

CLOSING REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT VISITOR'S CONFERENCE 2016

Ceremonial Hall, RBCC : Nov 18, 2016

1. We have come to the conclusion of this Visitor's Conference. Prior to the first Visitor's Conference last year, I had the good fortune to host some of you in the seven conferences held at Rashtrapati Bhavan between February 2013 and February 2015. So before I proceed with my closing remarks, I want to thank each of one of you for your association and participation in these conclaves at Rashtrapati Bhavan. You come to attend the conferences here at my request in spite of your busy schedule as heads of institutions you represent. I am grateful to you for that.
2. To be candid, before I became President, and in that capacity, Visitor's of institutions of higher learning my understanding of the higher education sector was limited. In my address to higher educational institutions, I have repeatedly emphasised on improving excellence and improving rankings. I refuse to believe that our institutions are not excellent. However, somehow we were not taking the ranking process seriously. However, now some of our institutions feature regularly in top positions in international rankings. I am sure others will also do so in the coming years.

Distinguished vice chancellors and directors:

3. The Visitor's Conference provides a platform where central institutions in diverse fields like agriculture, pharmaceuticals and humanities join institutions of technology, engineering, science and IT in deliberations. With coming together of such mighty minds, we are a living example of the plurality Prof. Ramachandra Guha was talking about yesterday. This interaction I am confident will lead to the cross-fertilization of ideas and innovative solutions to the various problems that our higher education system faces. This forum is not an umbrella that will shelter you from challenges but the trunk of a tree that nurture the growth of its many branches.

Dear friends:

4. Higher educational institutions are the torchbearers of progress. Building institutions is not merely a brick and mortar activity. It represents a vision of the future which we all want for our nation and the generations to come. Irrespective of race, gender, faith or socio-economic background, institutions of higher learning are a place where merit triumphs over individual identities, in pursuit of excellence.

Distinguished heads of academic institutions:

5. In the past four years, I have repeatedly stressed upon the need to up-grade the quality of education and research. This can only be done by improving the quality of faculty, mitigating faculty shortages, building a robust research and innovation eco-system, giving primacy to the rankings process, and developing linkages with industry, foreign universities and

alumni. We have had some successes. A lot still needs to be done. But I am convinced that we are moving in the right direction. As I heard the outcomes of the various group and panel discussions today, I found that we still have to resolve issues like pension portability, acquisition and development of land, funding for research, etc. While we work on these, our vision should be clearly set on the following:

Faculty

(a) Shortage of faculty has plagued our institutions for a long time. From a compilation of figures provided by you, I notice that the vacancy level has reduced only marginally, from 39 percent in 2014 to 36 percent in 2016. But for Central Universities we have been able to fill 70 percent vacancies which is a very good performance. We need innovative mechanisms to address this problem on a long-term basis. I compliment MHRD for launching the Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN) last year under which close to 800 experts from abroad have evinced their interest in teaching in Indian institutions. This programme has to be given a further push so that in the next one or two years, not 800 but 8,000 foreign experts enroll under this initiative. I find in most of the MOUs, that have been signed, an important

component is 'faculty exchange'. Effective implementation of these MOUs will bring in adjunct faculty from the corporate sector in addition to foreign faculty. This rush of fresh air will rejuvenate the higher education system.

Research **(b)** Quality research must get our utmost attention. The Prime Minister's Fellowship Scheme for Doctoral Research, which is a collaborative effort of Department of Science and Technology and CII and supports full-time PhD scholars, is a good initiative. It should help propel higher level research in our country. We should also prioritize research in our institutions on the basis of its relevance. The pan IIT-IISc initiative of IMPRINT India has great potential in addressing the immediate requirements of the society through quality research at these institutes of national importance. I reiterate my call to the academic leaders of institutes of liberal arts and humanities to also undertake similar initiatives.

Innovation **(c)** As I have often said, innovation is the currency of the future. The one-week Festival of Innovations that we started in the year 2015 has now become the biggest congregation of

innovative minds starting from grassroots innovators to IT professionals. The roundtables on inclusive innovation and financing of innovation provide a forum for grassroots innovators, entrepreneurs and financiers. The linkage between these entities in the innovation value-chain has now found a shape. The launch of Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) will take this idea forward and provide a platform involving academics, entrepreneurs and researchers. It will foster a culture of innovation and promote a network of world-class innovation hubs. Unnat Bharat Abhyan is another area which calls for the attention of the higher education sector. This initiative connects institutions with local communities to face developmental challenges of rural India in an excellent manner. It will also develop among the people / students a problem solving attitude. There might be some takeaways for you from our “Smart *gram*” experience.

Rankings

(d) Our institutions have started taking the rankings process seriously. I have already spoken about rankings. A successful implementation of ‘Project Vishwajeet’ could see 7 to 10 Indian institutions in the top 100 in near future.

Inter-
linkage
with
industry

(e) With over 1,800 MOUs with domestic and foreign institutions, and over 530 MOUs with industry, our central institutions are on the right path. Our central institutions of higher learning are getting truly internationalized. But the key

to success lies in the implementation of the MOUs. The content of the MOUs that you pursue should be rich and cover multiple dimensions of industry-academia collaboration. The AICTE-CII IndPact Survey showcases some successful examples of such linkages.

Technology enabled learning (f) The clientele of higher education has gradually expanded to include professionals from industrial and other fields. The higher educational institutions have to respond with flexible course structures and innovative pedagogy. This includes learning models on the e-platform like MOOCs. Beyond the 43 central institutions that are now offering MOOCs, the others should plan on offering similar technology-based learning platforms. The SWAYAM programme is a welcome initiative. Its greater outreach will help to negate the disadvantages some of our students face on account of remote location.

Friends:

6. I fully understand that for the successful implementation of all the initiatives that we have discussed, we need adequate financial resources. While the government will have to find a major part of the funds required, we should also look at other funding mechanisms like alumni and corporate sector support particularly in the area of research and development.

7. After listening to the observations in the Conference, I have some suggestions to make: - (a) NITI Aayog should examine the possibility of giving some funds for village adoption to these institutions. The allocation can be linked to the number of villages adopted; (b) To make India a favourite destination for higher learning central universities/institutes should strengthen international division immediately; and (c) HRD Ministry should immediately constitute task forces for developing model funding templates for different category of institutes.

8. Perhaps, when the next Visitor's Conference is held, there will be someone else presiding over the event. But I am sure the crusade for excellence that we started will continue with greater vigour. Our country needs inspiring minds like you to make a difference. Remember that the desired change will not happen on its own. Change is the result of sustained effort of the committed, who hitch their wagons to something bigger than themselves and fight for it every single day. To prepare and to win, you need to have, not just passion, but a strategy; not just awareness, but action. We have come this far in improving our central institutions of higher learning. I have no doubt we will go farther.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.
