

Address by the Hon'ble President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind at the meeting of Vice-Chancellors, Directors and Heads of various central Institutes of Higher Learning

President's Secretariat

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I must begin by thanking all of you for your concise but very educative presentations. In my capacity as the President of India I am visitor to 146 Central Universities and institutions of higher learning. On taking office, I was told that there was a tradition of a once-a-year conference of all the vice-chancellors, directors and other heads of these institutions. The President would address the gathering at the beginning of the conference and then the other sessions would begin.

When this proposal was made to me, I thought long and hard. I felt that an omnibus conference, where 146 different types of institutions, with different systems, frameworks, motivations and challenges, all sat in the same room would serve only a limited purpose. It was better to categorise the institutions into smaller, more manageable groups of similar institutions, or at least institutions with similar administrative regimes and issues. To my mind, this would be a more worthwhile exercise if problem solving was indeed a priority.

This set of 19 Central Institutes of Higher Learning is the fourth such cohort with which I am interacting. Next week there will a meeting with the National Institutes of Technology and the Indian Institutes of Information Technology and that will complete the engagement with all 146 institutions well within one year of my tenure to be completed by the end of this month.

The 19 Central Institutes that are gathered here are special. They promote technical education in critical areas such as agriculture; pharmaceuticals; aviation; design; footwear design; fashion; petroleum and energy; maritime studies; and youth development. Between them they fall under the jurisdictions of nine different Ministries of the Government of India.

Each of your institutes has a rich history. Each of your institutes is instrumental to the realisation of social and economic goals that India has set itself as it strives to eliminate poverty and become a middle-income country. Becoming a middle-income country is not just a statistical achievement; it also calls for a change in mindsets and an expansion in ambitions. This is true for each of us as individuals. This is also true for your institutes.

As such, it is important to plan the future of your institutes in the context of an India with a large

youth population for the foreseeable future – and with the prospect of a \$5 trillion GDP by 2025. This requires us to think big and to take risks – and each of your institutes must be equal to the challenge.

Take the seven National Institutes of Pharmaceutical Education and Research. India has a strong and vibrant pharmaceutical industry and an appreciable record in producing generics. Yet, it is now time to make a quantum leap: Drug discovery and the developing of cutting-edge, patented medicines; a stress on solutions for long-standing public health issues such as TB; a thrust on management of emerging lifestyle diseases and the pharmaceutical products needed for this purpose; and of course an enabling environment for a thriving clinical research industry. All this will create enormous economic and job opportunities for our young people. Incubating such an entrepreneurial environment should be a vital for your institutes.

The three Central Agricultural Universities represented in this room are force multipliers in the government's resolve to enhance quality of life for our farmers who are the backbone of our nation. 61% of our population continues to be dependent on agriculture. We need to be mindful that the pressure on land and on water is immense. New technologies, including technologies we have so far shied away from, will need to be studied and adopted, as feasible. The food and agricultural value chain will have to be made more robust. Agricultural Universities have a mandate that goes beyond the farm.

Similarly, an aviation university is no longer only about training pilots and aerospace engineers. As the aviation sector grows in our country, with even smaller cities being brought on the aviation map, there is scope for much more. The construction and management of new airports, with increasing integration of technology, will change this sector. It is very likely that India will host multiple major hubs for maintenance, repair and overhaul of airplanes and aviation equipment. Training the human resources for this MRO push should be very much part of the agenda of our National Aviation University.

If the sky is a frontier to explore, so is the ocean. The Indian Maritime University is a leading institution for oceanography, maritime history and legal studies – and an engine for our blue economy. The sea is a resource that we can use to a far greater degree. But this will require training people and developing strategies that an educational and technical institute is best placed to provide.

The two institutes devoted to petroleum and energy also have to be re-imagined not merely in the framework of fossil fuels and hydrocarbons – but also in the era of alternative and renewable energy, and of innovative fuel mixes and technologies such as shale and fracking. Likewise, the institutes for footwear design and for fashion technology – connected to leather and textiles, two of our country's historic traditions – have a critical social and economic implication. Traditional crafts, including those that help in creating handmade products, deserve a bigger global market. For that, they need to be packaged with an appropriate consumer assessment and adequate skilling.

While developing your specialisations, I would urge you to collaborate and learn from each other. This is possible for institutes in the same field. It is also possible across categories. For example, the National Institute of Design and the National Institute of Youth Development have a cross-cutting identity. Design can add value to several fields, and our youth are at the centre of all our national endeavours and for all of the institutes here today. Please make actionable and focused plans for collaboration. The Nalanda University, which has a pan-Asian footprint and is a tribute to the heritage of learning that India shares with Southeast Asia, can also provide a platform.

Whenever posts are yet to be created, it has to be done at the earliest. Filling up of vacant faculty positions is critical for ensuring quality education and research. I am sure you will take all the possible steps to ensure all these positions are filled up before next meet.

Award of degree is an important milestone in the life of students. So convocations should be held regularly. From deliberations, its clear that requests for my presence in convocation is pending from two institutions – Manipur Agriculture University and PUSA Agriculture University. We will try to accommodate these requests within next 3 months.

In an era of global competition, it is important that syllabus of various courses are updated on regular basis. This will make our students more confident and successful in a competitive world.

Ladies and Gentlemen

In conclusion, I would nudge you towards partnering with universities in our country and outside; in your respective fields and beyond. Knowledge cannot grow in silos and it is essential that each of you participate in the growth of the other. And all along, you must remember that you are institutions of national importance. The students you produce will shape the professions that will build our nation. This is what the people of India expect from you. And this is the benchmark by which you must measure yourselves. As you do so, my best wishes are with you.

Thank you

Jai Hind!

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