

SPEECH OF SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE, FORMER PRESIDENT OF INDIA FOR THE LAUNCH OF QS RATINGS

I am happy to be amongst you all today. At the outset, I wish to congratulate all the institutions that have been rated today. Ratings and rankings of institutions is an issue that I have been dwelling upon for quite some time now.

2. India has a rich and illustrious history of higher education. The country has attracted scholars and thinkers from all around the world in pursuit of learning and knowledge. Epoch-making discoveries were made, perspectives formed, and the spirit of enquiry developed. Once India had universities like Nalanda, Takshashila, Vikramashila, Valabhi, Somapura and Odantapuri, which were global leaders for eighteen hundred years beginning sixth century BC. Students and mentors from across the world attended these institutions. Such 'centres of learning' have been the epicentre for the evolution of the idea of university in the country.

3. The colonial era has ushered in a western construct of the university, deconstructing our heritage such as the

Nalanda and Takshashila models. Currently, the higher education sector has expanded into 864 universities and over 40000 colleges. However, such quantitative shifts have exposed or unpacked concerns regarding excellence among higher education institutions in particular and the sector in general. For instance, very few Indian institutions are ranked among the top 200 universities as per the QS world ranking league table. It is my firm belief that there are many higher education institutions in India that have the potential to become one of the best in the world.

4. India is all set to become the largest individual contributor to global demographic transition with the working population (Ages 15-64) set to reach 869 million by 2020. It is predicted that India will experience “demographic bonus”, where the growth rate of the working population would exceed that of the total population until 2020. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has predicted that by 2020, India will have 116 million workers in the work-starting age bracket of 20 to 24 years, as compared to China's 94 million. The IMF reported that if India's demographic dividend continues, it has the potential to add 2 percentage points per annum to India's per capita GDP growth over the next two decades. Clearly a well-educated, highly skilled workforce will be a huge advantage. We cannot let this opportunity pass us by. As India's population

increases, we need the private sector to step forward. The government plans to increase the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) to 30%.

5. Though important, just an increase in number will not lead to a commensurate improvement in quality. We need to re-think our approach and align our education policy to focus on outcomes and globally recognized quality. It is important to understand why foreign universities are doing better than their Indian counterparts. At the same time, we ought to explore ways in which universities in India can compete with the world's best universities in the rankings today and perhaps regain her lost position as the leader in Global education and progress.

6. Time has come that a serious discourse on how to address the quality concerns in higher education should begin not just in India but also in all emerging economies. There is an utmost need to cultivate a global consciousness in the higher education sector in India and in other emerging economies. Unless we do so, in the contemporary era of globalization, a country cannot grow in isolation. The connectivity and interdependence of countries on socio, political and economic grounds are irreversible phenomenon. The benefits of political stability, socio-cultural richness and economic prosperity travel

across borders through flow of capital, labour, technology and ideas. Since education in general and higher education in particular plays a major role in a country's politico, socio and economic outcomes, it is necessary that concerted efforts are put into building world class universities.

7. In the recent times, global benchmarking of higher educational institutions has also been acknowledged as a way to identify a world class university. Detailed benchmarking of educational institutions is required to get quantitative evidences to see if the institution is succeeding in improving its standard as compared to certain identified global standards. Most of the benchmarking agencies give considerable weightage to research output and international outlook of the educational institution. To my mind, therefore, rankings are not just a pursuit of numerical position, but it encourages healthy competition that results in research output that is globally recognized. Many have identified a number of basic features of a world class university-high quality faculty members, research output, teaching learning environment, high levels of public and private sources of fund, high quality students, quality infrastructure, autonomy and facilitating governance structure.

8. Further, to be a world class university, self-declaration is not enough; one needs to be recognized by the global

community of higher education. One needs to reach out, communicate, exchange and encourage mobility of persons and ideas across the globe. Many of the global benchmarking agencies, including the QS, gives considerable weightage to 'academic repute' that pushes educational institutions to reach out to the world at large.

9. No higher educational institution can succeed without adequate focus on research. We need to create an atmosphere of curiosity, audacity and interdisciplinary connectivity. We need to encourage a drive and a desire among students to solve complex problems.

10. Friends, India's share in the global research output is meagre. It is time that we move to a global education policy that fosters innovation and embraces change. We must take steps to empower our future generations with a world-class education that defines their place in the world order. We must create world-class universities that contribute to our nation's growth and re-establish India among the leaders of global change.

11. Corresponding the international ranking system, many countries have developed their own ranking framework at the national level. In the Indian context, we have just developed 'National Institutional Ranking Framework' to

evaluate educational institutions. We also have National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) which as the name suggests, assesses and accredits institutions of higher education in the country. I believe these national counterparts of international rankings system will only reinforce and concretize the push towards accountability of educational institutions in terms of their output.

12. Initiatives such as the earlier “Institution of National Importance” and the recent 'Institute of Eminence' has made the intent of the government clear - that it wants to support institutions that are particular about improving their quality.

13. It was also pointed out that the problem lies in our casual approach with the rankings process. It is high time that the rankings process is taken seriously. A high rank can boost the morale of the academic community and open greater avenues of growth and placement for students. It can help attract the best faculty from India and abroad and provide a benchmark for continuous quality enhancement. 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.

14. Friends, I am often told that despite having all prerequisites, Indian institutions fail to make it to the rankings because they do not provide inputs to ranking organisations in necessary format. Concrete action to present the credentials of our institutions is needed. Institutions must set up nodal authorities to handle data coordination. Some of the IITs have developed expertise in dealing with the ratings process. They can act as knowledge partners to other institutions. I also see that, to begin with, India can feature in the regional rankings.

15. When one realizes the need of the global character of today's universities, at the same time one is also reminded of the fact that universities cannot be made irrelevant to their immediate ground reality. While it is necessary that universities need to situate themselves in the global arena of higher education, it is also important that the vision and mission of the university is well grounded in its local context.

16. Given this background, the QS IGAUGE rating framework specifically designed for Indian Universities and colleges is an initiative that makes Indian institutions more aware of their strengths and weaknesses and urges them to take action towards their betterment. The legacy & credibility of QS combined with the customization that QS

IGAUGE brings to the table is the need of the hour for India. This augurs very well for the country as more and more institutions would start taking corrective action.

17. Before I end, I take this opportunity to appreciate QS for coming up with this tailor-made initiative for India considering the diversity in the Indian higher education space. I am optimistic about the prospects of QS IGAUGE in India and will look forward to see how this would impact the quality of Indian higher education in the forthcoming years. I once again congratulate the various institutions that have been rated by QS IGAUGE today.

Thank you

Jai Hind