

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASION OF INAUGURATION OF THE CENTENARY
CONFERENCE OF INDIAN ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION**

Guntur, December 27, 2017

1. I am happy to be here at the 100th annual conference of the Indian Economic Association. This professional body of Indian economists was founded way back in 1917. It has grown to become one of the largest academic communities in our country, with a membership of about 7,000 distinguished individuals and institutions.
2. I congratulate the Indian Economic Association – and indeed all of you – for reaching this significant milestone. Your pursuit of excellence and study of policy choices has enriched our scholarship and our public discourse. Several members of the Association have served in various policy-making bodies, including the Finance Commission, the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister and, till recently, the Planning Commission. And right from 1917, the Association’s journal – the **Indian Economic Journal** – has published research papers that are contemporary and relevant.
3. The annual conference is an important event that brings together members of the Association. In keeping with the centenary commemoration, this year’s theme is ambitious – “**Indian Economic Development: Experience since Independence**”. I understand that a whole range of topics – from fiscal policy to external trade, and from agriculture to socio-economic inequalities – will be discussed. I am also glad to learn that prominent economists from countries as far apart as the United States, Switzerland and Malaysia are participating. Of course the Nobel Laureate Professor **Muhammad Yunus** from Bangladesh is the guest of honour today. His work in development economics has made him the pride of the entire

subcontinent. I warmly welcome him and all other international delegates.

4. Economics has evolved enormously as an academic discipline in the past 100 years. This is a subject that combines history and geography, philosophy and ethics, and increasingly mathematics. Economics is like a grand river that has place for diverse currents, ranging from sociology to statistics. But at its core is and must always be human welfare.
5. This is what makes the **Indian Development Experience** such an important subject. India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Without growth there can be no development and little scope for redistribution. And yet, while growth is necessary, it is not sufficient. To tackle the inequities in our society, to overcome the social and economic inequalities between different sections and even different regions, requires imaginative policy making.
6. Significant numbers of our fellow citizens still live in poverty or very close to poverty. They have insufficient access to health-care, education, housing and civic amenities. This is particularly true for traditionally weaker sections of society, such as SCs, STs, segments of OBCs and of course women. Addressing these issues is necessary in order to achieve the dreams of a **New India** by 2022, when our country commemorates the 75th anniversary of Independence. We also have to treat investment in health and education as investment in **human capital** – a critical building block for our economy.
7. Many of the issues I have mentioned are actually in the State List of the Indian Constitution. Addressing them at the local and state level – with an appropriate policy mechanism and rollout – will drive forward the **Indian Development Experience**. In an era of **Cooperative Federalism**, and particularly after the implementation of the report of the 14th Finance Commission – which has transferred more funds to the states – there is a lot of responsibility and hope that rests with our various states.

8. Devolution of funds needs to be complemented by evolution of ideas. That is how states will benefit – and ultimately India's social, developmental and macroeconomic needs will be met.
9. As such, alongside the Union government, I would urge our community of economists to work more and more with our state governments and offer them counsel and recommendations that are specific to their regions and demographic profiles. In this context, I must congratulate the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Shri N. Chandrababu Naidu, for making his state a leader in economic thinking and initiatives – and for skilfully converting policy prescriptions into projects on the ground.

Ladies and Gentlemen

10. Human society is at a turning point. Many of the realities the world has lived with for the past several decades, especially since the end of World War II, are giving way. The discipline of economics has not been left untouched by these changes. We face a situation where many societies that had so far advocated the cause of a liberal trading order are turning protectionist. The onus is on emerging economies such as India to speak up for an inter-connected world, where fair and growing trade helps the largest number of people.
11. There are also domestic issues that must concern us. The era of formal jobs is gradually yielding to one of employment opportunities and even self-employment opportunities in specialised manufacturing, in the services sector and in the digital economy. Whether we call it the informal economy or the gig economy, as is the popular term now, whether we apply the norms of microcredit or social entrepreneurship, this sector will only expand. We have to understand it and devise policies that are in tune with it. And we need to design social security measures and safety nets that protect its workers.

12. I am pleased to note that the government of India has recognised these gaps. Initiatives such as Start-up India, Stand-up India and MUDRA, and the Jan-Dhan Yojana, which has brought hundreds of millions into the banking system, are aimed at filling gaps that have remained in our developmental model despite the progress since Independence.
13. All these are challenges and issues for our economists to think over and to analyse – and to provide a road map for. I am sure these subjects and many others will form part of this Conference over the next few days. And as the Indian Economic Association enters its second century, I am confident that the Association and its members will remain as connected to our nation's developmental process – and to the welfare of our people – as they have been for the past 100 years.
14. I wish all of you the very best for the rest of the Conference, and for the coming New Year.

Thank you
Jai Hind!