

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE MEETING OF VICE-CHANCELLORS OF NEW CENTRAL
UNIVERSITIES SET UP UNDER THE CENTRAL UNIVERSITIES ACT,
2009**

Rashtrapati Bhavan, January 6, 2018

1. Today, we have heard from 17 new Central Universities that are located all over the country – from Jammu and Kashmir in the north to Kerala in the south, and from Bihar in the east to Gujarat in the west. And of course many other states. These universities are among the youngest members of our family of higher education institutions. Sixteen of these Central Universities were set up in 2009, and one as recently as 2014, less than four years ago.
2. In my role as the President of India, I am the Visitor of all your universities. Education, especially higher education, is a subject I am personally passionate about. This led me to ask for this meeting to be convened – to understand, discuss and, where possible, to find quick solutions to the problems faced by your universities.
3. Setting up a new institution inevitably comes with some teething troubles. This is to be expected, and these have to be sorted out. In the case of the new Central Universities, as we have heard today, there are issues related to selection and recruitment of faculty, training and updating skills of academic staff, infrastructure, financial constraints, integration of technology and other such matters.
4. In many cases, these problems cannot be resolved by the university alone. Indeed, they cannot be resolved by any one Department or Ministry. Of course the HRD Ministry has to take a lead, and I appreciate the presence of the Minister for HRD, as well as the Minister of State and other officers from the Ministry.

But the Department of Expenditure of the Ministry of Finance, which is also represented here, as well as institutions such as the University Grants Commission too have a role.

5. That is why I proposed this meeting as a **multi-stakeholder brainstorming**. I am glad we have had an open and frank exchange of views. This must now lead to a time-bound implementation of decisions.
6. Our new Central Universities may have a few initial problems but are actually at an advantage. They can completely avoid legacy issues. They can create systems and mechanisms that are in tune with future needs and futuristic technologies. In short, they can be genuine 21st century universities. Having been set up together, your universities are part of the same fraternity – like the IIMs or the IITs too are part of their fraternities. As such, the new Central Universities must rise together and must engage in cross-learning.
7. Let me state quite clearly that all of you as Vice-Chancellors have been entrusted with the task of leading these institutions – and laying the foundations of what must grow to be great universities – because you have a greater degree of competence. The very name of **Central** University should indicate a higher calling – and an all-India character and reputation.
8. This gives all of you, as Vice-Chancellors and administrators of these new Central Universities, an enormous chance. You are **chief executives** of leading institutions of learning. It is for you to impose a certain discipline down the line. Your universities should formulate, regularise and strictly adhere to their **Academic Calendar** – covering all aspects such as admissions, conduct of classes, examinations, declaration of results and awarding of degrees at convocations, and so on. Society expects the best from you.

9. Similarly, ensuring regular attendance by teachers as well as enforcing financial discipline and maintenance of accounts is also important. After all, you are custodians of public funds. Where possible, it may be prudent to bring in officers from the Central Services as registrars and financial officers. This would help ensure certain standards.
10. Vacancies should be filled quickly and urgently. Vacancies in teaching staff are unfair on students who have enrolled, and a disservice to their education. Where necessary engagement of retired professors for specific periods could be done. Vacancies that are anticipated – due to retirements or expanded needs – should be planned for months in advance. And it is for all authorities to ensure that recruitment is absolutely above board and not influenced by other considerations.
11. Your universities exist in a geographical context. You have to contribute to the well-being of the community and the state that hosts you. Coordination with the state government should be a continuous process, and not limited to initial questions of land transfer. It would also be helpful to leverage and share resources and build partnerships with existing universities and institutions located nearby.
12. Central Universities in backward regions have a special responsibility – a moral responsibility I should say – to enhance opportunities for talented children. The best and brightest from the **Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya** in the district should aspire to come to your university. It should set such a high bench-mark.
13. Technology can have a multiplier effect. It can make the working of the university efficient and transparent. Today, we have heard of excellent initiatives by individual universities – such as using Skype and online communication for placement services, linking Aadhar to degrees to prevent fraud, and digitisation of records. These should be replicated and put up on a **best practices portal**.

14. Technology can also enable high-quality laboratories. By setting up online facilities it can overcome the shortage of books and teaching resources and provide access to e-learning and e-libraries.
15. In a country such as ours, with such diversity, vocational courses and Massive Open Online Courses (or MOOC) should also be a focus of Central Universities. Here again technology can be of great help. And with the spread of telecom and Internet connectivity in our country, I am sure gaps faced by a few universities will be covered.
16. Please do remember that there is increasing competition in our country and our world for the best minds – for the best professors and for the best students. There are many doors open for good teachers and professors. Universities have to compete for talent. That is why assessing the quality of a university through, for example, the NAAC evaluation system is so important. It helps a potential student decide which university to opt for. I would urge every Central University to endeavour to get a good NAAC rating for itself and its affiliated colleges.
17. I would like to add that it is for all of you, as Vice-Chancellors, to provide the best atmosphere and facilities – whether hostel rooms, a clean and healthy environment or the right academic setting – for those who work under you or study at your universities. Their legitimate demands need to be met. And in the meeting of those legitimate demands is your true test.
18. Today, we have discussed problems but we have also made some progress in identifying the way forward. I am sure the Ministry of HRD, lead by the Minister, Shri Prakash Javadekar, will not only resolve these problems in a time-bound manner but also set out a medium to long-term vision for our new Central Universities. We need to equip these universities to become national assets and world-class institutions. If we cannot achieve

this in a reasonable time frame, we will be failing coming generations.

19. That is why I am confident that the Ministry of HRD and bodies such as UGC will do their utmost to resolve niggling issues of new Central Universities as quickly as possible. And I propose that in approximately four months, perhaps in the middle of May, we meet again to review progress.

20. With those words, I would like to thank you for coming to Rashtrapati Bhavan for this very educative meeting and for speaking so honestly. I am happy to see that all of you are so committed to your institutions and to making them centres of excellence. I wish you and wish your universities – and your university communities – all the best for the future. And especially for the year that has just begun.

Thank you
Jai Hind!