

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE TO HIGHER EDUCATIONAL AND RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS ON THE TOPIC "ENERGIZING THE HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTES IN INDIA" THROUGH VIDEO CONFERENCING

Video Conference Room, Rashtrapati Bhavan: Aug 10, 2015

Leaders of institutions of higher education; heads of other academic and research institutes; faculty members; dear students:

1. I am happy to have the opportunity to interact with you at the beginning of this new academic session. I welcome all the new students to universities and other centres of higher learning. Addressing you twice a year through video conferencing is a practice I started in January 2014. Through this e-platform, which now has been upgraded to twice its capacity, it is possible for me to connect with a much larger audience from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, West to East and North-East. For that, I must thank the National Knowledge Network and the NIC teams.

My dear students:

2. I speak to you today in the shadow of an irreparable loss that we have suffered in the passing away of Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. My two illustrious predecessors, Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan - a philosopher teacher and Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam - a scientist

teacher have greatly influenced my thinking on the education sector. When we talk of energizing the higher educational institutions, we should be guided by what Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan had said, and I quote: *“Education should be imparted with a view to the type of society that we wish to build. We are working for a modern democracy built on the values of human dignity and equality. These are only ideals; we should make them living forces”* (unquote).

3. The enduring civilization that is India is also a land of contradictions. It is a matter of fact that 26 per cent of our population is illiterate. Yet, our education system has given rise to the second largest pool of scientists and engineers in the world. Even today, many villages in the country are devoid of clean drinking water. Yet, we churn out a larger quantity of software for US IT firms than any other country. To take this fascinating and vibrant democracy to greater heights, we need highly educated and skilled young men and women. That is the challenge before our higher education system.

My dear students:

4. As Dr. Kalam has explained in his book, “Indomitable Spirit”, the education system in the 21st century must be based on five components - research and enquiry, creativity and innovation, capacity to use high end technology, entrepreneurship and moral leadership. In the contemporary world, we are wading in a sea of information. Converting this information into knowledge and

knowledge into wisdom, calls for exceptional skills which we must impart in our students. They should be prepared for lifelong learning which now is easier because of digital technology. An inquisitive mind and research oriented approach has to be built in our students.

5. It is easy to be overwhelmed by the amount of information around us. But when information is networked, its power and utility increases. In today's world, management of knowledge is beyond the capacity of an individual. Students must learn how to manage knowledge collectively. Another skill essential for the younger generation is to learn how to use the latest technologies for aiding their learning process. Universities must create an ecosystem with adequate hardware and software where 'inspired teachers' can be effectively used to propagate knowledge. Entrepreneurship is another quality which must be cultivated in our students from an early age. They must learn how to take calculated risks for the sake of greater achievements within the parameters of ethical business practices.

6. Value oriented education with deep understanding of the democratic governance structures and systems are a must for building leadership skills. Development of the country and betterment of humanity should be the guiding principles for mission driven leaders of tomorrow. "Yes, *We Can*", spirit also has to be inculcated in formative years of our gen-next. They

must have the disposition “*to do the right thing*” as well as “*to do things right*”.

Friends:

7. Urgent measures to improve academic management in higher level institutions are necessary. To make learning more effective, teaching pedagogy must be refined, curricula up-dated regularly, an inter-disciplinary approach adopted and evaluation mechanism reformed. They must identify core competencies and nurture centres of excellence.

8. The higher education sector is witnessing sweeping changes the world over. Rising costs of higher education and the changing profile of education seekers, aided by technological innovation, are leading to alternative models of knowledge dissemination. MOOCs, which first began in 2008, allow students to hear lectures and read course material on-line, and earn a degree at a cost much lower than conventional education. Disruptive technologies should be used to our advantage.

Friends:

9. Is it possible to become a world power without a single world class university? In two reputed international rankings of universities, there is not a single entry from India against the top 200 places. I refuse to believe that despite having the second largest higher education system in the world, with over 700

universities and 36,000 colleges, we do not have even one truly outstanding institution.

10. The fault lies in our casual approach. The rankings process should be taken seriously. A high rank can boost the morale of the academic community and open greater avenues of growth and placement for students. It can help attract the best faculty from India and abroad and provide a benchmark for continuous quality enhancement.
11. Concrete action to present the credentials of our institutions is needed. Institutions must set up nodal authorities to handle data coordination. Some of the IITs have developed expertise in dealing with the ratings process. They can act as knowledge partners to other institutions. As a result of concerted efforts, India today has nine institutions in top 50 in the BRICS region, with the Indian Institute of Science Bangalore at the 5th position. I hope the success in the BRICS rating will extend to other international ratings.

Friends:

12. Our country is beset with problems like drinking water, sanitation, energy availability, urbanization, and poverty that call for innovative solutions. These challenges must ring the bells in the laboratories, corridors and classrooms of our higher academic institutions. Unfortunately, research in most institutes is marked by a certain degree of neglect. The eco-system for cutting-edge

research is missing. This general apathy is reflected in some indicators. India has 160 researchers in R&D per one million people compared to 710 in Brazil and 1,020 in China. In high technology exports also, India does not fare well.

13. The *Make in India* campaign aims at facilitating investment, promoting innovation, fostering skill development and establishing best-in-class manufacturing infrastructure. Our universities and engineering and research institutions must take up this challenge and make India a hub for technology-based products. They must build a research culture and promote research activity at all levels.

Friends:

14. Our institutes of higher learning must leverage their linkages with key stakeholders. Academic institutes in India must develop partnerships with reputed international institutions. A win-win mode of interaction could be exchange of faculty; collaborative research; and sharing of academic resources like course material and resource persons. An increased interaction by setting up industry-interface cells and induction of industry experts in governance structures of our institutes can pave the way for sponsorship of chairs; support for research projects; and setting up of incubation centres and laboratories.
15. Alumni have an emotional connect with their *alma mater*. An institution can draw the expertise and experience of some of

their illustrious alumni for academic management through governing bodies. They can also be drafted for business and project mentoring, and curriculum design.

16. A higher educational institution has to interact with the society at large. Its soft power of persuasion and influence extends beyond its classrooms. Adoption of some neighbourhood villages to effect holistic change and transform them into model villages can be a very good beginning.
17. Before I conclude, here is a piece of advice from Mahatma Gandhi, which we will do well to remember. I quote: "*Literary education is of no value, if it is not able to build up a sound character* (unquote). I once again wish all of you a very happy and rewarding academic year ahead. Let the time be spent in fruitful pursuits, meaningful opportunities and significant achievements.

Thank you.
