

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE SECOND CONVOCATION OF THE CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

Shahpur, Himachal Pradesh: 12-02-2014

1. I am glad to have this opportunity to address you in this second Convocation of the Central University of Himachal Pradesh. The picturesque location, idyllic surroundings and quiet atmosphere makes it an ideal destination for the pursuit of learning and creativity.
2. On this happy occasion, I first of all congratulate Dr. Vijay Kelkar, noted economist and administrator, for being conferred the degree of D. Phil *Honoris Causa*. I also congratulate the second batch of students who have graduated from this fledgling university. It is hearty to see the joy of accomplishment in all of you. Remember that you were treated with care and provided with attention here. You felt guided, secured and enriched. As you step out of your academic universe today, be assured that your education will always keep you in good stead; you will thrive wherever you go and shine whatever you do.
3. Having said that, I want to remind all of you that you owe something to the world around you. You are now entrusted with the people's hopes and expectations. The educated is a trustee of a special responsibility. The upliftment of your less fortunate compatriots is a sacred task that precocious people like you must perform. This obligation to your country is something that you must always cherish. It is a bond that you must not sever. So, go; live your dreams. At the same time, live the dreams of your country and countrymen.

Friends:

4. Education has the ability to alleviate human lives like none other. Particularly, higher education can deliver great benefit to society; gains that are unthinkable without allowing education full play. Recognizing this, higher education has received focused attention over the last few years. Many universities and technical institutions have taken birth during the Eleventh Plan period. 21 central universities, 8 IITs, 7 IIMs and 10 NITs have been started. With the exception of Goa, we have a central university in every state today. By creating new institutions of higher learning and gearing up the capacity of existing ones, we have sought to take care of the increasing number of students wanting to

pursue higher studies. Strategic locations of new universities and institutions have helped improve accessibility to meritorious students from remote regions.

5. Developing a formidable infrastructure is one part of the education continuum. We have a more pressing challenge; to elevate the scholastic value of our students. It is a worrying fact that the standards of education in many of our institutions are below benchmark. There is not a single Indian institution in the list of top 200 universities in the world. Some of our universities and engineering institutions are indeed capable of figuring much higher in the ranks. Concrete action is required to not only have an in-depth understanding of the criteria and process followed by the ranking agencies, but to also develop a strategy to project the achievements more effectively. Our new universities may not be in the reckoning immediately. Yet, a concerted effort made from the very beginning could lead to substantial progress in their academic functioning.

Friends:

6. The annual Conference of Vice Chancellors of Central Universities at Rashtrapati Bhavan provides an opportunity to discuss ways and means to quicken the process of change in our higher education sector. This year's Conference was held last week and I am happy to mention that the Vice Chancellors had a fruitful engagement with the other stakeholders, and the experts from different fields whom we had specially invited. I am confident that the takeaways would be implemented within the timeframe. Remember that central universities should be the torchbearers of transformation in India's higher education sector.
7. Faculty development is a crucial aspect of overall academic management. Every discipline undergoes rapid change in conceptual understanding and theoretical underpinning. Teachers will do well to keep themselves abreast with the latest formulations. There is also a continuing shortage of bright people for teaching positions in higher educational institutions. The large number of vacancies is ominous, especially in the context of our drive to rejuvenate this sector. We have to attract talent to fill up unoccupied faculty posts through flexible and innovative solutions. Specialists from abroad should also be drafted into our education system to inject new ideas.
8. Technology wields tremendous power to bridge distances and overcome other barriers. Through the use of knowledge networks, academic institutions can defeat physical

constraints and reach one another in a meaningful collaboration of ideas, thoughts and knowledge. Sharing of course material and important lectures can mitigate the lack of expertise in a particular field. It can also help establish uniform standards across educational institutions in the country. I have started using video-conferencing when I delivered my New Year Message to over 450 institutions this year. I intend to reach out to you more. On your part, I hope you will take greater recourse to ICT networks in your normal academic and intellectual interactions with the world beyond your campus.

9. Transformative ideas are required to steer our educational institutions from the muddy waters of mediocrity. Governance structures have to be supportive of innovative ideas and also facilitative of faster decision-making. The expertise and experience of alumni, who are well-established, can be utilized for effective university management. Studies have shown how alumni participation in university governance improves academic performance. Our universities, especially the older ones, should make a definitive move towards engaging alumni in their activities. In times to come, I expect this University to also involve the alumni purposefully in its academic affairs.

Friends:

10. Disconnect between university education and industry requirement has to be bridged. Institutional mechanism for greater collaboration has to be in place. In the Conference of Vice Chancellors, I have spoken about the need for every central university to set up an Industry Interface Cell. Such a body can work towards galvanizing industry initiatives like setting up research chairs and endowments. I am hopeful that such cells comprising local industry, industry associations, alumni and faculty will be formed in each central university soon.
11. Research is a neglected domain in our higher education structure. Successful research programmes offer vast possibilities to make a difference in the lives of people. Countries devoid of natural endowments have progressed solely on the strength of technological advancements brought about by intensive research. A developing country like India has to address the grand challenges of renewable energy, climate change, drinking water and sanitation. Research in these areas will have spin-offs unimaginable in terms of benefits to the common man. Our universities have to be the breeding ground for creative pursuits. They have to be the source of cutting edge technological developments. A beginning has already been made by the opening of Innovation Clubs in several central

universities to promote ingenuity and exchange ideas. As the next step, innovation clubs should work in tandem with innovation incubators located in the IITs or NITs in the region to take forward the novel, workable ideas of grassroots innovators to create useful products.

12. A spirit of competition and collaboration has to be instilled in our central universities. On my part, I have announced the institution of an Annual Visitor's Award in the three categories of Best University, Innovation and Research. I want all the central universities, including the Central University of Himachal Pradesh, and their faculty and students to give their supreme effort for these awards.
13. In the end, I wish you all the very best. I thank you for inviting me to your annual convocation. Remember always, the words of Confucius: "*Education breeds confidence. Confidence breeds hope. Hope breeds peace*".

Thank you.

Jai Hind.
