should not pursue science, develop technology and strive to improve the quality of human life, but while doing this we should take care not to disturb the delicate balance of our compound ecosystem. All the natural elements that sustain life on earth are inter-connected and exhibit the highest order of coordination; and any disturbance caused to any one of them will lead to imbalance in nature as a whole. We simply cannot afford to do that.

8. Ladies and Gentlemen,

Education is a necessary tool for national progress, human empowerment and social change. The Right of

Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, and the inclusion of Article 21-A in the Constitution of India has far reaching implications for elementary education and for the implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), in the years to come. Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) focuses on strengthening of the secondary school system in the country so as to raise enrolment in secondary education, reduce the gender, social and regional gaps in enrolment and improve school retention. In higher education, a plethora of reforms are being introduced to increase access and ensure meaningful quality. An umbrella scheme of Rashtriya Ucchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is being launched to address the needs of State institutions so as to strengthen them and enhance their quality.

9. However, much remains to be done. There is a need to promote a culture of excellence and provide quality education for all with special focus on the marginalized and disadvantaged groups. The thrust should be on inclusive education and the three Es of expansion, equity and excellence in education across all levels. Teachers should inspire students to imbibe correct values and shape future citizens having a sound character. There is a need to give greater focus on female literacy as well as the synergy between literacy and skill development. We must focus on technology enabled learning in all the institutions across the country and empower the faculty and students to harness technology for improving the quality of education. Increased use of technology solutions to address the problems of accessibility, quality and faculty shortage is necessary. Accessibility and affordability are key steps for inclusion.

10. Innovation will be a determining factor of growth in the future. In a world marked by resource constraints, growth will increasingly depend on technology up-gradation. India has dedicated 2010-20 as the Decade of Innovation. The Science, Technology and Innovation Policy, unveiled this year, calls for mentoring grassroots innovation. Innovation in science and technology can lead to the development of new products and processes which could act as catalysts for growth. Therefore, Research & Innovation needs to play a vital role in our education system. Further, our drive towards innovation should benefit those at the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid.

11. My vision is that India should become a knowledge power in the coming decade wherein every Indian is literate and has access to affordable, quality education. I am sure the visionary perspectives of Maulana Azad will continue to inspire and guide us to build a knowledge society.

12. I would once again like to thank the NCERT, New Delhi and the Government of Sikkim for inviting me to this exhibition. Panditji had once observed and I quote: "Who indeed could afford to ignore science today? At every turn we have to seek its aid... The future belongs to science and those who make friends with science". (Unquote). I hope, young children that you continue to take inspiration from these eternally relevant words of Pandit Nehru. Remember that Science, Technology and Innovation is the key to progress and prosperity for our nation. Always move forward with an open mind and strive to reach new heights. I offer my best wishes to you for a bright and productive future.

“Jai Hind”