

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE AT THE INAUGURAL SESSION OF THE
VISITOR'S CONFERENCE 2016**

New Delhi : Nov 16, 2016

1. I am delighted to welcome you all to the second Visitor's Conference at Rashtrapati Bhavan. I extend a special welcome to those heads of academic institutions who are attending this conference for the first time. I have had the good fortune to interact with you and the institutions you represent, on several occasions – be it the eight conferences held here in last four years, the video conferences, or the convocations and other special occasions. My interface with you has enriched my understanding of the higher education sector.

2. The conferences at Rashtrapati Bhavan provide a platform to the central institutions of higher learning for in-depth discussions on crucial matters concerning higher education. We have had the benefit of unique insights of academic leaders and experts on issues like faculty augmentation and development; global standing of our institutions; research and innovation; alumni involvement in the management of institutions; collaboration with foreign universities and industry; effective utilization of technology including knowledge networks, and alignment of institutional goals with societal requirements.

3. The recommendations that have emerged from the previous conferences have been worked upon by all concerned, particularly the institutions. Some of the action points are

ambitious. But, it only shows the willingness and drive of the captains of these institutions to aim higher and achieve better. I am eager to hear from them about the progress made on all fronts.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

4. The growth of an economy has a close linkage with the knowledge generated in its universities. The technical professionals, scientists and researchers trained in these knowledge centers contribute to the nation's competency level and competitiveness. Their scientific efforts induce greater systemic efficiency through innovation, introduce newer and better products and services, and incentivize follow-up research. When universities function as pioneers in scholastic and research fields, they not only help maintain their own leadership position but also that of their economies. Outward-looking nations have higher learning institutions with global orientation even while they serve as storehouses of local history and culture. Institutions, today, seek to be benchmarked globally, motivated by honest pride, and a desire to reflect the home country's status in the comity of nations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. India has achieved considerable economic success since it became a free nation in 1947. Her average decadal growth rate has increased from 3.9 percent in the first three decades in post independence era to 7.7 percent in the first decade of the twenty-first century. India today occupies an envious

position of being the fastest growing economy amongst the major economies of the world. However, the global rankings of our higher educational institutions belie our economic prowess. Focused action on the ratings process over the last three years has yielded some dividends. Two Indian institutions have come to occupy positions within the top two hundred. But our institutions deserve much more. We must aim to have many of our institutions within the top hundred in the near future. And for that, we need a strategic vision aided by concerted effort.

6. In the conference of chairmen, board of governors, and directors of IITs held in August 2014, I had suggested that we must identify 7 to 10 institutions, which with some support can find a place in the top 100 rankings of international agencies. I am happy to find this recommendation getting traction now with HRD Ministry's 'Project Vishwajeet'. The proposals made by the seven IITs – Kharagpur, Kanpur, Bombay, Delhi, Madras, Guwahati and Roorkee – should be expeditiously examined by the HRD Ministry for quick implementation. Indian students go abroad seeking quality higher education. India ranked first amongst the top 25 countries sending students to US with 25 percent growth this year. Indian students make up 16 percent of the total international students in US. Considering the foreign exchange outgo from our students going abroad, the resource requirement of Rs. 22,000 crore spread over 5 years projected by the seven IITs for 'Project Vishwajeet' does not appear to be a big amount. These resources have to be found through innovative funding

mechanism. The proposed policy of MHRD to establish ten world class institutions each in public and private sector is also a very welcome step. Through an enabling regulatory environment, these institutions can achieve global standing in teaching and research.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

7. The road to becoming world-class institutions is through the trinity of talent, resources and management. Our institutions must brim with meritorious students and top-notch faculty. Mobility of students through measures like choice based credit system is important. So too, mobility of faculty, and for that, an encouraging environment like proper implementation of pension portability is necessary. Higher education is becoming increasingly expensive. To attract bright students with limited means, a support base comprising options like deferred and variable fees and income-contingent loans will be necessary. Access to higher education is also hampered by information asymmetry. Various funding and communication and counseling models have to be developed depending on specific requirements.

8. Our institutions must become magnets for talent—not only internal but also from outside. By sourcing students and faculty from abroad, they can deliver education in a global setting, enriching their scholars with international and inter-cultural skills. From '**brain drain**', we must shift to abundance

of '**brain rain**', as many successful Indian professionals working abroad are keen to come back, excited by the opportunities unfolding in a changing India. With adequate thrust on internationalization of our institutions, we can develop "**brain networks**". Distance learning programmes, particularly MOOCs, can enhance virtual mobility. Cross-country collaborations can result in a vortex of ideas and outcomes. The recent reduction in the threshold limit of annual salary for hiring foreign faculty will not only help induct international experience but also mitigate faculty shortage. Already, initiatives like GIAN are showing good results. We need to take this engagement further where our institutions are seen as the next generation destinations for higher learning.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

9. World-class institutions can be developed only with adequate financial resources. Government funding in public institutions are limited to budget provisions. Tuition fees are relatively inelastic compared to cost escalations. To cater to the progress of our central institutions, their fund requirements must be supplemented by other sources such as endowments and contracts for research projects from industry. I am happy to find industry-interface cells operating in most central institutions now. But there is a need to review their work and up-grade their performance.

10. Institutions and industry are taking a proactive stance in signing MOUs. Last year, 43 MOUs were exchanged during the industry-academia session of the Visitor's Conference. In my visits abroad, the academic delegations which I am proud of taking along with me have signed 92 MOUs with their foreign counterpart institutions. The focus now has to be on implementation of these agreements. Going forward, we have to shift gears in terms of the contents of MOUs signed. More emphasis must be laid on high ambition contracts like collaborative R&D, commissioning of research projects, and allowing the use of R&D infrastructure like laboratories, incubators and parks. Linkages with business schools must also be established. Such schools can provide market knowledge to test the innovations emanating from the minds and laboratories in institutions. Indeed, we must develop our institutions as teaching, research and entrepreneurial centers.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

11. Another vital pre-requisite for a world-class institution is a governance model that encourages creative thinking, scientific scrutiny and critical reflection. It enforces a mechanism of accountability that enables institutions to respond to changes in the external environment with agility thereby promoting competitiveness. A good governance model also calls for strong institutional leaders who drive the vision of the institution with commitment and pursue excellence. Such academic leaders inspire followership amongst students and

fellow educators by encouraging free exchange of views, and facilitating organizational learning.

12. The challenge to attain global standards for our higher education system is two-fold. We need our established institutions to graduate into world-class centers of learning. At the same time, we need new institutions to take-off successfully, overcoming the nascent-stage hurdles. Some of the new institutions have been set up in remote areas of the country. They hold great promise to spur the development of their regions. They can be the bridge to build local capacity for teaching and learning. Necessary assistance, both financial and administrative, must be at their disposal to see that these institutions start functioning at full capacity. In conferences of NIT Directors held in 2013 and 2014, I had stressed upon the need for greater cooperation between institutes of higher learning. The current practice of mentoring of new central institutions by established institutions must be intensified. In addition, mechanisms for regional cooperation amongst central institutions should also be put in place.

13. The new institutions would do well to remember that while constructing new facilities for teaching and practical learning, the requirements of modern curriculum and pedagogic methods have to be kept in mind. At times, manpower or financial resources may become a constraint. Innovative teaching aids like sourcing e-content and lectures through

knowledge network must be deployed. It must be ensured that an efficient communication infrastructure is put in place in these far-off institutions.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

14. There have been incidences of student unrest in our institutions in recent past. Our campuses must have a harmonious and peaceful environment for students to pursue higher studies and research. Vice-chancellors and directors must deal with any unpleasant situation with sagacity. They must take help of all well-wishers including inspired teachers, who by the dint of their wisdom, conviction and conduct, can inspire confidence among students and have a calming influence. The concerned administrative ministries must also facilitate the academic leaders.

15. In India, we have enough talent. With the largest population of the young, we are poised to leverage a low dependency ratio. But that depends on the productivity of the population in the working age bracket. If there are enough jobs in the country, there will be content, refinement and perfection. An opposite scenario can spell disaster. The restlessness and frustration of youth manifests in unrest and upheaval. Let us not allow such a situation to appear on our horizon. We must turn our evolving demographic configuration into strength. For that, adequate job creation is a priority. The job creation figures of 1.35 lakh in 2015, which is the lowest in seven years, are not

encouraging. With machines fast replacing men, we have to look at a paradigm shift. We have to prepare our youth, who are buzzing with innovative ideas, to turn into entrepreneurs. We also have to enable our students-turned innovators-turned entrepreneurs to be able to successfully harness the market. You, as heads of the central institutions, must consider this as your prime responsibility if we have to achieve equitable growth. I am happy to have launched the Student Startup Policy of AICTE today. I see great potential in this policy to unleash the entrepreneurial talent of our students of institutions of higher learning.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

16. Just as there are peaks in mountain ranges, there are world-class institutions amongst the vast number of higher learning institutions globally. In India, the number of such '**knowledge peaks**' on the horizon are few. We need many more such peaks if India is to be counted as a world knowledge power. As leaders of central institutions you must come up with innovative ways to take the ambition of our country in higher education forward. I look forward to some constructive suggestions and imaginative outcomes from this forum. I wish you purposeful thinking and progressive deliberations over the next two and half days!

Thank you.

Jai Hind.
