

NEW YEAR MESSAGE BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE TO THE STUDENTS AND FACULTY OF CENTRAL UNIVERSITIES, IITS, NITS AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS / LABORATORIES THROUGH VIDEO-CONFERENCING USING THE NATIONAL KNOWLEDGE NETWORK

Video Conference Room, Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi: 07-01-2014

Vice Chancellors of universities, Directors of Indian Institutes of Technology and National Institutes of Technology, Heads of other academic institutions; faculty members; my dear students:

1. Let me begin by wishing you all and your families a very happy and prosperous New Year 2014. It is with great pleasure that I speak to you in the New Year. Throughout 2013, I have been closely interacting with various academic institutions. In February 2013, a Conference of Vice Chancellors of Central Universities and in November, a Conference of Directors of National Institutes of Technology were held in Rashtrapati Bhavan. So far, I have visited and addressed over 45 institutions including universities, IITs and NITs.
2. Thanks to the National Knowledge Network (NKN), it is now possible for me to reach out to all of you today to share some thoughts on higher education in India. I am

grateful to Prof. S.V. Raghavan and his team, and NIC team, for facilitating this video-talk with you.

Friends:

3. As I have said earlier, education is the true alchemy that can bring India to its next golden age. My first and foremost concern is the quality of education in our country. The standard of higher education has a direct relationship with the development of a nation and the quality of life of its citizens. Two recent surveys conducted by reputed international organizations have brought out the difference in the standards of education between institutions in India and abroad. None of the Indian universities find any place in the top two hundred institutions.

4. This was not the case in the past. Between Sixth Century BC and Twelfth Century AD, our seats of higher learning – Nalanda, Takshashila, Vikramashila, Valabhi, Somapura and Odantapuri – dominated the world. They were visited by knowledge seekers from round the world. But now, many bright Indian students go abroad for higher studies. Nobel laureates Har Gobind Khorana, Subrahmanyam Chandrasekhar, Amartya Sen and Venkatraman Ramakrishnan did their graduate or post-graduate studies

in Indian universities before they went abroad to pursue higher learning.

5. Why is it that our higher education system that is capable of producing world class scholars loses them to foreign institutions? Is it due to the lack of research facilities and opportunities for creative and innovative thinking? To nurture and retain talent, our institutions must increase their potential for research and promote an eco-system conducive to creativity and innovation. What we need today are more collaborative partnerships on cutting edge technology, better linkage with industry and greater incentivization through scholarships. This will not only encourage meritorious students to do research but also attract talent from foreign universities. In a country of over 1.2 billion people, only eight Indians have so far won the Nobel Prize. This country is eager to see an increase in the number. I am sure it will come from amongst you.

Friends:

6. To improve the standards of higher education, we must improve the quality of teachers, the learning capacity of students, and the physical infrastructure. But, physical infrastructure alone will count for nothing unless it is matched by the quality of human capital that comprises

the academic community. The faculty, to be of a high order, must keep themselves abreast with the latest developments. To bring about qualitative changes in teaching, the institutions must arrange a common platform of resources to be used by all faculty members for skill enhancement and knowledge gathering. The National Knowledge Network offers an effective solution to the academic institutions to connect, collaborate and disseminate ideas, views, findings and research innovations. Using this network can compensate many of the shortages - in terms of faculty, infrastructure and resources – that hinder an institution from offering a great learning experience.

7. We also have to project our universities in a more proactive manner. Our institutions have to accord due seriousness to the university rankings process. A higher rank can boost the morale of the academic and the student communities. It will also help in opening fresh avenues of growth and placement for students. Better rankings will also encourage a greater flow of faculty and students from abroad, opening new vistas of frontier technology. I am confident of some Indian universities and institutes making it to the list of world's top two hundred universities in near future.

Friends:

8. During some of my visits to Central Universities, IITs and NITs, I have had the opportunity to interact with 'Inspired Teachers'. They are such teachers who make their students appreciate a subject from a wider perspective and encourage them to explore beyond the frontiers of the discipline. By their own example, they instill good moral values in their students. These teachers must be encouraged to share their wisdom, thoughts and experience with the larger academic community. An 'Inspired Teachers' Lecture Series can be initiated to carry forward the benefits of excellence in teaching.

My dear students:

9. Pursuit of academic excellence should be accompanied by the quest for moral development. Your preparedness in life should be on the foundation of essential values of patriotism, compassion, tolerance, integrity and equality.
10. You, the young ones, are the bright future of our nation. The extent of our progress will be decided by your energy, drive, initiative and industry. Understand our nation and its institutions. Read, learn and formulate views on national issues. Choose to engage with our beautiful, complex,

often difficult and sometimes noisy democracy. Understand your rights and duties well, especially towards those who are less fortunate. The voiceless deserve your voice; the weak deserve your strength; and the needy deserve your help. Make the best use of your knowledge in the service of the nation and its citizens. Remember what the great teacher, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, had said and I quote: *“All education is, on the one side, a search for truth; on the other side, it is a pursuit of social betterment. You may discover truth but you should apply it to improve the status of society”* (unquote).

11. In conclusion, I would like to once again wish all of you a very happy and rewarding year ahead. It is time for new beginnings. The air is thick with hope and expectation. Let this be a year of new opportunities and achievements.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.
