

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE ON THE OCCASION OF CALL ON BY ASHOKA
FELLOWS FOR THE YEAR 2015**

Rashtrapati Bhavan

February 12, 2016

1. I am happy to meet this young, enterprising group of Ashoka Fellows for the year 2015. At the very beginning, I extend you and the representatives from the 'Ashoka Innovators for the Public' a warm welcome to the Rashtrapati Bhavan.
2. 'Ashoka Innovators for the Public' (ASHOKA) is a worldwide network of social entrepreneurs comprising people with innovative solutions to urgent social problems. It provides an enabling platform to social entrepreneurs to think and act as change agents. It is a matter of pride that this organization has over the last 35 years of its establishment, mentored and supported over three thousand Ashoka Fellows in eighty two countries, including over 380 Fellows elected from India.

3. I am told that ASHOKA applies a rigorous selection process to elect their Fellows. The candidates and their innovations have to fulfill criteria like system-changing idea, entrepreneurial quality, creativity, ethical fiber and social impact. It is heartening to know that the Ashoka Fellows for the year 2015 who are present here have devised innovative solutions in areas like education and skills training, healthcare and urban development.

Friends:

4. There are many social needs that public, private and civil society institutions are not able to meet fully. At the same time, there is tremendous ingenuity amongst the people, which if tapped, could address the necessities of the common men and women. Much as the blooming of the spring, innovations by students, professionals, common man and local communities can bring smiles on the faces of millions of people.

Friends:

5. The process of innovation converts knowledge into social good and economic wealth. It encourages the engagement of talent with the society to improve the quality of life. India has had a long tradition of innovation. From time to time, the common people in our country have ushered in novel solutions to overcome their day-to-day difficulties. The drivers that influence the pursuit of innovation are many – from basic survival to propulsion of growth. A healthy eco-system is needed to harness innovative potential of various segments in different sectors and at multiple levels in our society.

6. Creating an inclusive eco-system call for linkages between innovators on the one hand, and academic and research institutions and market forces, on the other. Countries successful in building such a network have become innovation leaders. As an attempt to bring educational institutions and innovators within the ambit of an inclusive innovation system, a programme for Innovation Scholars In-Residence was started in Rashtrapati Bhavan. I would like to inform you that two batches of innovation-scholars have come so far,

one group of five scholars in the year 2014 and a second group of ten scholars in 2015. During their stay at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, they have been mentored and connected with relevant stakeholders to provide wings to their ideas.

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7. Educational institutions have a critical role to play in nurturing innovations in society. The large network of higher educational institutions of 712 universities and over 36,000 colleges in India is poised to play a leading part in developing an innovation eco-system. To catalyze the institutions of higher learning in this process, I have been urging the leaders of the higher education sector to establish a connection between their institutes and innovations in their hinterland, and to also set up Innovation Clubs. I am happy to state that in over sixty central higher educational institutions, innovation clubs have been set up. They provide a platform to encourage students to *sense* the unmet needs of the common men and women, and *search, spread and celebrate* innovations. Once unmet needs are mapped, the pedagogy and research process can be reoriented suitably.

8. For the first time ever, a week-long 'Festival of Innovations' was organized at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in March 2015 in collaboration with the National Innovation Foundation. It demonstrated new technologies and products made by the grassroots innovators. The Global Roundtables on Inclusive Innovation and Financing of Innovation in the Festival saw the participation of distinguished thinkers, policy-makers, academicians, entrepreneurs and financiers. The second 'Festival of Innovations' will be held at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in March this year. You may like to consider participating in this event. The presence of renowned participants from India and abroad will provide a global platform to all the innovators and participants of this Festival.
9. With these few words, I conclude. I wish you all the very best for your endeavours. Chase your dreams as you fulfill the dreams of your country and countrymen.

Thank you.
