

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASSION OF THE CENTENARY YEAR CELEBRATIONS
OF PUNJAB ENGINEERING COLLEGE, CHANDIGARH**

Chandigarh, November 16, 2021

It is a moment of pride for me as I stand amid you here to celebrate the centenary of the Punjab Engineering College. Such moments are rare in history. Institutions like the PEC are not just educational institutions but are among centres of nation building, for here you nurture talent and create the leaders of tomorrow.

The Punjab Engineering College, a deemed university now, has a rich legacy. Its roots go back to 9th December, 1921 when its foundation was laid as Mughalpura Technical College at Lahore by Sir Edward Douglas MacLagan. From the humble beginning, with only 50 students, the PEC has evolved into a vibrant knowledge centre at Chandigarh, with hundreds of students receiving professional learning in different disciplines at this campus.

Punjab has always played a pivotal role in the history of our country. Be it as the hub of the Indus Valley Civilisation or as the Sapta Sindhu region of the Vedic period, Punjab has made a mark since times immemorial. Being a border state of our country, it has been among the first to feel the social-political churnings caused by external influences. What is most important is that it has been a prominent symbol of Indian culture and civilisation all over the world. Be it spiritual traditions or modern technology, achievements of this land are shining glories of our country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to learn that the alumni of your institute have brought immense fame to our country. I cannot help but recall the name of Professor Satish Dhawan, an extraordinary scientist who led India's space programme through rapid growth and spectacular

achievements. He is considered by the Indian scientist community to be the father of experimental fluid dynamics research. My esteemed predecessor, Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, considered him not only as a guru but also one of the three teachers in his life whom he held in the highest esteem. Such people are not just good professionals but are great institution builders.

It is also an honour for all of us to know that PEC has always risen to the needs of the nation. In the early 1960s, when it was felt that our country needed the services of aeronautical engineers, the Indian Air Force had approached the PEC. It was in no time that the urgent need was met by shifting students from other disciplines of engineering into the final year of specialisation in aeronautical engineering. The faculty for this subject were from the Indian Institute of Science. Coincidentally, the director of IISc at that time was none other than Professor Satish Dhawan, himself an illustrious alumnus of your college. It was through this joint effort with IISc that PEC created history as being the first engineering college to give India its first batch of 17 graduate aeronautical engineers in 1964.

When the foundations of an institute have such a glorious and inspiring past, its students are bound to have higher ambitions in mind. Such ambitions were personified in Dr Kalpana Chawla, an astronaut-engineer and the first woman of Indian origin to travel in space. She continues to be an ideal, inspiring millions across the world. I am glad to know that your institute has established the Kalpana Chawla Chair of Geospatial Technology.

Today, we are in an era when rote learning must be kept aside and the idea of research in education has to be promoted. Our new National Education Policy is a guiding light for all of us, as it encourages research and development. Education, under this policy, will move from content-heavy towards learning more about how to think critically and solve problems, how to be creative and multidisciplinary, and how to innovate, adapt and absorb new material in ever-changing fields of study. The curriculum will include basic arts, humanities, sports and languages, and it will be based on our culture and values.

I am told that the PEC has already been well ahead on the path of research and development. I am happy that, on the occasion of the centenary of PEC, a state-of-the-art semiconductor research facility is being inaugurated on the campus. It is remarkable that such facilities promoting R&D are not new to this institute as there have been previous collaborations with government and private organisations for establishing such ventures for the benefit of students. The Siemens Centre of Excellence in Manufacturing is an example worth emulating by other universities. I would also like to commend the PEC for continuous collaborations with other prestigious institutions like the IITs, PGI and ISRO. Such steps are helpful towards realising the goal of excellence in application-oriented research. Such industry-institute interface will also help in realizing the goal of an Atmanirbhar Bharat.

The young minds that come to this campus are fertile and open to innovation. I was pleasantly surprised to know that during the challenging times of the Covid-19 pandemic, the PEC students built robots that could go into isolation wards and deliver food, medicine and other supplies to patients. That was a wonderful illustration of innovation in the service of society. I am told that two patent applications have also been filed from this institute on Covid-related research. Besides technical achievements, human values have also been amply demonstrated during the Covid times. Organising a blood donation camp by the students at the time of shortage of blood at the PGI, Chandigarh, is worthy of appreciation. The PEC alumni too stood together in the Covid times. When they came to know about the loss of income of some parents, they joined hands and made donations worth more than Rs 1 crore for the sake of the students in need. Let us all applaud the efforts of those who worked to achieve it.

I am happy to share that an endowment fund was launched at Rashtrapati Bhavan. Two years back, I had the opportunity to launch the endowment fund of IIT Delhi. Through this initiative, the alumni could make donations for the betterment of their institute as well as help the students in need. Infact, an amount of Rs. 200 crores was committed by the alumni at the launch itself. Through these endowments, the alumni are participating in nurturing the future generations.

It was a pleasure to know that the PEC has established a separate office to foster alumni relations and it has constantly and closely coordinated with them. The network now links about 17,000 former PEC students together and helps in facilitating donations and scholarships for students. This successful set-up is already helping the PEC as well as the students here. There hardly remains a field untouched by the graduates of this institute. From industry, civil services and defence services to music and entertainment, PEC graduates have made a mark everywhere.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to make a suggestion. The PEC alumni are very well placed in their chosen walks of life, and their reach is far and wide. With such mentorship and experience available to them, the graduates of this college are never alone. This mentorship should be extended to other universities of our country. Last week, a Governors' Conference was organised at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in which I had an opportunity to interact with all Governors, Lieutenant Governors and Administrators. I always emphasise that as Chancellors of the state universities, they should promote innovation and encourage research and development. In this context, I would expect institutes like the PEC and your competent alumni to act as mentors and collaborate with other universities of the country. The PEC has students from all parts of the country, making it a perfect example of unity in diversity. If an institute can be the unifying factor for such a large set of students, I am sure mentorship from you all can definitely be the unifying factor for our country too. We have always followed the ideal of "Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam" – the whole world is but one family. It is desirable that different institutes and universities of our country follow this principle. We need to work together, hand in hand, for greater progress of our country and make a knowledge network for the benefit of all students of our country. I would like each one of you to follow your very own PEC anthem:

अध्यात्म है, विज्ञान भी
संस्कार है, नवज्ञान भी

कल्पना है, रचना भी
परिश्रमी है, प्रवीण भी
लक्ष्य राष्ट्र निर्माण की ओर

In the end, I would like to congratulate the faculty, students and all members of the PEC community on this momentous occasion. May you continue to “innovate, explore and excel” and propel yourselves towards greater success.

Thank you.
Jai Hind!