

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE AT THE VALEDICTORY SESSION OF 12TH PRAVASI
BHARTIYA DIVAS CONVENTION AND CONFERMENT OF
PRAVASI BHARATIYA SAMMAN AWARDS**

Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi. : 09-01-2014

It gives me great pleasure to be present here for the twelfth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas. The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is a historic occasion as it is on this day the greatest Pravasi of all times and our father of nation- Mahatma Gandhi returned to India. It is also the beginning of the new year which gives rise to new hope for a better future. I take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy and prosperous new year.

The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is an occasion when people and Government of India renew and strengthen our bonds with the Indian diaspora. It is also an opportunity to advance the mutually beneficial relationship between Indians within and outside the country. On this day every year, our country acknowledges the exemplary contributions made by eminent Overseas Indians by conferring upon them the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards.

I congratulate all winners of this year's Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards. We are honoured by the presence of the awardees at this function. All of them have made their mark in their countries of adoption and advanced the welfare of the communities in which they live and work.

Migration, as far as India is concerned is a millennia old phenomenon. Our doors have always remained open to migrants from abroad and our people have ventured into foreign lands from the early days of our history. In fact, there would be few countries in the world where migration, both internal as well as external, has and continues to play such a major role in the economy and society.

The Indian Diaspora world wide has steadily grown in both numbers as well as importance. Indians abroad today comprise over 25 million and are engaged in all walks of life. Through their success and their contribution to their host countries, they have consistently brought laurels to their land of

ancestry. It is a matter of great pride to all Indians that the Overseas Indian community is respected for its work culture, discipline, and successful integration with local communities.

The greatest hallmark of the Indian diaspora is its commitment to our common cultural heritage and passion for motherland India. The Government has over the years strengthened partnerships and institutions that enable India connect with its Diaspora comprehensively and nurture not only emotional and familial bonds, but also cultural, social and economic interests. The Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) which assists Indians in distress abroad is an important initiative in this regard. This has been of great help and solace to Indian workers, especially those in the Gulf countries. Similarly, a new e-Migrate project is being rolled out in order to ensure hassle free migration of workers in the ECR category. A Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra will also soon open in Delhi and serve as a Centre to commemorate and celebrate the contributions of the Indian diaspora to India and the world through lectures, seminars, exhibitions, research etc. I congratulate the Honourable Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs, Shri Vayalar Ravi for his dynamic leadership and for spearheading these important initiatives.

The theme of this year's Pravasi Bharatiya Divas "Engaging Diaspora: Connecting across generations" is apt and timely. As is well known, over fifty percent of our population is under 25 years and soon one fifth of the world's working age population will be in India. It is our hope that this demographic dividend from this young population will create self-sustaining economic growth in the coming years.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

India's economy is the third largest in the world in terms of purchasing power parity. The substantial growth rate that our country has achieved over the last few years is second only to China in the world. India's economy has been more resilient than most other economies of the world. If we have to attain a growth rate of 9 per cent per year, as has been envisaged during the Twelfth Five Year Plan period, we must put in place enabling factors, most prominent of which is education. I believe that education is the alchemy that

can bring India its next golden age. The success we achieve in educating our people will determine how fast India joins the ranks of leading nations of the world.

As Visitor to all Central Universities, IITs and NITs, I have been travelling the length and breadth of our country pointing out that India needs world class universities and has not produced a single Nobel Prize winner from India since Sir CV Raman. I have been urging our educational institutions to invest more in research and development and to pursue greater international linkages by establishing collaborations with foreign Universities and inviting the best of faculty from across the world to come and teach in our institutions.

Over the last nine years, the Government has prioritised higher education and supported it with increased resources. Enrolment to higher education institutions in the country has increased, from 1.39 crores in 2006-07 to 2.18 crores in 2011-12. India has today 659 degree awarding institutions and 33,023 colleges.

However, despite significant growth in the number of higher education institutions, we have few institutions of global standards. But, that was not the case in the past. In the past, India's ancient university system dominated the world for nearly eighteen hundred years beginning from the sixth century BC to 11th Century A.D. when the collapse of Nalanda occurred. Famed seats of higher learning like Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramashila, Valabhi, Somapura and Odantapuri were a magnet for scholars across the world.

Time has now come for us to reclaim our leadership position in the world as far as higher education is concerned. Our effort to increase 'quantity' must be matched with commensurate efforts to improve 'quality'. We must lead our institutions into the ranks of the best such institutions in the world.

Friends, in a world marked by increasing constraints on natural resources, innovation will be the key to future growth. China and the US are amongst the countries at the forefront of innovation with over 5 lakh patent

applications filed by each country in 2011. In contrast to this, India filed only 42,000 patent applications, which is far behind these countries. As per an international survey, only 3 Indian companies are amongst the world's 100 most innovative companies.

To promote innovation, there is need to emphasize research in our industry as well as our higher education institutions. India ranks 12th amongst top 20 countries, in terms of publications on science and technology. We have only 119 researchers in R & D per million people, as compared to 715 in China and 468 in United States. Out of the total student strength of 71,000 in NITs, there are only 4000 Ph.D. students. In IITs, there are only around 3000 Ph.D students in the total student strength of 60,000.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This situation must change. Our leadership in fields such as science and technology is incumbent on the level of competence in our scientists, academics, engineers and doctors. Our growth will increasingly depend on the amount of technology up-gradation we can achieve. We have to upgrade standards of our country's higher education as a top priority. Overseas Indians such as all of you gathered here can play a major role in supporting and supplementing the efforts of the Government to remedy this situation.

I am happy to note that the discussions this year included a session on "Innovation and Technology". It might interest you to know that in my capacity as Visitor, I have been urging our Universities and NITs to set up Innovation Clubs and establish linkages with grassroots innovators, providing them the necessary institutional support to commercialize their innovations. Every year the Rashtrapati Bhavan hosts an exhibition on Innovations. Recently, we have also initiated a programme inviting talented young innovators along with artists and writers to live in residence at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, to take innovative ideas forward and be provided mentoring and support.

Similarly, during my visit to Belgium and Turkey last year, I took along with me a delegation of Vice Chancellors of Central Universities as well as the UGC Chairman. This was perhaps the first time ever that University Vice

Chancellors accompanied the Head of State on a foreign visit. The intention was to highlight to foreign interlocutors as well as domestic stakeholders our renewed focus on taking higher education in India to world class standards. During the visit, the Vice Chancellors held discussions with their counterparts and many MoUs were concluded on future cooperation with leading Universities of these two countries.

Friends, overseas Indians can play an extremely important role in helping the education institutions of India, most of which are their Alma Maters, rise to world class status. They can be catalysts in transforming our higher education institutions and instilling in them a culture of excellence as well as the spirit of innovation. I call upon all of you to take up this task in a single minded manner.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that each one of you can play an important role in the growth and development of India. Whether you are scholars scientists, professionals, businessmen and or even workers, you have within you experience, expertise and knowledge gained as a result of your life abroad which can be of immense benefit to India. Many of you can also play a role in guiding to India greater foreign direct investment and in educating your colleagues and friends abroad of the business opportunities that exist in India. As the Prime Minister pointed out yesterday, our economic fundamentals remains strong and India is re-emerging as an attractive investment destination. I am sure you have confidence in the inherent resilience of our people and the dynamism of our economy which has the ability to overcome temporary downturns.

I hope this year's Pravasi Bharatiya Divas will seed many initiatives for deepening our mutually beneficial engagement. The Government on its part will continue to actively engage with the overseas Indian community and explore all possible avenues to make them valued partners in the building of a strong and prosperous India.

I wish all of you every success in your life and future endeavors. India looks upon you with affection, pride, satisfaction and hope.

Thank You, Jai hind!

