

OPENING REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE VICE CHANCELLORS' CONFERENCE

Rashtrapati Bhavan : 04.02.2015

Shrimati Smriti Zubin Irani, Minister for Human Resource Development;

Shri Satyanarayan Mohanty, Secretary, Department of Higher Education;

Prof. Ved Prakash, Chairman, University Grants Commission;

Vice Chancellors of the Central Universities;

Senior Officers;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning:

I warmly welcome all of you to this Conference. This is the third time we are meeting at Rashtrapati Bhavan and I hope our deliberations shall be as focussed and meaningful as on the earlier two occasions.

1.I understand that HRD Minister, Smt. Smriti Zubin Irani had a retreat with the Vice Chancellors of Central Universities at Chandigarh in September, 2014. The Ministry of HRD has also undertaken a review of the action taken on the recommendations of last year's Conference and both these developments have set the tone for today's Conference.

Friends:

2.In the last Conference of Vice Chancellors, we took a number of decisions. While I await a detailed analysis of the action taken report later today, a quick look at the progress made on these action points reveals a disappointing picture. The vacancy position remains alarmingly high - in terms of percentage, vacancies have increased from 37.3 percent as on Mar 31, 2013 to 38.4 percent as on Dec 1, 2014. Performance is marginally better in setting up innovation clubs and inspired teachers' networks. However, only four universities have so far established centres of excellence while another five are working towards these. Efforts aimed at engagement of central universities with industry and alumni need far greater focus and direction than at present.

3.During this Conference, I would want you to devote considerable thought and effort on the successes, failures and difficulties in implementation of last year's recommendations. The modified format of the Conference will enable you to collectively identify difficulties and evolve collaborative strategies towards overcoming these.

Friends:

4. Over the last two years, I have been insisting upon a rigorous follow-up of the decisions taken in these Conferences. Earnest efforts have been made to fulfil the commitments I made last year. Non-availability of Visitor's nominees in the Selection Committee of faculty has been addressed. Consequent upon my approval, each Central University will now have a panel of five names of nominees who can be called as per extant instructions.

5. As a short-term measure to overcome faculty shortage, engagement of eminent scholars and researchers, both from within the country and outside, was suggested in the last Conference. During my visit to Norway and Finland, where I was accompanied by an academic delegation from central universities, IITs and IISERs, I called upon academicians and experts to come and teach in India. Under the Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN), the HRD Ministry has asked you for a list of eminent scholars and researchers for inviting them as guest speakers or scholars. An e-platform needs to be developed to facilitate scholars from within and outside the country to log in their details. It shall, in due course, lead to creation of a robust database of global experts for the Indian higher education system. The recently-launched 'Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya National Mission on Teachers and Teaching' will set performance standards and create world-class facilities for innovative teaching.

6. I had announced the institution of Visitor's Awards for Best University, Innovation and Research during the last year's Conference. This decision has been implemented and I will have the pleasure of presenting these Awards this evening. They promise, in the near future, to become a driving force in promoting research and innovation in our universities.

Friends:

7. There is an urgent need to put ICT Networks to effective use. Through the video-conferencing facility of NKN, I have so far interacted with faculty and students of your universities three times. When I delivered my New Year Message on 19th January, 2015, **120** institutions of higher learning were connected through the National Knowledge Network and another **900** locations through web-cast mode. I would urge the Ministry and all our leaders in research and education institutions to use NKN's reach to transform the quality of higher education system in our country.

8. The students passing out from the Indian higher education system will necessarily have to compete with the best in the world. There is a need to imbue young minds with competitive spirit and a sense of pride in their alma mater. In addition to international rankings, the universities should attempt ratings on a National Ranking Framework which needs to be expeditiously developed.

9. Government has taken several steps for enhancing efficiency and excellence in our higher education sector. However, because of the diversities in our evaluation systems, students have suffered in the acceptance of their credentials across the university system as also in accessing employment opportunities.

10. The initiative of Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) will ensure seamless mobility of students across the Higher Education Institutions in the country as well as abroad. The credits earned by the students can be transferred and would be of great value to them in the event of their seeking migration from one institution to the other. I am told that 23 central universities have already implemented CBCS. I urge the remaining universities to consider implementing this system from the next academic year.

Friends:

11. The university is a role-model for society at large. Its persuasive power extends beyond the classroom and teaching. Its influence therefore must be tapped for the greater good. The Central Government has launched several initiatives having enormous socio-economic significance. The *Swachh Bharat Mission* aims at a Clean India by the 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi in 2019. The *Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana* (SAGY) envisages the integrated development of selected villages through community participation. I call upon you, as I had done with the NITs last year, to start working with at least five villages each under SAGY to transform them into model villages.

Friends:

12. In my observations so far, I have briefly touched upon some of the issues that you will deliberate upon. It is equally important for us to focus on the challenges that lie ahead and recognize the emerging global trends that are likely to bring in sweeping changes in the higher education system worldwide. Rising costs of higher education and the changing profile of education seekers, aided by technological innovation, are leading to the creation of alternative models of knowledge dispensation.

13. Cost of creation of physical infrastructure and academic facilities, increasing salaries of teaching and non-teaching staff put a severe pressure on the finances of a university. Due to limitations of public funding, these costs get transferred to students in terms of higher fees. Whereas universities earlier used to educate fresh scholars, they now have the added responsibility of training and re-training workers throughout their careers. An Oxford University Study predicts automation of 47 percent occupations in the next few decades. As innovation eliminates certain job types, changes others and creates new ones, the workforce will have to engage in lifelong learning to upgrade and refine their skills and capabilities.

14. The twin compulsions of increasing expenditure and dynamic demand can be addressed through extensive use of e-enabled learning. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which first began in 2008, allow students to hear lectures and read course material on-line, and earn a degree at a fraction of the cost of the traditional systems of education. Both SWAYAM (Study Web of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) and MOOCs could pave the way for speed,

scale and efficiency for teaching in the higher education system. The Ministry of HRD and the institutes of higher learning should develop eco-systems for deriving maximum benefits from applying technology to learning.

15. Disruptive technologies come with a caveat. They deny students the benefit of personal interactions and learning from inspired teachers, consequent imbibing of values as also the development of inter-personal and communication skills. Online instruction supplemented by periodic classroom interaction, or blended MOOCs, could provide a solution for retaining the essential elements of traditional pedagogy.

Friends:

16. Whether through MOOCs or the formal education system, particular emphasis has to be provided by our higher learning institutions on the inculcation of core values in our students. Abraham Lincoln had said and I quote: "*The philosophy of the school room in one generation will be the philosophy of government in the next*" (unquote). Our civilization has espoused patriotism, pluralism, tolerance, honesty and discipline as core values. Our democracy has thrived on these. The next generation must learn to recognize our diversity, inclusiveness and assimilative capacities as inherent sources of strength.

Friends:

17. A society takes the form of a creative enterprise when educated masses, with their interlinked rivers of thoughts and ideas, give rise to a sea of innovations. The teacher must encourage the taught to satiate their curiosity, question established knowledge, accept a proposition only after investigation, and pursue ingenuity. A scientific temper, which takes one's imagination beyond the realm of grades and classroom, is essential in our students. In particular, the habit of reading and learning through books must be inculcated to sharpen their energetic and inquisitive minds. Books also break societal and cultural barriers. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan had said and I quote: "*Books are the means by which we build bridges between cultures*" (unquote).

Friends:

18. Central universities have an enhanced responsibility in leading the transformative processes of India's higher education system. I am sure under your leadership they will rise to the occasion. My Secretary has already explained the format of this Conference. I expect innovative solutions to emerge out of your discussions and look forward to the results of your deliberations over these two days.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.