

**SPEECH OF SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE, FORMER  
PRESIDENT OF INDIA FOR THE 12TH ASSOCHAM  
NATIONAL EDUCATION SUMMIT**

I am happy to be present amongst you to address the 12th ASSOCHAM National Education Summit. At the outset, I would like to congratulate ASSOCHAM for organizing this Education Summit. As an apex Industry Association of the nation, you have been continually organizing such summits on issues touching a wide spectrum of our developing society. It is indeed praiseworthy.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

2. The topic placed before me today, “**Making India a Global Knowledge Powerhouse, Catalyzing reforms and innovations**”, is of immediate importance. India has a rich and illustrious history of higher education. The country has attracted scholars and thinkers from all around the world in pursuit of learning and knowledge. Epoch-making discoveries were made, perspectives formed, and the spirit of enquiry developed. Once India had universities like *Nalanda, Takshashila, Vikramashila, Valabhi,*

*Somapura* and *Odantapuri*, which were global leaders for eighteen hundred years beginning sixth century BC. Students and mentors from across the world attended these institutions. Such 'centres of learning' have been the epicentre for the evolution of the idea of university in the country. As inheritors of their legacy, our premier institutions of higher education are the vehicles on which India has to propel itself into a knowledge society. Education of mind and soul has guided the Indian way of life since time immemorial and it should continue to do so.

3. The colonial era ushered in a western construct of the university, deconstructing our heritage such as the Nalanda and Takshashila models. Currently, the higher education sector has expanded into 903 universities and over 40000 colleges. However, such quantitative shifts have exposed or unpacked concerns regarding excellence among higher education institutions in particular and the sector in general.

Distinguished Guests ladies and gentlemen,

4. India is all set to become the largest individual contributor to global demographic transition with the working population (Ages 15-64) set to reach 869 million by 2020. It is predicted that India will experience “demographic bonus”, where the growth rate of the working population would exceed that of the total population until 2020. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has predicted that by 2020, India will have 116 million workers in the work-starting age bracket of 20 to 24 years, as compared to China's 94 million. The IMF reported that if India’s demographic dividend continues, it has the potential to add 2 percentage points per annum to India’s per capita GDP growth over the next two decades. Clearly a well-educated, highly skilled workforce will be a huge advantage. We cannot let this opportunity pass us by. As India’s population increases, we need the private sector to step forward.

5. The government plans to increase the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) to 30%. Though important, just an increase in number will not lead to a commensurate improvement in

quality. We need to re-think our approach and align our education policy to focus on outcomes and globally recognized quality. It is important to understand why foreign universities are doing better than their Indian counterparts. At the same time, we ought to explore ways in which universities in India can compete with the world's best universities in the rankings today and perhaps regain her lost position as the leader in Global education and progress.

6. Today students and teachers across the globe are able to challenge each other's interpretation. The Technological Revolution has made a global dialogue possible. The art of questioning and counter-questioning has found new life. Dialogue has always been key to the Indian way of thinking. However my question to educators is "Are we ready?" Are we prepared to speak in a global tongue? The time of the blackboard is gone, that of E-Classrooms has begun. Is our nation equipped to teach through this medium? These are some of the questions which continue to vex me.

7. Today, I address you, not with a sense of warning but with a sense of caution. In these changing times, I feel that it is important that apex industry bodies and the academia work together to chart out a roadmap towards creation of a knowledge society which shall, in turn, nurture and propel a powerful and dynamic economy. We must recognize that a strong economy can emerge only on the bedrock of a knowledge society which is possible only when we actively recognize and create synergies between industry and academia. While industry has to create employments and academia has to not only create employable human resource but fuel the Industry's research and development and innovation requirements so as to augment their growth.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & gentlemen,

8. A strong inter-linkage between industry and academia is a critical component for developing the educational and industrial ecosystems. I believe, that the industry captains and leaders of academic institutions must come together to strengthen this ecosystem. Today's summit, in fact,

shows on one hand the increasing commitment of the industry towards institutes of higher learning, and on the other, exhibits a strong desire of academic institutions to constructively engage with industrial partners. This will only help in deepening the much needed interface for industry-academia dialogue.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

9. There is a lot of space for growth in our education system. Technology in the shape of a teaching-aide can revolutionize education. The systems that govern our schools and colleges must be open to technological advances. The teachers must understand that technology cannot and will not replace them, but only aide them. Having been a teacher once myself, I know the importance of a teacher and mentor in a student's life. However, it is difficult for the existing physical infrastructure, especially in the public sector, to meet the learning needs of the growing population. Our country is expected to touch 1.5 billion by 2030 and 1.7 billion by 2050. Digital learning and e-classrooms provides a

solution to fulfilling the education needs of our nation, and it should be seriously contemplated upon. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru firmly believed that **“we must step out of the old and into the new”**. There have been many attempts to revamp the regulatory structure, efforts made to attract talented faculty, and increase spending on education, much more needs to be done. To remain relevant in the world that we live in, we need to revamp our higher education by changing the educational approaches, thrust and content.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

10. While increasing the access to education is important, the actual goal of schooling is to teach skills and transfer knowledge to students in the classroom. A concrete development of the mind must be the aim of good Education. Education is not only the life-blood of a people but also a transformative process. Let me end by quote of our father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi **“What is really needed to make democracy function is not knowledge of facts, but right education”**.

I once again congratulate ASSOCHAM and all the educationists for successfully conducting this 12th National Education Summit 2019.

Thank You

Jai Hind