

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE TWELFTH ANNUAL CONVOCATION NALSAR UNIVERSITY OF LAW

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1. I am delighted to be here this evening for the twelfth annual convocation of NALSAR University of Law which has, in a short span of sixteen years, emerged as a leading destination for legal education in our country. Its graduates have made a mark in almost all facets of the legal profession. They have excelled in litigation, judicial services, teaching, research, social advocacy, international organizations and transactional lawyering.
2. NALSAR stands tall amongst the National Law Universities that have revolutionized legal education in India and helped the prestige of the legal profession. Consequently, the legal profession today attracts the best and the brightest like medicine and engineering did in the yesteryears. This is indeed a welcome transformation as the importance of the legal profession in a democratic country cannot be exaggerated.
3. Lawyers play a vital role in ensuring the public access to justice and making our Constitution a living reality. In any society where the rule of law prevails, the legal profession is regarded a noble profession and some of the most prominent leaders of India have been lawyers. Mahatma Gandhi and Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru were lawyers.
4. It is important to recognize that the training our leaders received as lawyers in both India and abroad played a major role in our unique national movement. Our independence struggle sought to wrest from the colonial power, basic rights and democracy in a peaceful and non-violent manner using reason, argument, and moral courage all of which are important tools of a good lawyer.

Friends:

5. Legal education has undergone a paradigm shift in the last two decades. Yet there are many areas that require further strengthening. Our educational institutions imparting law education have to bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and practical application. They have to ignite inquiry and encourage curiosity.
6. The study of legal system cannot be pursued in isolation from the wider socio-economic realities. Even as law students become more adept in

interpreting legislative enactments and reading judicial opinions, they must do so within the liberal framework.

7. The shadows of our colonial past continue to play a predominant role in our thinking in relation to the enforcement of rules as well as adjudication of disputes. It is important to gradually rework the underlying principles to make administration of justice more representative and responsive to the citizens. Lawyers are in a unique position to play this transformative role, be it through offering of inputs in the framing of legislations, leading cause-oriented litigations and engaging in social advocacy or research.
8. Legal education should, therefore, be seen by students and practitioners much beyond than a means of livelihood. It must encourage them to constantly think about how their actions will affect the common man. Along with proficiency in the traditionally identified skills of legal reasoning, research and writing, students must be encouraged to attach utmost importance to the enduring principles of equality, liberty, fraternity with unflinching support for social justice.
9. The framers of our Constitution gave us a rich and varied text which speaks about these ideals. They incorporated several provisions in the Constitution to address the social, economic and political problems of the nation. Abolition of untouchability, prohibition of hereditary titles and the guarantee of fundamental rights are a few notable examples. Despite our best efforts, some of these social evils continue to survive. It calls for urgent attention of the policy-makers as well as those in the legal profession.
10. The framers also left us with some enduring principles which continue to shape our thinking. Late Granville Austin, the noted historian of the Indian Constitution, described it as a 'seamless web' which weaved together the three distinctive strands of national integration, building democracy and ushering in a social revolution. As keen students of Constitutional Law, I need to hardly emphasize to you that a meaningful study of this subject is possible only if one engages in moral reasoning and debates about the true meaning of these strands.

Friends:

11. It is my hope that our leading law schools are encouraging their students to not merely learn the content of laws but to also assess their rationale, the consequences of their implementation and constructive suggestions for their reform. In the interest of ensuring quality education, there is usually a push towards standardization. Yet, there is need for experiments in higher education. Very often, it is the willingness on the part of a few to take a leap of faith to introduce changes.

12. I am happy to learn that NALSAR in the last two years has made conscious efforts to diversify its curriculum by offering more elective courses, giving students greater academic flexibility. NALSAR is a one-of-its-kind law university in the country which has choice-based credit policy in the true sense.
13. The university is also focusing on post-graduate programmes to attract students with training in different disciplines. NALSAR has introduced unique MBA programmes in Court Management and Innovation & Sustainability Management besides offering post-graduate degrees in Aviation and Telecommunication Laws.
14. I have also been given to understand that NALSAR is planning to launch a new three-year LL.B. course. Going forward, the challenge for this institution will be to produce high-quality research papers that are accepted by internationally recognized peer-reviewed journals. The objective of research should be the creation and preservation of knowledge and the evolution of new ideas. Such efforts require the determined effort of researchers and the sustained support of administrators and governing bodies.

Dear graduating students:

15. I congratulate you all on your remarkable success. You would soon join different branches of the legal profession like corporate law, judicial services amongst others. Each of them would be rewarding in their own ways. But remember, whatever branch of law you may chose, the bedrock of your success should be erected on your unflinching defence of fundamental rights of all, civil liberties and the realization of the rights of the marginalized communities. Dedicate yourself to the lofty ideals of selfless public service. Attain the highest standards in terms of professional skills and be daring in your fight against injustice irrespective of the financial reward that you receive.
16. NALSAR thrives to produce socially relevant lawyers. You have to live up to the ideals and goals that your university stands for. I recall a famous statement made by three judges of the United States Supreme Court, Justices O'Connor, Scalia J., and Rehnquist C.J. I quote: *"One distinguishing feature of any profession, unlike other occupation that may be equally respectable, is that membership entails an ethical obligation to temper one's selfish pursuit of economic success by adhering to standards of conduct that could not be enforced either through legal fiat or through discipline of the market. There are sound reasons to continue pursuing goal that is implicit in the traditional view of professional life. Both the special privileges incident to membership in the profession and the advantage those privileges give in the*

necessary task of earning a living is means to a goal that transcends in accumulation of wealth” (unquote).

17. Gaining financial security and meeting other obligations are necessary. Yet, while pursuing your professional goals, always keep in mind the values that you have imbibed during the course of your education. Irrespective of your chosen branch of law, apply these values to them. Your actions will shape the lives and prospects of those who rely on your professional expertise.
18. Study the Constitution well. Understand our political system, its institutions and processes. Analyze the choices that were made to build the country into what it is today. Recognize that intelligent choices will need to be made for enabling this country reach its maximum potential and participate and contribute in making these choices.
19. At the conclusion of your formal education today, you step into a world where you would need to learn more. Continue learning throughout your professional life and accept new ideas. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes had said and I quote: *“The best part of our knowledge is that which teaches us where knowledge leaves off and ignorance begins”* (unquote).
20. I wish all of you a successful career and a fulfilling life ahead.

Thank You.

Jai Hind.
