

## **SPEECH**

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**New Delhi**

### **PM's remarks in the Conference of Vice Chancellors of Central Universities at Rashtrapati Bhavan**

Let me begin by thanking respected Rashtrapati ji for taking the initiative to organize this conference. I am sure that we will all benefit from his leadership, wisdom and vast experience during the course of discussions today.

I understand that the last such conference was held in the year 2003. In almost a decade that has passed since then, the educational landscape of our country has been transformed beyond recognition. This transformation has touched all levels and types of education- Primary, Secondary, Higher and Vocational, and also Skill Development. Today, there are new challenges but also new opportunities. Our collective task ahead entails putting in place an educational system that would help build India into a modern, prosperous and progressive economy and society in the 21st century.

I believe our government has given education its due. We have expanded access to education as never before. We have increased investment in education as never before. The share of education in the total outlay went up from 6.7 percent in the 10th Plan to 19.4 percent in the 11th Plan. We have endeavored to take care of the concerns for equity, enhancing scholarships and setting up institutions in different parts of the country. It is for this emphasis on education that I have often referred to the 11th Plan as an Education Plan.

Our efforts have been especially marked in Higher Education, which has seen unprecedented expansion since the year 2004. Our government established 51 institutions during the 11th Plan period, the highest for any Plan period. These include Central Universities, Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) and Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISERs).

The number of Central Universities has more than doubled in the period after 2004-05, increasing from 17 to 44. Each State now has at least 1 Central University, except Goa where the State Government did not want one. Special financial assistance was provided to the existing Central institutions to enable them to provide 27 percent reservation for the Other Backward Classes without affecting the number of general seats.

In the period after 2004-05, the number of IITs has increased from 7 to 16 and the number of IIMs from 6 to 13. Five new IISERs have been established. The number of Indian Institutes of Information Technology has also doubled to 4.

We have promoted the use of technology in Higher Education. The National Mission of Education through ICT aims at ensuring high speed broadband connectivity to universities and colleges, developing e content in various disciplines and providing access devices at low cost. About 400 universities and more than 19000 colleges have already been provided connectivity under the Mission.

We have also taken steps and brought about reforms with the aim of enhancing quality in Higher Education.

These efforts have shown results. The actual enrolment in Higher Education grew from 16.6 crore to 25.9 crore during the 11th Plan period. The Gross Enrolment Ratio for Higher Education went up from 12.3 percent in 2006-07 to 17.9 percent in 2011-12. However, this is still much below the world average of 26 percent.

What about the road ahead? The 12th Plan rightly identifies the task for the next 5 years as building on the momentum generated in the last ten years and continuing the focus on expansion, equity and excellence.

Further expansion of the Higher Education system is necessary to cater to the growing demand for Higher Education. But in recognition of the fact that expansion without quality improvement serves little purpose, we will now give over-riding emphasis on quality. We must recognize that too many of our Higher Educational institutions are simply not up to the mark. Too many of them have simply not kept abreast with the rapid changes that have taken place in the world around us in recent years, still producing graduates in subjects that the job market no longer requires.

It is a sobering thought for us that not one Indian university figures in the top 200 Universities of the world today.

Improving quality and fostering excellence in our institutions of Higher Education is a critical challenge that we must collectively address. Our Higher Education system is often criticized for being unnecessarily rigid both for the faculty and the students. I think it is well worth exploring how we can introduce flexibility in our institutions to enable them to attract good faculty, raise teaching standards, encourage cutting edge research and nurture talent. I am happy that one of the points of discussion in the agenda of this Conference is about the quality of education and faculty development in the Central Universities. I sincerely hope that the ensuing discussions will come up with some good recommendations in this regard.

As we move ahead we will keep in view the concerns for equity. We will work to remove imbalances across States, across regions and across sections of our society. We will streamline our equity related schemes in the area of Higher Education, target them better and provide them with increased budgetary support.

We envisage a very important role for Central Universities in setting standards for Higher Education across the country. We expect them to become role models and contribute to strengthening other institutions of higher learning in their vicinity. Some Central Universities located in far-flung areas can also contribute to reducing the academic imbalances in our country. We expect the Central Universities to be Quality-Leading institutions, a role that the 12th Plan envisages for all Central institutions.

You have a very well thought through agenda before you. Apart from issues of quality and faculty development in Central Universities it also includes steps needed to extend the reach of education through extension work in contiguous areas. I consider this as a very important part of the role that the government expects you to play. I urge you to come up with new ways in which you can benefit people in the area around your University, by disseminating knowledge, encouraging innovation, promoting environmental conservation, developing skills and so on.

The Vice Chancellors of Central Universities gathered here represent a vast pool of talent. You are among the leading intellectuals in the country in the field of Higher Education. I am sure that in the discussions that follow you will use your ability and expertise to come up with new and innovative ways of raising standards of education and research in our Central Universities. I once again thank Rashtrapati ji for this initiative. I wish you all very productive discussions and every success in your endeavors in the cause of Higher Education.

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