

EXTRACTS FROM SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE SECOND CONVOCATION OF THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH (IISER), BHOPAL

Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh: 27-06-2014

1. I am happy to be with you on the occasion of the Second Convocation of the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Bhopal. This Institute today has awarded its first PhD degree along with graduation and post-graduation degrees to its second batch of students. It is a significant milestone for IISER Bhopal, which is a relatively new seat of higher learning in the educational firmament of our country.
2. Established in 2008 with 18 students on its rolls, IISER Bhopal has grown rapidly and has now a total of 635 students, including 178 PhD scholars. With girls comprising 36 per cent of the student population, it is heartening to see how IISER Bhopal has provided impetus to gender equity in science education and research in the country. I am also glad to learn about the efforts being made by this Institute to promote scientific temperament amongst people and to reach out to underprivileged sections of the society.
3. Convocation is the single-most important event in a year for any academic institution. I congratulate all the students who have received their degrees today. It is a moment of reckoning not only for them, but for all those – faculty and staff; family and friends – who have played a role in their success. During the first Annual Convocation of IIT Kharagpur in 1956, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had said and I quote: *“When I look at the new graduates, I see them launching out not only on their life’s career which is an exciting business for every young man and woman at this time of life, but launching out at a time of peculiar significance to this country..... It seems to me that at the present moment there is no more exciting place to live in than India”*. (unquote). Our country remains as exciting a place to live in and grow with, as it was 58 years ago. India needs capable and committed graduates, more so now, to keep her firmly engaged with the future.

Dear graduating students:

4. You have passed out with flying colors and build a strong foundation for a good career. You have worked very hard, and you deserve it. But you must not rest on your laurels. You are entrusted with the hopes and expectations of this nation. So, use your education to pursue your dreams. At the same time, serve the country; and what better way to serve, than to help the less fortunate realize their dreams. Always stay true to the knowledge you have

gained and uphold the values that your alma mater has instilled in you. Dream about the endless possibilities for the future; act on those dreams, and help change the world.

Friends:

5. If there is any investment that can truly fashion a country's prospects and shape its future generations, it is education. And if a country has over half its population aged 25 years or less, which is what India's position is today, then the significance of a robust education system is undeniably strong. The youth of our country is brimming with energy and aspiration. They have to be imparted quality education and requisite skills to beat competition and meet success. The present educational standards of our institutions could however belie our anticipation of the demographic dividend.
6. The quality of higher academic institutions in India is unfortunately below globally-acclaimed institutions. Way back in September 2012, in the Annual Convocation of IIT Kharagpur, I had expressed my sense of dismay on seeing not a single Indian institution finding a place amongst the top 200 universities in the world in international rankings. Since then, I have been sharing my concerns about our performance and reiterating in all my interactions with higher educational institutions – be it in Convocations or Annual Conferences in Rashtrapati Bhavan - the need to attach more importance to the rating process. The Ministry of Human Resource Development has taken a lot of interest and initiative in this direction. It is, therefore, a matter of great satisfaction that reputed international rating agencies, of late, have started to recognize the quality of our institutes. In subject-wise world rankings, two IITs - Madras and Bombay - are amongst the top 50 institutions in civil engineering, while IITs - Delhi and Bombay - are in the top 50 in electrical engineering. Five institutions are amongst the top 20 universities in BRICS nations. The number of Indian institutions in the top 100 in Asia has increased to 10 this year from 3 in 2013. IIT Guwahati is amongst the top 100 institutes aged 50 years or less. I am confident that in the overall rankings too, our institutions would soon feature amongst the top 100 or even top 50 in the world.
7. The cornerstone of quality up-gradation is promotion of excellence in our academic institutions, with no leniency for mediocrity. Teaching must be made a more challenging and gratifying profession to attract bright people. Faculty development must be continual given the dynamic nature of conceptual understanding in various disciplines. Greater internationalization of the academic community must be attempted through innovative models of faculty and student exchange, visiting chairs and short-term projects. The

advances in ICT must be employed for intellectual collaboration, sharing of lectures and dispersal of ideas and best practices.

8. The governance structure of institutions must facilitate smooth decision-making. It must draw wider expertise, including industry experts and prominent alumni. The industry-academia linkages in activities like joint research and commissioning of chairs and endowments must be strengthened through institutional mechanisms.

Friends:

9. Science education and research, technology and innovation are crucial underpinnings of progress. Yet, there is an apparent neglect of scientific research in our education system. This does not augur well for our future growth, which will arise not so much from the utilization of our resources with existing technology than from its better usage through more advanced technology. Good education system calls for continuous knowledge creation which can be facilitated only through high quality research. It is with this vision that IISERs have been established. They have been envisaged as research centres of the highest calibre in which teaching and education in basic sciences integrate totally with state-of-the-art research. This amalgamation of science education and research is a novel departure from the higher education model that we follow, where universities are focused mainly on education while laboratories and R&D centres undertake research. In this context, the effort of IISER Bhopal to conduct frontier research in collaboration with national and international organizations is a welcome step.
10. IISERs must play a central role in attracting more students towards science and converting this fascination into tangible career opportunities. They must equip students with sound conceptual understanding and analytical foundation. I am happy to learn about the 'Research Vision Document' and other initiatives of IISER Bhopal aimed at becoming one of the top institutes in its class within the next twenty years.
11. IISER Bhopal must be conscious of the fact that any step taken today is significant as it will determine the kind of institution it will become in the times of come. I am confident that this Institute will fully live up to the expectation with which it has been established. Let us dream through the prism of posterity. I wish you all the very best for the future.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.