

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE AT THE FIRST CONVOCATION CENTRAL
UNIVERSITY OF KERALA**

Kasaragod, Kerala: 18-07-2014

1. It is a happy occasion for me to be here today to attend the First Convocation of the Central University of Kerala. I am also delighted to visit Kasaragod, located in the Malabar region, which holds great socio-historical significance. It was an important centre of commerce during the medieval times, frequented by Arab and European traders. During India's struggle for independence, this region produced prominent freedom fighters like Pazhassi Raja, Kelappaji – known as 'Kerala Gandhi' – and K.P. Keshava Menon.
2. Despite its glorious past, this region over the years has lagged behind the rest in terms of development. To restore its rightful place as a centre of growth befitting its legacy, one of the important initiatives was to establish this Central University in 2009. Flanked by the Western Ghats on one side and the magnificent Malabar Coast on the other, Kasaragod provides a picturesque, tranquil ambience for higher education.
3. The Central University of Kerala had braved the initial limitations of infrastructure and support facilities to start its academic activities with two post-graduate programmes. It now has six schools, 17 teaching and research departments, over 600 students and 100 faculty members. It is commendable that within two years of receiving this permanent site for campus, this institution has succeeded in creating the essential minimum infrastructure to shift five academic departments and the administrative wing. I am pleased to name this Campus, 'Tejaswani Hills', after the river in this region, Tejaswini, which literally means radiant. This University has also set up a centre at Thiruvananthapuram. I compliment the university authorities for quickly responding to the recommendation for establishing centres at state capitals made at the Conference of Vice Chancellor of central universities held in Rashtrapati Bhavan in 2013.
4. I am glad to learn about the proposed expansion of academic programmes at this University. A classical language centre has been envisaged. With Malayalam attaining classical status in 2013, I am sure that such a centre will provide a worthy platform for research in various aspects of the local language, literature and culture. A School of Medicine and Public Health has also been planned. In the context of the unfortunate 'Endosulphan' tragedy at

Kasaragod, this is a welcome initiative. This school should be a platform for higher learning and research in all systems of medicine, with particular emphasis on community healthcare and affordable medical treatment.

5. Awarding degrees today to its first batch of students, Central University of Kerala has attained an important landmark in its journey of continuous development. It is indeed a moment of pride, joy, satisfaction and fulfilment for the students and this entire university community. I congratulate each one of you who has a share in and is deserving of the success of the students. Convocation day should be a time for introspection about the purpose of education and its role in the development of the individual and the nation.

Dear Students:

6. India is an emerging global power. Yet, there are many in this country on the periphery of basic needs. Success of our nation will lie in mobilizing all the positive forces to fight the scourges of poverty, deprivation and backwardness. You enjoy a privileged position by virtue of having access to higher education. This privilege comes with a huge moral responsibility. Your success will lie in becoming the agent of change – the catalyst in mitigating the hardships and sufferings of the people.
7. It is alright to have personal ambitions. But it should not be the 'be all and end all' in life. While pursuing your individual goals, always keep the bigger picture; the higher calling; the greater good, in mind. Treat your personal aims and the greater good as one integrated whole, without separating them. Swami Vivekananda had stressed on the inextricable link between education and altruism, which I quote: *"Do you feel for others? If you do, you are growing in oneness. If you do not feel for others, you may be the most intellectual giant ever born, but you will be nothing; you are but dry intellect, and you will remain so"* (unquote). Always be the responsible citizens of this great nation and inspiring role models for the future generation.
8. If students are the future of this nation, it's the teacher who shapes them. I was a teacher before I came into public life. I know how gratifying it is to be a part of this noble profession. Our adage of *mata pita guru daivam* has always placed the teacher on a pedestal. The teacher led exemplary lives, worthy of the reverence they received. India needs such teachers in greater numbers today, who are not only dedicated towards teaching and committed to their

students but are also driven by a selfless desire to mould the moral fibre of our society.

9. We are faced with a scarcity of good teachers in our universities. The challenge before us is two-fold – fill up vacant teaching positions, and attract the best talent. Innovative measures like appointing eminent resources on short-term basis from research institutions, industry or from abroad have to be adopted to reduce vacancies without dilution of standards. Quality of faculty has to be transformed by providing them encouragement to attend seminars and workshops, undertake collaborative research and contribute to research publications. Needless to say, boosting faculty standards is crucial for upgrading our higher education sector.

Friends:

10. Indian universities are absent from the top two hundred ranks in the world as per reputed surveys. Though our institutions are placed in higher brackets amongst Asian or BRICS nations, or in some specific disciplines, we are yet to convert these micro developments into macro successes. With greater impetus being provided to the ratings process now, I am confident of finding a few Indian institutions amongst the front-ranking universities in one or two years' time. Though newly established universities like yours may not be in the reckoning immediately, you should continue to make progress so that you can soon come up to the level of the leading institutions.
11. Academic development has to be through a multi-pronged strategy. Modern physical infrastructure like smart classrooms has to be made available. ICT networks have to be leveraged for sharing of ideas and knowledge, and academic cooperation. E-content through such networks has to be suitably integrated into the regular curriculum. A dedicated cell has to be in place to strengthen linkages with the industry. Various forms of academia-industry collaboration – endowments and chairs from industry, visiting faculty from industry, joint academia-industry research guides, drafting industry expertise in creating academic programmes and introducing sandwich courses for industry executives – have to be introduced. Alumni have to be involved in different capacities – in governance mechanisms, as experts in course design, or as student mentors. I am sure alumni of this University will play a fruitful role in its affairs in the times to come.
12. Due emphasis has to be laid on research activity. To help find solutions to local problems, the focus of research has to be local but its quality should be

global. The universities have to tend to grassroots innovations by facilitating the conversion of ideas into tangible products. In the course of the Vice Chancellors' Conference this year, I had announced the institution of three Annual Visitor's Awards for the best University, best innovation and best research. I would like all the central universities, including yours, and their faculty and students to strive hard to get recognition. I am hopeful of these awards instilling a spirit of competition as well as cooperation amongst the central universities.

13. With these words, I conclude. I once again wish all of you on this pleasant occasion. I also wish you good luck for your endeavours.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.
