

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE AT THE CONVOCATION OF ASSAM UNIVERSITY**

Silchar, Assam: 14-05-2013

1. At the outset, I extend my greetings on the festive occasion of the thirteenth annual convocation of Assam University. I take this opportunity to congratulate all the awardees of medals, various degrees and diplomas and wish them a very bright future.
2. As the Visitor of the university, I thank the awardees of Honoris Causa for accepting our request and making us proud of our association with them.
3. Ladies and Gentlemen, education is an important driver of social change and progress. The increase in cases of crime against women and children calls for effective steps to ensure their safety and security. It also underscores the need for our society to introspect and find ways to arrest the moral decline. It is for our universities and other institutes of higher learning to initiate a movement to meet the moral challenges and ensure that our civilizational values of compassion for all; love for country; tolerance for pluralism; respect for women; truth and honesty in personal life; discipline and self-restraint in conduct, and responsibility in action are instilled in the minds of our youth.
4. Education plays a fundamental role in the development of a society and nation. True empowerment can be attained only with knowledge. If our country has to continue on its path of higher growth, then the relentless pursuit of higher educational standards is an indispensable requirement for its achievement. We have made remarkable progress in this direction. During the Eleventh Five Year Plan period, 65 new Central Institutions, including 21 Central Universities, were started and the number of Central Institutions increased by about 75 per cent. Except for one State, today there is now at least one Central

University in every state of our country. This phenomenal growth is still inadequate to cater to the demand for the higher education in the country.

5. The education sector is today confronted by problems relating to both quantity and quality. It may be heartening that the density of educational institutions in India has increased from 10 to 14 institutions per 1,000 square kilometers during the Eleventh Plan period. But it is disheartening that many places in our country do not have higher educational institutions that are within the reach of aspiring students.
6. Looking into the challenges of the higher education system in India, we had organized a conference of the Vice Chancellors of the Central Universities in Rashtrapati Bhavan in February of this year. During the meeting, we had arrived at some conclusions on the immediate, short-term and medium-term measures that need to be taken to bring in the necessary changes in our education system to address the nation's requirements. The Prime Minister, the Human Resource Development Minister and the Vice Chancellors were agreed on the urgent need to address the challenges that we are facing in the sector. It is gratifying to note that the Ministry of Human Resource Development has started the implementation of the decisions taken in right earnest.
7. India has the second largest higher education system in the world, but the gross enrolment in the country in 2010 was only about 19 per cent, which is much below the world average of 29 per cent. Adding to the woes is the low enrolment rate of the disadvantaged sections which is much below the national average.
8. To make education accessible to more students, our efforts must be directed at bringing higher education closer to our population to particularly those in remote corners of the country. We must remove the imbalances in the reach of higher education across states, regions and sections of society.

9. Knowledge pursuit has many dimensions. It brings Gender equity as a result of access and reach. I am happy that the North-East has now focused its attention on education for women. A large number of North-Eastern girls are now pursuing education in major cities of India and are also employed in metropolitan cities.
10. In the developed countries, universities are converting themselves into virtual and meta universities permitting free movement of the academic fraternity, both students and academia, from one institution to another. Flexibility in procedure and rigour in quality have made them attract large numbers of students from different parts of the globe. They are truly world class. How can we match them in real terms? The entire education system should be fine tuned to create centres of academic excellence. We must remember that once we had world class universities in Nalanda and Takshashila. Therefore, the dream of creating world class universities in India is an achievable aspiration.
11. India with a strong scientific and technical manpower has an opportunity to become a major knowledge power in the years to come. To make this dream a reality, we have to invest in research and development. Best investment that a Nation could make is in her youth power. To capitalize the advantages of large demographic dividend and huge scientific talent pool, we have announced the Science, Technology and Innovation Policy, 2013. We have to recognize innovation and bring it closer to the masses.
12. This decade is the decade of innovation. Innovation will carry meaning only if it translates into benefits for those at the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid. In the Conference of Vice Chancellors of Central Universities held this year, a recommendation was made to set up Innovators Clubs in the Central Universities to facilitate interaction between the teaching and student communities and grassroots

innovators. Recently, I had the opportunity to open such a club at the Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow. I was happy to see the innovations that have been made by the young people.

13. Today, I am happy that Assam University, Silchar, has also set up the innovation club and organized an exhibition of innovators. I will also be meeting the inspired teachers identified by the university. I would like to compliment the Vice Chancellor and his team for taking this initiative and being one of the first few central universities to put these elements in place. I hope that this will provide a platform for innovation in this region so that no innovation will go unnoticed and unexploited.
14. The North-Eastern part of the country has been always very dear to me. This region has a potential to excel in the field of higher education. As the Visitor of Assam University, I would like to see Assam University taking lead in imparting high quality education and become a role model in higher education segment.
15. Convocation is a special occasion in the life of a university and the students. It marks the culmination of a phase of learning. I take this opportunity to congratulate once again all the students graduating today, and the University on providing them the opportunity to pursue their academic goals.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.