

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE FICCI HIGHER EDUCATION SUMMIT**

New Delhi, November 27, 2019

1. I am happy to address the 15th Higher Education Summit 2019 organised by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry in collaboration with the Ministry of Human Resource Development and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. This global conference has come to occupy a vital place in the thought leadership forum on higher education. We have a large and diverse gathering of stakeholders from India and abroad participating in the event. I am sure you will find this edition as enriching as the previous ones.

2. Higher education as a public-policy issue enjoys primacy the world over. It is seen as a fundamental enabler of social, economic, scientific and intellectual progress and advancement. In the case of India, we have a distinguished history of higher education to inspire us as we work to strengthen and illuminate our universities as fonts of knowledge and learning. India has been home to the oldest university in the world. At its peak in the 7th century CE, the Nalanda University had 10,000 students from all over Asia enrolled in its campus. The methods of teaching prevalent in these ancient temples of learning and the emphasis on critical analyses could be of relevance as we look at modern trends in pedagogy.

3. Investing in people through higher education and education in general has an omnibus impact on nation-building. The investment is made once but the dividends are realised in perpetuity. Recently, I had gone to Mysore to join the centenary celebrations of the enlightened “Monarch - Democrat” Jayachamaraja Wadiyar, the late Maharaja of Mysore. He was a pioneer in higher education who generously

invested in his people. The lead that the Maharaja took in empowering people several decades ago, today provides the strong foundation of technological transformation that we see in Bengaluru, Mysuru and the adjoining areas. A country such as ours that wishes to transform itself within a short span of time, must transform its higher education journey first.

Ladies and gentlemen,

4. Higher education is a subject close to my heart, both for personal and professional reasons. I have myself experienced its power and potential to bring about intra-generational change and mobility. As President of India, I am Visitor to 152 Universities and Institutes of Higher Learning. I have had the opportunity to interact with Vice-Chancellors and Directors of almost all of them. India with over 990 Universities is home to one of the largest higher education ecosystems in the world. We are constantly at work to improve their standards and convert them into global knowledge hubs. We have just begun nationwide consultations on the New Education Policy. It would lay out the path for transforming Indian education landscape suited to 21st century needs.

5. The world of tomorrow will be driven by knowledge, machine-intelligence and digital pathways. To prepare ourselves for this transformation and to leverage its limitless opportunities, we have to recast our higher education with new courses and deeper research-orientation. Ideation, innovation and incubation should be given primacy in our curriculum. India has the third largest scientific human resource pool in the world. If we establish robust academia-industry linkages, we have the potential to become the R&D capital of the world. And along with science, liberal arts and humanities must get equal attention - for fruits of technology have to be ultimately made relevant to people, communities and cultures. The connectedness of disciplines is not a mere reality today, but the inner core of knowledge itself. I am happy that our Universities have already made progress with inter-disciplinary approach, combining courses in mathematics

with music, and artificial intelligence with animal husbandry. Much more work is required on this account.

Ladies and gentlemen,

6. Another important aspect that we need to attend is how to bring pedagogical changes in our education system. Spirit of inquiry, critical thinking and an overall culture of looking at what, how and why of issues and perspectives needs to be nurtured. Creativity, imagination and thought in the minds of our students have to be unlocked and its exuberance allowed to flow and flower. To bring about this educational renaissance, we would require attitudinal adjustments and openness about new concepts on several fronts: at the level of academic leadership; at the level of student-teacher engagement; and at the level of technology integration. These would only be possible if there is a vision to move forward and a committed urge to make things happen. In this context, I would like to commend the programmes initiated by the Ministry of Human Resource Development – LEAP that is “Leadership for Academicians Program” and ARPIT that is “Annual Refresher Programme in Teaching”. While LEAP aims to build leadership and vision among higher education administrators, ARPIT is geared to improve pedagogical skills of our teachers.

7. Earlier I had talked about our ancient universities. They had a learning culture where ideas and concepts were constantly tested and subjected to verification and critical analyses. The system that produced a Panini, an Aryabhat, a Charak, or a Kautilya must have been robust. We must use modern tools to reopen wisdom stored in our countless knowledge traditions, even as we optimize the opportunities of a machine-intelligence age. An open learning culture will foster the spirit to innovate and give new wings to Atal Innovation Centres established in our Universities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

8. Our economic needs are immense. Over the next several decades, India will witness tremendous growth leading to higher standards of living for its people. All this demands that we bring new energy and dynamism in our higher education profile. Programmes for vocational education, apprenticeship and internship are needed for combining theoretical and practical knowledge streams. We have to also draw and learn from global institutions and experiences.
9. At the same time, India's diverse higher education ecosystem offers immense opportunities for the world at large. The forces of globalisation pose their own imperatives for making learning a cross-cultural experience and an integrated construct. To promote India as a global knowledge destination, the Government of India has begun a "Study in India" programme to attract international students. Our Universities have also been developing international networks for faculty, student, pedagogy and knowledge exchange. Making our higher education ecosystem world class will also give a wider choice to Indian students who go abroad seeking quality education.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. The world of higher education is an expansive one. For it to grow and empower us, we need support from all stakeholders - policymakers, educationists, researchers, entrepreneurs and others. Given the socio-economic reality of our country, public institutions will play a lead role. But along with it, the private sector must continue to contribute to national efforts. We will also have to look at innovative models of funding to boost research and scholarship. Just last month, I had the pleasure to launch the IIT Delhi Endowment Fund. This is the first of its kind Fund in India and is based on the contribution of the alumni. The Fund within a very short span has raised Rupees 250 crore and has a target to raise 1 billion US dollars for supporting academic excellence and research at IIT Delhi. I impress upon FICCI Higher Education Committee to galvanize greater people's participation in strengthening our higher education system.

Ladies and gentlemen,

11. As we talk of higher education as a public good, a critical bearing in the Indian context is how to deal with regional imbalance in the quality of education. We are trying to narrow the gap but a lot more initiatives are required. Another related aspect is the rural-urban divide that we see in the field of higher education. Our Founding Fathers, Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore had paid detailed attention to it, be it the Medical College in Wardha or the Visva Bharati in Santiniketan. I had the opportunity to visit both these illustrious campuses this year. For our inclusive growth and progress, we have to take inspiration from them and build on their ideas. In this effort, technology platforms such as digital classrooms, e-learning and National Digital Library can be a key enabler.

Ladies and gentlemen,

12. I have put forth some of my ideas on higher education before you. It is now for you, the stakeholders, to flesh out the way forward. And as you deliberate and discuss, I would remind you of an old saying in Sanskrit, and I quote : “ सा विद्या या विमुक्तये” that is “true learning is that which liberates”. Let us together create that university, that classroom, that curriculum, that culture which allows our students to realize their fullest potential as a human being, in service of our people, our nation and the world.

13. I wish the Summit all success.

Thank you,
Jai Hind!