

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE ELEVENTH CONVOCATION OF SYMBIOSIS INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Pune: November 26, 2014

1. I am happy to join you for this Eleventh Convocation of Symbiosis International University, a prominent centre of higher learning in our country. At the outset, let me thank all of you for inviting me to be a part of an occasion which is both joyous and revered. I congratulate all the graduating students who have, through industry and perseverance, achieved success in their chosen education streams. A long journey with a bigger task awaits these new graduates, who I am sure will pass muster with their ability, knowledge and foresight.
2. I am also glad at this opportunity to visit Pune, a historical city closely associated with our independence movement. It is the land of freedom fighters and social reformers like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Veer Savarkar, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Maharishi Karve and Mahatma Jyotiba Phule. Pune, over the years, has made tremendous progress in terms of industrial development and socio-economic change. It hosts major players in automobiles, IT and engineering sectors. Pune has established itself as an education hub. Commonly referred to as the 'Oxford of the East', it has become a popular destination for students from different parts of the country and abroad.
3. Symbiosis, established in 1971 with the motto '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*' which means 'the world is one family', has considerable number of students from outside. Of its 44 institutions, 28 fall within the Symbiosis International University that was established in 2002. This University offers over 14,000 students 107 programmes in streams like management, computers, health, media, humanities and engineering. Symbiosis has transformed the fortunes of thousands of students. I applaud Dr. S.B. Majumdar, the Founder President, and his team for the progress Symbiosis has achieved through the years and urge them to continue moving ahead with the same vigour and vision.

Friends:

4. High economic growth is central to a developing country like ours as it is a panacea for ills like poverty, deprivation and backwardness. Creation of growth is increasingly happening through knowledge-based sectors. Given that knowledge will spur greater progress in the future, it is critical for us to prepare a pool of skilled and capable manpower by focusing on education. A country can neglect education at its own peril. The challenge of providing education with exacting standards to meet the growing aspirations of the youth, more so in a country of our size, is daunting. Having said that, we have been firm in our determination to develop the higher education sector.

5. A credible set-up comprising 723 universities and over 37,000 colleges is in place. We are deficient, though, in terms of good quality institutions. No Indian institution is ranked amongst the top 200 universities in the world as per reputed surveys, though I believe, a few of our leading institutions can do better through a systematic and proactive approach. In the past, our seats of higher learning like Nalanda, Takshashila, Vikramashila, Valabhi, Somapura and Odantapuri were global leaders for eighteen hundred years beginning sixth century BC. These universities attracted scholars from round the world. Today, instead, bright Indian students – around two lakh every year – go abroad seeking higher education. It is a matter of introspection as to how we can bring our centres of higher learning back into the fold of leading institutions in the world.

6. Our academic institutes have to be dynamic and hands-on in facing emerging challenges. Students today, far from being passive recipients of education, are active demand centres gradually seeking to re-define knowledge requirement. Institutions of higher education have to promote a culture of excellence and develop core competencies. They have to expand capacity to cater to more students and at the same time uphold the quality of instruction. They have to resort to technology tools like e-classrooms and knowledge networks to enable sharing of ideas and intellectual resources like lectures and tutorials.

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7. Students are the core of our educational institutions. They are the ripening fruits of their intellectual enterprise. The students of today would be engaged in their lifetime in jobs that perhaps do not even exist now. They have to be taught critical skills and transferable competencies. They have to be infused with qualities like creative-thinking and problem-solving. They have to be encouraged in their quest to unearth the hidden and to experience the joy in discovering the unknown. They have to be trained to possess a universal mind-set to enable them to interact in the melting pot of an ever more globalized world. Our higher academic institutes would do well to provide exposure of foreign institutions to their students. In this regard, I am happy to learn that this University has innovative programmes like Global Immersion, Semester Exchange and Dual Degree through collaborations with over thirty foreign institutions.
8. Faculty development is another important area for focussed attention. To keep pace with the information boom as well as continual refinements in disciplines, the faculty have to be trained in content and modern pedagogies. They have to be encouraged to attend seminars and workshops, and publish research papers.
9. Research and innovation is the cornerstone of any academic endeavour. Their spin-offs could be large and immensely beneficial to a wide spectrum of the society. It is innovation due to which industrial enterprises show high growth momentum and keep themselves ahead of their competitors. As per a 2014 international survey, there are five Indian firms amongst the world's hundred most innovative companies. We have to strive harder. Our academic institutions and industry have to engage with one another and benefit mutually from partnerships in joint research, curriculum development, and setting up of chairs, incubation centres and research parks.
10. A sweeping up-gradation of India's higher education sector calls for deepening of private sector involvement. Leading global universities like Harvard, Yale and Stanford have evolved out of private sector initiative. India's private sector is engaged in several key areas like health, transport and financial services. In education too, private institutions play an important role as they account for nearly sixty per cent of total enrolment at the tertiary level. Yet at the same time, a disparity exists in the educational standards of the private system. Measures are therefore necessary to

ensure better service delivery, benchmark and excellence. It is gladdening to note that this University, with an 'A' grade accreditation, has demonstrated its ability to deliver quality education.

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11. Higher level institutions have a larger role to play in the society. Their engagement with social issues has to be at a much deeper level. Some major initiatives aimed at inclusive development have been launched recently. The *Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana* envisages the adoption of villages for holistic development and their transformation into model villages for wider replication. I have urged Central higher educational institutes to work with at least five villages each by identifying problems in the villages, and using expertise available within them or accessing it from others, provide solutions. I call upon your Institution to also take active part in this programme.
12. Before concluding, I would like to tell my young friends what Aristotle had once said; I quote: "*Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all*" (unquote). Your education should make you reflect inwards and help you engage with the world better. Never gauge success in the scales of money. Your success will be in the number of lives you will touch; in the positives you will help usher in the society. It is human nature to seek truth and happiness. These should be your barometers of pursuit.
13. I once again thank all of you for showering on me your warmth and affection. I wish you all best of luck for the future.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.
