

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB  
MUKHERJEE AT THE FELICITATION FUNCTION AT SURI  
VIDYASAGAR COLLEGE**

Suri, Birbhum, West Bengal: 18-12-2012

1. It is indeed a moment of joy and nostalgia to be back at the college where I spent four of the best years of my youth. It seems like yesterday that I was admitted for the I.Sc course in 1952. My registration no. was 5057. The registration fee at that time was Rs.2/-. I went on to do the B.A course from 1953-56 and I distinctly remember collecting my graduation mark sheet on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August, 1956 from this college. I resided at “Chhatrabas” situated North of the Nilakshi. There were at that time eight boys’ hostels in the college. My batchmates included Gopal Sarkar, Shri Sasthi Kinkar Das, Prof. Amal Mukhopadhyay, Prof. Dwipendu Banerjee, Shri Balaram De, Shri Ganga Charan Mishra, Shri Rajat Kumar Mishra, Shri Angshu Bhusan Bhattacharyya, Sri Sambhu Gopal Das, Sri Jatadhari Malakar and Shri Bimalendu Naskar. I recall them and their families vividly. I am very happy to see some of them here today. It is with great respect and reverence that I remember the Principal, Professor Arun Sen.

2. It was a privilege to have studied under the guidance of the venerated teachers who guided my efforts as an earnest young student here - more than half a century ago. The goals and motto of the Suri Vidyasagar College, “Jnana”, “Tyaga”, and “Seva”, that is, wisdom, self-sacrifice and social service, embedded in the college emblem, inspired my thoughts and actions. They remained in my heart all these years. It has

since been an eventful journey for me, full of challenges but I have been fortunate as there have also been so many rewards along the way.

3. Ladies and gentlemen, this is an important moment in the evolution of the higher education framework in our country. We have reason to be optimistic. At the end of financial year 2011-12, the overall figures revealed a total of 659 degree awarding institutions and 33,023 colleges. This indicates that enrolment to higher education institutions in the country has increased, from 1.39 crore in 2006-07 to 2.18 crore in 2011-12.

4. However, the challenge remains - to maintain and upgrade the standard of education imparted in these institutions. The other urgent need is to train and motivate their teaching staff. Universities need to develop in their students a scientific temper and a curriculum that will encourage the growth of research and innovation. To provide greater access to quality higher education to more students, the financial assistance offered must increasingly offer a mix of scholarships, education loans and self-help plans such as 'earn while you learn' schemes. Increasing the reach of education in the country, flexible models such as 'open', and 'distance' learning are far-reaching initiatives and should be encouraged and supported. I am told that the response to such initiatives has increased - from around 27 lakh in 2006-07 to 42 lakh in 2011-12. This is a positive development. While information technology has been put effectively at the disposal of distance learning programmes, more innovative use of technology needs to be made so that besides increasing

its coverage, modules can be devised that are more user-friendly.

5. Research is a key requirement where there is a potential and a need for a concerted drive. Last year, for an estimated 260 lakh students at the under-graduate level and above, there were only one lakh PhD students. This needs to be given a boost. A study of the incentive structure for a research student would indicate how he or she can be incentivized to move towards research.

6. We must take full advantage of India's fortunate demographic ratio; our economy's sustained economic growth would depend on appropriate human capital formation. And this should be our priority. Government of India's 12th Plan Strategy includes a series of initiatives. These include the establishment of more Central Universities, greater emphasis on technical education and distance learning, academic reforms, interest subsidy on education loans, establishment of innovation universities, expansion of existing institutions and a focus on better quality – in research, infrastructure, faculty and curriculum content. The strategy gives due emphasis to greater outreach and more opportunities for all the sections of our society. Governance reforms and restructuring will also be a timely measure. All these initiatives are welcome and outcome oriented. We should support Government's efforts through private partnerships as much as we can and wherever these are possible and feasible. To the students here, I would emphasise that the time is not far when they will reap the full benefit of all these steps - and

more - that Government of India is taking in the interest of their generation.

7. With these few words, I have the pleasure to offer you all my felicitations and good wishes and greetings of the season.

Thank you.

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