

**INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE VISITOR'S CONFERENCE 2022**

Rashtrapati Bhavan, June 7, 2022

I always look forward to the Visitor's Conference, as it deals with the future of the youth of India and, thereby, with the future of the nation. This is the aim of higher education and it makes the Conference especially significant.

I am happy to learn that we shall be joined by a few alumni of some of our prestigious institutions of higher learning who continue to support their alma mater for improving research and innovation. I recall that we had discussed various alumni initiatives in earlier conferences. I am glad to see that their involvement as stakeholders is growing.

I have been aware that the Minister for Education, the Minister of State for Education and their colleagues at the Ministry have been deeply involved in planning this Conference and the agenda reflects their efforts. I must appreciate the effort they have put in.

When the agenda for this Conference was shown to me, I was impressed by the thoughtfully conceived and very pertinent topics covered in only five sessions. This agenda reflects the policy focus of the Ministry.

I was happy to see that 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav' commemorating the glorious history of India's freedom movement finds a place in the opening session. Our institutions of higher learning are central to this, as our young citizens are not only the inheritors of the past, but also the ones who will be leading India into its next golden age. Institutions of higher education have a major responsibility of transforming the impressionable youth. For this, we need to address their aspirations, as they are future leaders in various spheres of life. I can say with confidence that each one of you is going to help achieve this goal. The extraordinary growth of India in recent times

would not have otherwise been possible. I am sure you will continue the good work.

While talking of 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav', it is important to mention that the National Education Policy, while looking ahead, has not forgotten the wisdom of the past. In tune with the Government's priority of making affordable, quality education accessible to every Indian, the Ministry of Education has also focused on quick implementation of the N.E.P. 2020.

I am happy to note that a number of steps have been taken towards the implementation of N.E.P. As many as 13 Indian Knowledge System Centres have been opened across the country. Books have been published in 12 Indian languages, with introductory chapters on Indian knowledge traditions of the respective subjects. I have been informed that the initiative has been so popular that already 404 internships of two months have been granted. At the same time, 36 research projects have been sanctioned along with six special projects on digitisation and text mining. These initiatives will be of immense help not only to research scholars but also to anyone curious about the vast treasure of knowledge accumulated from ancient times in India.

In order to achieve our larger goals, improving the quality of institutions of higher learning is of vital importance. We should be setting benchmarks for the best in the world. Mr. Nunzio Quacquarelli has so kindly joined us to share his expertise in the ranking of institutions. I am happy to note that this year 35 Indian institutions have been ranked in the Quacquarelli Symonds or QS ranking as against 29 last year. In the top 300, there are six institutions this year as against four last year. I am especially happy to note that the Indian Institute of Science has got a full score of 100 on the 'research' parameter and shares this distinction with eight highly reputed institutions of the world, including Princeton, Harvard, MIT, and Caltech. I congratulate IISc Director Dr. Govindan Rangarajan and his team for this achievement.

While talking about quality of education, I will again refer to the National Education Policy. In fact, the previous Conference was focussed on this policy. To improve the quality of education, we should also consider sophisticated and innovative learning approaches. The key to achieving excellence is to harness the transformational benefits of digital technologies for enriching the teaching and learning experience. Digital technologies are expanding the boundaries of education. When the pandemic threatened to derail teaching and learning, technology ensured continuity. There were difficulties, no doubt, but it is good to see that all of you imparted teaching and conducted assessments, evaluations and research uninterrupted. We can build on that experience now, and make classroom sessions more interactive, giving students a thorough understanding of the subject. Educators and academic experts should consider this when they prepare the curriculum and other policy initiatives.

The N.E.P., though recent in its inception, has already allowed our institutions to forge a new and vigorous path. Few of us here could have imagined organising multiple courses at the same time, mixing subjects across streams or doing parts of programmes from both Indian and foreign universities. In order to promote academic collaboration between Indian and foreign Institutions, the UGC has issued regulations allowing joint, twinning and dual degrees. These initiatives under the N.E.P. have unshackled higher education from the constraints it suffered earlier.

One of the highlights of the N.E.P. is that it allows for multiple entry-exit for flexibility and lifelong learning. This, along with the Academic Bank of Credit on the Digilocker platform, makes it possible for students to study as per their convenience and choice. I am happy to see that 383 institutions of higher education have registered for ABC and over ten thousand students have opened ABC accounts.

The N.E.P promotes multilinguality in education and testing to ensure that any lack of competency in English does not impede the educational progress of any student. With this objective in mind, states are publishing bilingual and trilingual textbooks at the

foundational level and the content on the DIKSHA platform has been made available in 33 Indian languages. I am certain that this will go a long way in the democratisation of higher education in India.

Whenever I dwell upon the subject of the N.E.P., I always reflect that a great polymath like Jagdish Chandra Bose, the biologist, physicist, botanist and writer of science fiction, would have appreciated the flexibility and access to knowledge that it promotes. I am sure the N.E.P. will pave the way for many more Jagdish Chandra Bose's in the future.

While one cannot deny the importance of pure sciences, for a country like India the importance of utilising research into socially and economically relevant outcomes cannot be ignored. Therefore, the agenda item on 'Collaboration between academia, industry and policy makers' is highly relevant. There are a number of such initiatives in India working both ways – taking the benefits of research to the market and also bringing the expertise of the market to academia. Moreover, the A.I.C.T.E. – I.N.A.E. – Visiting Scholarship Scheme brings the expertise of the market to the Institution. The Department of Science and Technology provides for the aptly named 'Industry Relevant R&D'. I am sure the discussions during this Conference will provide us with a better understanding of this area and also help in further policy development to facilitate the same.

Questioning accepted beliefs and flowing against the tide has often been the basis of human progress. However, in an era of unprecedented technological strides, it is not just individual brilliance but also the systems of support that facilitate such progress. It is a pooling of human intelligence that has led to this fluid environment. When I noted the topic, 'Education and Research in Emerging and Disruptive Technologies', this was the thought that crossed my mind. I am sure our discussions here will enhance our understanding of this very relevant aspect of higher education.

I must return to the initiatives under the N.E.P. here. I have been informed that in order to encourage an ecosystem of start-ups and innovation, nearly 2,775 institutional innovation councils have been

set up in Higher Education Institutions in 28 States and six UTs. I am sure this will go a long way in promoting the aims of a socially relevant partnership between the institutions of higher education and the industry. I have also been informed that our efforts towards building a culture of innovation have started showing results and India's ranking in Global Innovation Index has significantly improved from 76 in 2014 to 46 in 2021. However, in order to improve the culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in India, we need to encourage the filing for patents and streamline the process for it.

We will surely hear more on the challenges faced by the institutions with regard to achieving many of the goals set for higher education in India. I understand that many of the challenges faced cannot be resolved by the institutions alone, and they need policy-level changes or support. In that regard, I am aware that the Minister and his team are proactively addressing the structural issues to ensure a conducive environment for the growth of higher education. At the same time, as I always suggest, by simply adhering to timelines the institutions can overcome many issues such as shortage of faculty. In fact, I would be happy to hear how robust the visiting faculty systems are in your institutions. Similarly, I am also interested in knowing how programmes like LEAP are progressing.

Without taking anything away from your role, I would say that nature is the best teacher before us. Just as nature ensures a connected and continuing growth process through life, so too must education, providing essential life skills as one grows up. Integrating schooling and higher and vocational education, which is part of this Conference's agenda, reflects just this aspect of nature. This is again something that the N.E.P. has been focusing on. The system should educate in a way that not only enhances knowledge, but also provides the skill to live a fulfilling and useful life. School lays the foundation, but this must lead a student to higher or vocational education meeting both aptitude and aspirations. I am sure the discussions here will help us understand how to achieve what nature does so effortlessly. I feel the importance of this topic as each of us has been through phases in life where what we study and what we

aspire to or need appear disconnected. I am sure the discussions today will pave the way for reducing such dissonance.

Before I conclude, I must once again acknowledge the pertinence of the topics chosen for the discussions. They reflect the potential that we hope to realise. I am sure the discussions will be of a high order. I am also sure all of us present here, and those who are connected virtually, will gain immensely from the sessions. The proof of the utility of this Conference will, however, be seen in the actions taken and the results thereof.

I wish the Conference success. My best wishes are with you in all your endeavours.

Thank you,

Jai Hind!