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Vice President's Secretariat

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Strengthen the quality of mathematics teaching at school, college and University level: VP

Prof. Mahalanobis an iconic visionary: Vice President

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The Vice President of India, Shri M Venkaiah Naidu has said that every citizen must play an active role in nation building. People are not merely recipients or beneficiaries but active agents of change, he said while addressing the gathering on the occasion of 125th Birth Anniversary of Prof. Mahalanobis in Kolkata, today. Minister of Statistics and Programme Implementation in the Government of India, Shri D. V. Sadananda Gowda, Minister of Information & Technology, IT, Govt. of West Bengal Shri Bratya Basu, and other dignitaries were present at the venue.

Vice President called Prof. Mahalanobis an iconic visionary who introduced the Indian sub-continent to the field of statistics. His vision, focus, and his application-driven research in the field of statistics, is the bedrock of the modern official statistical system in practice in our country today, he said.

The Vice President said that over 65% of our population is under 35 years of age and it is crucial to turn this 'potential' asset into an 'actual' asset. If we fail to tap into this reservoir of human resources and turn it into human capital, it will be a missed opportunity and the country would have to cope with a number of socio-economic consequences including poverty inequality, social unrest and unsustainable growth, he said.

We need to equip this young population with the skills, knowledge and attitude required for the knowledge economy of the twenty first century to realize the demographic dividend, he said.

The Vice President said that statistics is truly the backbone of good governance. It is absolutely essential for planning and indispensable for monitoring and evaluation. We need data to improve the quality of life and to make informed choices, we need statistics, we need tools to analyze and

synthesize, he said.

The Vice President said that India has a tradition that was built by numerous mathematical geniuses like Bhaskaracharya, Aryabhata and Srinivasa Ramanujan. There is a need to continue this tradition of excellence and strengthen the quality of mathematics teaching at school, college and University level, he added.

Following is the text of Vice President's address:

“It is a pleasure to attend the function celebrating the 125th birth anniversary of the iconic visionary who introduced the Indian sub-continent to the field of statistics. Prof. Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis was not only a great scholar but also an esteemed Institution-builder. He visualized this great institution, the Indian Statistical Institute, as early as 1931.

He was also the architect of the national sample survey organisation. His vision, his focus, and above all his application-driven research in the field of statistics is the bedrock of the modern official statistical system in practice in our country today.

Prof. Mahalanobis was a versatile genius. Along with enriching statistics, Prof. Mahalanobis had also introduced the idea of using statistics as a key tool for national development and social empowerment. With his all encompassing vision, statistics found numerous applications in the fields of social sciences, biological sciences and earth sciences.

Prof. Mahalanobis was the first to bring the computer to India, thus laying the foundation of fabrication of computers in our country. I am delighted to note that this is the first institute in the country to start a formal training programme in computer science under the leadership of this great visionary. It is an apt way to celebrate the legacy of the legendary personality who first introduced the concept of statistical quality control, fundamental to the manufacturing sector of India.

Sisters and Brothers,

I am reminded of Prof. Mahalanobis's famous article 'Why Statistics' written in the 1950's. Quoting Kautilya's 'Arthashastra', he explains how, through a rich and precise tradition of statistical measures that were practiced in ancient India, we can rediscover a solid foundation of what we claim today as good governance. His thoughts on development in post-independent India on issues such as food safety, national security, industrial development, and the concept of national income are so pertinent and relevant even today.

I would like to draw your attention to a significant line in this article, Prof. Mahalanobis says “Our vast population is a great asset, but only in a potential form.” This observation is relevant even today. Over 65% of our population is under 35 years of age. This demographic statistics is

significant if we can turn this 'potential' asset into an 'actual' asset. We cannot realize the demographic dividend unless we equip this population with the skills, knowledge and attitude required for the knowledge economy of the twenty first century. If we fail to tap into this reservoir of human resources and turn it into human capital, it will be a missed opportunity and the country would have to cope with a number of socio-economic consequences including poverty, inequality, social unrest and unsustainable growth.

I am also struck by another prophetic statement by Prof. Mahalanobis. He had said "It is a matter for serious thought whether or not the wiser policy would be to rally the common man into a great effort for national welfare. We look to our political leaders for guidance, decision, and action."

Prof. Mahalanobis's vision was democratic, people centric and fully recognized the critical role of each individual in the country in nation building.

People are not merely recipients or beneficiaries but active agents of change. Mass movements that channel people's energies towards constructive ends have been a part of national development strategy. We have been witness to the community development programmes, total literacy campaigns, pulse polio programme, green revolution, white revolution and the recent Swachh Bharat programme. This is what Prof. Mahalanobis talked about at the beginning of our country's five year plans.

This institute owes its existence to the far-sighted vision of this great son of modern India. While this Institute was blooming, Prof. Mahalanobis had started the journal 'Sankhya', an Indian journal of Statistics. Such was the influence of Prof. Mahalanobis that his invited statesmen and scientists formed a reputed congregation of great scholars and leaders who decided to stay on in this campus, only to enrich the institute and its human resources.

Of all the lessons we can learn from the life of a multifaceted visionary such as Prof. Mahalanobis, the greatest lesson is the ability to adopt an objective view to a problem, be it social or scientific. The need of the hour is to assess the importance and impact of a problem in a principled and quantitative manner.

Statistics gives us an ability to objectively measure a phenomenon.

It enables us to make evidence based decisions.

It enables us to examine past trends and make predictions about the future.

It enables us to understand different dimensions of everyday life from education levels to health status, from air quality to water purity, from production to productivity, from income to expenditure.

We cannot think of a situation in which we don't use numbers, where we don't quantify.

Counting and accounting is part of our daily life.

Data is useful. The process of collection of data, analyzing and synthesizing gives us new insights.

We move away from mere opinions or guesswork to getting closer to reality. Statistics provides the essential tools for enhancing this objective appreciation of reality.

Statistics is truly the backbone of good governance.

It is absolutely essential for planning and indispensable for monitoring and evaluation.

Sisters & Brothers,

As we remember this great stalwart who gave us new statistical measures and a model of development that has left an indelible footprint on the sands of Indian history, we should recall with legitimate pride the grand mathematical tradition of India of which he is a shining lighthouse.

It is a tradition that gave the concept of zero to the world.

It is a tradition that was built by numerous mathematical geniuses like Bhaskaracharya, Aryabhata and Srinivasa Ramanujan.

We need to continue this tradition of excellence.

We should strengthen the quality of mathematics teaching at school, college and University level.

Sisters and Brothers,

We live in a world in which technology has become all-pervasive.

We live in a world in which knowledge explosion, information overload and data-driven lives have become common place.

Statistics and big data management along with artificial intelligence will play an even more significant role in the years to come.

We need to harness the power of computing, communication and robotics to improve the quality of life.

This requires wisdom.

It requires each one of us to make wise choices.

How do we use these tools once we acquire them?

We must remind ourselves that in the ultimate analysis what ultimately counts is not merely what we can count but what we experience.

To improve the quality of life and to make informed choices, we need data, we need statistics, we need tools to analyze and synthesize.

How do we apply this knowledge is entirely up to us. Let me conclude in this context, with the wise advice of Prof. Mahalanobis we are remembering today on his 125th birth anniversary

"It is not enough to have a large number of scientists in research institutes publishing many papers most of which may be useless and therefore called pure research, but which have no connection with economic growth. Therefore, today, I should like to say to our young graduates and to my colleagues, our teachers and our students, and also to our guests from neighbouring countries which are underdeveloped, that you must realize that the essential need is the most difficult transition of lifting our country into the modern age by establishing a sound and growing tradition of science. This is the task which is before us, nothing less would be enough."

As we dream of a New India and are working hard to make it a reality, let us take inspiration from the lives of great India who were pathfinders.

Great visionaries like Prof. Mahalanobis give us the courage to dream big, set high benchmarks and achieve them through untiring effort.

As Swami Vivekananda had exhorted many years ago echoing the Upanishadic message "Spring up, get enlightened and do not stop till you reach the goal".

That is the spirit of excellence, spirit of scientific enquiry and spirit of using out knowledge for enhancing the quality of life that should drive us all to a new trajectory.

I look forward to the days ahead when all of us use the glorious past illumined by legends like Prof. Mahalanobis as a springboard for the big leap forward.

Thank you for inviting me to pay homage to one of the illustrious sons of modern India."

Jai Hind

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