

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT  
THE ANNUAL CONVOCATION OF DEVI AHILYA VISHWAVIDYALAYA**

Indore, Madhya Pradesh: 28-06-2014

It is my pleasure to be here today for the annual convocation of Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, Indore which is being held in its Golden Jubilee year. I congratulate all the students who have received their degrees and medals today.

Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya established in 1964 as University of Indore, reminds us of the great ruler Devi Ahilyabai Holkar who was a benevolent ruler of Malwa and who commands great respect. Association of her name with the University places great responsibility on the University to combine its role in higher education with service to society.

It is said that India lives in villages. This is particularly true for Madhya Pradesh, a tribal – rural area dominated state, with more than 72% population living in rural areas. The ratio of tribal population to the total population in Madhya Pradesh is about two and a half times of that at the national level. Furthermore, there are 40 tribal development blocks out of 54 development blocks in the eight districts of Indore division. This implies that challenges of higher education in Madhya Pradesh are higher than those at the national level. Adequate interventions in terms of policies, plans and approaches are needed for

the education of students drawn from tribal and rural backgrounds, especially to make them globally competent. I am glad to know that Devi Ahilya University is serving the educational needs of eight tribal dominated districts.

Friends, education separates light and darkness; advancement from backwardness; excellence from mediocrity. If one investment can truly define a subtle linkage to future progress, it is education. Countries built on the strength of education and knowledge have achieved development over longer periods of time. Such countries have exhibited greater adaptive powers to changes in resource endowments. Education has afforded them the ability to overcome resource constraints and build an economy on a high technological base. If India has to be one of the front ranking nations in the world, the way ahead is only through a robust education system.

Accordingly, the Government proposes to set up an Education Commission to draft a new education policy. The last modifications to the National Policy on Education was made in 1992. The country has witnessed tremendous changes since 1992. A new, comprehensive National Education Policy is the need of the hour in order to attune education to meet global challenges and address issues of quality, research and innovation as well as capitalise on the “demographic dividend”.

India has a sizeable number of young people, with two-third of the population below 35 years of age. Their proper grooming is essential as they are our future. Sadly, enrolment in higher education is below 20 per cent in India. Recognizing that this is not enough and may drag down the potential of our future generation, rapid strides have been made to expand the higher education infrastructure in recent years. The Government now proposes to establish institutions of national importance such as IITs and IIMs in all the states.

Yet, if we undertake an honest analysis of the state of higher education in our country today, it is evident that many higher academic institutions lack the quality to produce graduates for the global market. I have been sharing my concerns about the performance of Indian institutions in world university rankings during my visits to the universities. Not a single Indian university figures in the list of top 200 universities in the world.

We must transform our Universities into world class institutions. Indian civilization has a long standing knowledge tradition. Our ancient universities - Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramashila, Valabhi, Somapura and Odantapuri – were renowned seats of learning that attracted scholars from outside. In fact, for almost 1500 years, from the founding of Takshashila in 3rd century BC to the collapse of Nalanda in 12th Century AD, India was a world leader in the field of higher education.

We must salvage the declining standards of our country's higher education as a top priority. Our leadership in fields such as science and technology is incumbent on the level of competence in our scientists, scholars, engineers and doctors.

I am happy to find that our institutions have started to accord due seriousness to the rankings process. In September last year, the Finance module of IIM, Calcutta was adjudged by a reputed agency as the best amongst business schools offering the Master of Management programme. In the World University Ranking done subject-wise by another reputed agency, two IITs - Madras and Bombay - are amongst the top 50 institutions in civil engineering, while IITs - Delhi and Bombay - are in the top 50 in electrical engineering. I want our institutions to build up on these micro-level successes and achieve a much higher overall ranking.

Friends, faculty is the bedrock of education. The quality of teachers determines educational standards. Several measures are required for faculty development. Vacant teacher positions have to be filled up on priority. Talented faculty from abroad must be hired to inject new thinking and diversity in academic approach. The Scholar-in-Residence 'ENCORE' programme and Faculty Recharge Programme of the UGC should be utilized better.

Many ills that afflict efficient functioning of our universities stem from the lack of good governance practices. Governance structures have to promote faster and transparent decision-making. In this context, the induction of reputed alumni into the governance mechanism could provide the dynamism that our institutions are often in short supply of. Alumni expertise can also be drafted to review existing courses and introduce new ones.

A concerted effort has to be made to develop a wide-ranging partnership with industry. An institutional arrangement for industry-academia interface is essential to explore the contours of collaboration like sponsorship of research endowments and chairs, and conduct of internship programmes.

Technology is a knowledge carrier and information disseminator par excellence. Knowledge networks facilitate intellectual collaboration. They mitigate physical constraints as well. Effective use of technology-based media for greater academic exchange is the need of the hour. The Government intends to promote launching of Massive Open Online Courses, virtual classrooms and also establish a national E-library.

It is now over 80 years since an Indian University produced a Nobel Prize winner. The last person to win the Nobel Prize while working in India was Dr. CV. Raman in 1930. Dr. Amartya Sen, Dr. S. Chandrashekar, Dr. Hargobind Khorana and Dr. Vekataraman

Ramakrishnan were all graduates of Indian Universities but obtained their Nobel Prizes while working in US Universities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, if we have to change the above situation, the neglect of research in our universities must be reversed. We must adopt multi-disciplinary approaches in our academic system since most research activity requires the meeting of minds from diverse disciplines.

In order for students and parents to make informed choices about institutions and courses, objective quality assurance frameworks are also required. Assessment and accreditation in higher education, through transparent and informed external review process, are effective means of quality assurance thereby assisting student mobility across institutions, in India and abroad. Even though accreditation is mandatory in India, a lot remains to be desired in terms of its implementation. It gives me great pleasure to note therefore that Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya has been accredited with grade 'A' by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). I would also like to mention here that we recently became a member of the Washington Accord, paving the way for India to be included in the global comity of nations and providing opportunities of mobility for our engineering students.

The Government is also in the process of setting up a National Academic Depository (NAD). This will be a national database of academic qualifications for facilitating online verification of academic awards issued by boards and universities. This would immensely benefit institutions, students and employers by eliminating the need for persons to approach educational institutions for obtaining authenticated copies or for verification of awards as well as reduce the need for institutions to preserve records related to academic performance of students for long years. The system would also eliminate fraudulent practices such as forging of certificates, mark sheets, etc. by facilitating online verification.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our universities have a duty to create inquisitiveness and promote scientific temper amongst their students. Wings should be given to the ingenious ideas of students and grassroots innovators. Novel ideas that can be nurtured into viable products deserve mentoring by Universities. An initiative taken in several central universities is the setting up of Innovation Clubs. Activities of such clubs must be dovetailed with innovation incubators located in IITs and NITs in the region. The engagement of clubs with incubators will help create an 'innovation web', to provide linkage between advanced centres of research and the common man. I urge Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya to take the lead in creating such an "innovation club" in Indore.

Friends, India is on the threshold of new opportunities and higher achievements. Assuming global leadership by India is no longer a utopian proposition. You, the educated youth of our country, will build

this resurgent new India. Use the education you have received here to become change-agents in society. Draw inspiration from the words of Mahatma Gandhi who said and I quote: “Essence of education lies in drawing out the very best that is in you” (unquote). Always keep in mind the fact that this wonderful education you have received is a contribution of the state and the community. The land on which your university stands has been provided by community. Similarly, these buildings, the books that fill your library, the online databases etc. come from money that the state has invested in you. The nation invests in its universities because students are our future. Students, in turn, have an important responsibility to fulfil, not just to themselves and their families but also to this country and its people.

A convocation is a red-letter event for any academic institution. It holds great significance and underlines a genuine milestone in the life of its students, their family and teachers. It is a day when the fruit of years of hard work and perseverance is recognized and celebrated. Students, you will leave the hallowed precincts of this university with the armoury of knowledge and strength of character. Go to the world outside; make a difference; touch and transform the lives of people around you, and create a happier universe.

Jai Hind.

Thank you.