

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, DURGAPUR

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1. It is my privilege to address you in this Ninth Convocation of the National Institute of Technology (NIT), Durgapur, which is an important centre of technical education in Eastern India.

2. NIT Durgapur was established as Regional Engineering College in the year 1960 with the legendary Dr. B.C. Roy as its first Chairman of the Board of Governors. With his vision and the support from the Government of India and the Government of West Bengal, this College has grown in stature to become an Institution of National Importance.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

3. Education is an instrument to set mankind free from the bondage of narrowness. It widens our horizon and shapes our thinking. Or else, as Aristotle had proclaimed and I quote: "Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all" (unquote). The youth are the future of our country and it is really important that they are imbued with the right values. Educational institutions beginning from schools, have to ensure that the core civilizational values of love for motherland; performance of duty; compassion for all; tolerance for pluralism; respect for women; honesty in life; self-restraint in conduct, responsibility in action and discipline are inculcated in the young minds of our students.

4. During the last few years, a concerted effort has been made to put higher and technical education on a firm footing. There has been an unprecedented expansion in the number of Central engineering institutions during the Eleventh Plan period – the number of IITs has increased from seven to fifteen while the number of NITs has increased from twenty to thirty.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

5. The urgency to build up and expand the engineering education infrastructure can, however, be no reason to give quality any lesser priority. We have only a few good quality institutions unlike our past when we had world class institutions of higher learning like Nalanda, Odantapuri, Somapura, Takshashila, Valabhi and Vikramashila. We do not have today a single university or institution that can compete with the best universities in the world. Reputed international surveys have ranked Indian institutions outside of the top two hundred places.

6. A Conference of the Directors of NITs was held for the first time in the Rashtrapati Bhavan recently. The recommendations made in the Conference are many and will require the cooperation and effort of all the NITs and their stakeholders to fulfill them.

7. NITs must pursue a culture of excellence. They must identify one or two key departments in which they have core competence and nurture them into centres of excellence. It is gratifying to note that a Centre of Excellence on Advanced Materials is being established at NIT Durgapur under the Government's Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme. NITs must give greater priority to technology-enabled teaching like e-classrooms for wider diffusion of information and knowledge. They must address faculty shortage on immediate basis so that the efforts at up-grading educational standards are not hampered. They must contribute to reforms in curricula and evaluation. They must strengthen the linkage with industry so that there is regular flow of inputs from industry experts on course curricula and research. They must periodically evaluate their programmes based on industry trends. A concrete step that they may take is to set up an Industry Cell in collaboration with local industry and industry associations. This cell can establish contact with industrial units to develop collaborative research projects, internships, faculty exchanges and workshops.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

8. Higher academic institutions in India lack orientation towards research, as a result of which, their standing amongst the top global institutions is not very high. Our institutions must be able to challenge the frontiers of knowledge. They must be able to make revolutionary contributions in different disciplines. They must be able to find solutions that help common man to lead a better life. They must be able to guide policymakers in issues ranging from energy security to environment degradation, sanitation, urbanization, healthcare and education.

9. Premier technical institutions like IITs and NITs have a responsibility to spearhead research in various branches of science. They have to become institutions of research apart from being institutions of learning. I am happy to note that NIT Durgapur attaches equal importance to academics and research. I am told that a drive to expand the research and academic infrastructure is under implementation in this Institute. The faculty is encouraged to engage in active research while the students are initiated to research early and are provided financial support for research-related visits. This Institute is performing exceedingly well and I am happy to note that four hundred and eleven papers were published in reputed journals last year. Around sixty projects are presently being executed by the faculty. Conferences, workshops and seminars are organized regularly by NIT Durgapur. Seventeen such programmes were held this year. I urge this Institute to continue maintaining the thrust on research.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

10. Our future progress will depend increasingly on our ability to innovate, to devise efficient processes for the industrial sector and better solutions for governance. For that, it is necessary to permeate the spirit of innovation to all sectors – business, government, education and society. The Indian innovation strategy must focus on generating ideas that promote inclusive growth and benefit those at the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid. There are many grassroots innovations that can be developed into suitable products if provided with technological support. Our higher academic institutions must play an important role in mentoring such innovative endeavours. In the Conference of the Directors of NITs, a recommendation has been made to set up Innovation Clubs in all the NITs. I call upon this Institute to take initiatives for putting innovation at the forefront of its priorities.
