

National Education Day Celebrations

Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi.

11th November, 2012

Address by Hon'ble President of India

Dr M.M. Pallam Raju, H'ble Minister for Human Resource Development

Dr. Karan Singh, Designate Representative of India to UNESCO,
Shri Jitin Prasada, Minister of State for Human Resource Development,

Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Minister of State for Human Resource Development,

Madame Irina Bukova, Director General, UNESCO,

Distinguished Guests,

1. It is an honour for me to join you today in celebrating National Education Day. 11th November is celebrated as National Education Day to commemorate the birth anniversary of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, who was a great visionary, freedom fighter, scholar, secularist, eminent educationist and the first Education Minister of India.

2. Dedicating this day, in this manner, is not merely the nation's way of remembering Maulana's contribution for laying the firm foundations of education in Independent India but also in visualising the path and progress that the Indian education system must take forward at all levels. In my opinion, it is also an occasion every year to re-dedicate ourselves through the efforts of all stake-holders to the re-discovery of India as an enriched knowledge society, carving a niche for itself in the global comity of nations.
3. On this occasion, it would be appropriate to remember this great leader and recall his contribution in according high priority to education and its role in the making of a vibrant and modern India. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was one of the most important leaders of our independence movement, who championed the cause of unity of India during and after the struggle for Independence.
4. As India's first Education Minister, he was convinced that education is the tool of social transformation. Maulana Azad realised that the country could achieve a higher level of progress and advancement only by making the education system more practical, pragmatic and responsive to the

immediate demands of society and industry. Realising the need and importance of education, he set up a number of educational commissions, boards and institutions such as the University Grants Commission and the Indian Institutes of Technology.

5. When we look at the legacy of Maulana, we need to appreciate his overall contribution which was not merely confined to education, but also to various other spheres of life. His involvement in the Khilafat Movement gave him the opportunity to come into close contact with Mahatma Gandhi and his association thereafter is legendary. The significance of Maulana Azad's struggle becomes evident today when we recall that as a national leader, he took a tough stand against communalism. He strongly opposed separate electorates based on religion, and called for an independent India committed to secularism. He also supported the ideology of socialism, which spurred him to fight inequality, poverty and other economic problems. This commitment to the cause of equity and equality is what had endeared him to Pandit Nehru, who fondly addressed him as "Mir-I-Karawan" (the caravan leader).

6. Maulana Azad was also fully conscious about the composite cultures of India. Therefore, to bridge the socio-religious and cultural gaps and to enrich Indian culture and heritage, he set up a number of institutions of national importance such as Lalit Kala Akademi, Sangeet Natak Akademi and Sahitya Akademi.
7. Maulana Azad was also the President of the General Conference of UNESCO in 1956 and I am glad that the Director General of UNESCO Ms. Irina Bokova is amidst us today. Another important achievement of Maulana Azad was the setting up of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations for establishing and improving cultural relations with other countries. I am glad that the President of the Council, Dr. Karan Singh, who is also India's Designate representative to the Executive Board of UNESCO, is with us today.
8. The wealth of a nation, according to Maulana Azad, was not in the number of country's banks but in the number of primary schools. He was aware that the content of education in independent India had to be different from that of colonial India. Maulana Azad believed in a four-fold national education system - provision of basic education on a universal, free and compulsory basis, provision of adult education; improvement

and expansion of technical education; and the reorganisation and improvement of university education at a national level.

9. Maulana Azad had firm faith in the fact that every individual should have the right to education that would enable him to develop his faculties and live a full human life. He further said that such education was the birthright of every citizen. The enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009 is a culmination of Maulana's dream. The Ministry of Human Resource Development is currently implementing a policy of quality education for all with special focus on marginalised and disadvantaged groups. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has a special focus on education for girls and children belonging to disadvantaged groups and weaker sections and ensuring availability of primary and upper primary schools near habitation as prescribed under the Act. Further, to achieve the goal of Inclusive Education at school level, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan seeks to ensure that every child with special needs, irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability, is provided meaningful and quality education. The RTE Act even provides the option of home based education for children with severe disability. The 'Shiksha Ka Haq' Abhiyan launched last year on 11th of November 2011 on the occasion

of the National Education Day is a drive to ensure that all schools in the country are compliant with the provisions of the Act. Access to elementary education is an area of priority focus in the 12th Five Year Plan. Presently, I am told that the number of schools has increased to 13.04 lakhs and the Gross Enrolment Ratio has reached close to 120%. Meeting the national goals shall always be a challenge, but we have to address it in a comprehensive and effective manner.

10. I am glad to note that quality of education is getting due attention under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan with more emphasis on building teacher capacity, teacher training and motivation, promoting effective pedagogy, and improving district and block level capacity for better management of the school education system.
11. The successful implementation of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has necessitated strengthening of the secondary school system through the Rashtriya Madhyamic Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA). This was launched in 2009-2010 to raise enrolment in secondary education, focus on science, mathematics and English teaching, improve retention and reduce the gender, social and regional gaps in enrolment. Government will focus on strengthening the capacity at secondary and senior

secondary schools level. 6000 Model schools are in the process of being set-up - of which 2500 would be under the public private partnership mode.

12. The introduction of Information and Communication technology in schools will generate educational content and make it accessible to schools through the network being created under the scheme. Other schemes launched at secondary level will also continue to promote the objective of quality education with enhanced enrolment at this level too. The Saakshar Bharat Scheme launched on International Literacy Day , 8th September , in 2009 will give due focus to female literacy as well as synergy between literacy and skill development.
13. It is equally vital to carry forward the important task of skill development in our youth if we want to fully realise the dividends from the demographic orientation of our country. I am informed that the Ministry of Human Resource Development has recently brought out a National Vocational Education Qualification Framework (NVEQF) which provides for horizontal and vertical mobility between the vocational education and general education. The task of skill building should be taken up on a very large scale so as to properly

equip and motivate the youth of our country for jobs and the country's economic growth.

14. I would emphasise that Technology Enabled Learning is a very important aspect of education. This must be adapted to our specific needs and introduced expeditiously in all educational institutions across the country.
15. I am happy that UNESCO, in collaboration with Government of India is establishing the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Peace and Sustainable Development - which will be a Category-I Institute of UNESCO in Asia. It is indeed befitting that the Institute is named after the Father of our Nation, Mahatma Gandhi and is being launched today on the birth anniversary of another great Son of India, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.
16. Lastly, I would stress that we must be conscious that the outcome of our education system will be measured not merely in the number of degree holders, but in the large numbers of informed citizens that we create – enlightened citizens, who respect humanism and instinctively rise above narrow feelings of hatred, regionalism, violence, divisiveness; and contribute gainfully to a better, stronger and vibrant India.

17. As Swami Vivekananda had believed, a country's future depends on its people. To him, education was not merely collection of information, but something more meaningful; education should give a perspective of life and build character. To him education was an assimilation of noble ideas. He is famously quoted to have said, *“Education is not the amount of information that we put into the brain We must have life building, man making, character making assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library.....”*

18. With these few words, I extend greetings to teachers, students and stakeholders in our Education system across the nation on this Education Day. I congratulate the Ministry of Human Resource Development for all the initiatives they have undertaken and wish them success in policies and programmes in the years to come.

I wish all of you a happy Diwali.

Thank you.