

SPEECH OF SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE, FORMER PRESIDENT OF INDIA AT THE ANNUAL CONVOCATION OF PATNA UNIVERSITY

I am extremely happy to be present here today to address the Convocation of the historic Patna University. Indeed it is a special occasion for me since I have come here again after more than 34 years, having addressed the Convocation of the University in 1984, as Finance Minister of the country.

2. At the outset I would hail Patna University, the 7th oldest University in the sub continent as the inheritor of the great intellectual traditions established more than a millennium and a half back through the great seats of learning at Nalanda, Odantapuri, and Vikramshila. As inheritor of this massive legacy of intellect and academic excellence, you the students also have the historic responsibility of using the knowledge acquired at this alma mater of yours for the good and well being of your state, the eastern region, the nation and the world as a whole. I exhort you with the words of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru from his famous speech, *Tryst with Destiny*. He said and I quote, "***The achievement we celebrate today is but a step, an opening of opportunity, to the greater triumphs and achievements that await us.***" (Unquote)

3. Having been established as the sole modern university way back in 1917, the Patna University had its jurisdiction over what is today Nepal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa. You were the precursor to the Tribhuvan University in Nepal, the Ranchi University in Ranchi and the Utkal University in Bhubaneswar.

4. With 10 colleges, comprising 42 different departments and a separate directorate for distance education, I can say without a doubt that Patna University as a collective has played a significant role in the spread of education, especially Higher Education and Research and Innovation. I believe Patna University has benefited not only the citizens living in Eastern and North-east India and also a large part of Eastern Uttar Pradesh. This university has as its alumni a remarkable list of nation builders such as Dr. Sachidanand Sinha, Sri Jai Prakash Narayan, Dr. Ramdhari Singh Dinkar and

Dr. B.C. Roy. These include many of the brightest minds of the last century who distinguished themselves through their academic achievements.

I take this opportunity to congratulate all the students who have assembled here to receive their degrees, diplomas and other awards.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen, Assembled Scholars and Students

5. As you walk out of the portals of your alma mater today, you shall be carrying on your shoulders not only the academic legacy of intellectual excellence but also the glorious legacy of the great traditions of Buddhism and Jainism and the great Magadha Empire. Amongst others, you will have the great Buddha, Lord Mahavira and Emperors Chandragupta and Ashoka as your fore bearers.

6. The challenges ahead of you are compounded by the fact that eastern India, whose fertile lands once cradled civilizations, shaped Empires and led the world economy till as late as the mid 18th century, for various extraneous politico economic reasons faced a downslide during the last century, even as its contribution to nation building remained as high as it always was. Be it in terms of intellectual capital and human resource, contributions in terms of mineral resources or food grain, the East consistently fueled the growth engines of Modern India. Today, I can say with confidence that Bihar, as indeed the entire Eastern India is on the cusp of an agricultural and industrial revolution. It is you who are going to be leading India's growth story for the next century.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

7. Being an ardent student of Economics, the numbers speak more to me than any other proof. According to a recent report published by Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdele (KPMG), the eastern regional states of Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand and Assam are expected to contribute at least 25 per cent of the country's GDP by 2035. The report also suggests that the region has a direct influence on over 30 per cent of the IIP (Index of Industrial Production) by weight and 57% of the core industries.

8. Let me highlight the particular case of Bihar. According to the 12th Economic Survey 2018-19 tabled in the Bihar Assembly, the projected growth rate of 10.3% of the state in the last fiscal year was higher than the national average growth rate of 7%. Significant growth has also been witnessed in the agricultural sector. For instance, there has been a 21.2% rise in rice production at 82.8 lakh tonnes, while wheat production has gone up from 47.36 lakh ton in 2015-16 to 59.86 lakh tonne in 2016-17. The eastern region of our country is bestowed with abundant natural resources and has the potential to achieve much higher crop productivity.

9. To my mind, this can be achieved when universities like Patna University churn out research scholars, inquisitive graduates and innovative post-graduates who can apply their knowledge and skills in the real world to not only help foster the growth of Eastern India but also to the whole country. In our economy, agriculture retains its primary importance in terms of value creation and employment generation. There are millions of farmers tilling on small and marginal holdings. Our challenge is to reach out to the last farmland and equip them with the best cultivation methods. Improving the quality of agricultural education holds the key to driving not only agricultural growth but also developing technologies for sustainable agriculture leading to livelihood and nutritional security. I call upon the scientific fraternity to work towards a technology-led path for development of agriculture and prosperity for the farming community.

Dear Friends,

10. My association with the entire Eastern region goes back many a decade with the neighbouring West Bengal being my home state. Indeed Bihar, undivided Bengal, Jharkhand, Orissa and Assam were part of the same Bengal Presidency for a long period in the earlier part of the last century. The area has a shared past and heritage and its shaping in the post Independence era has also been similar. The land of Eastern India comprising Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar, Assam, Orissa and the other states of North East have since centuries been the land of India's renaissance and reformation. Apart from being the breeding ground of various cultures and religions, it is this land that

witnessed excellence in indigenous handlooms, setting up of nascent industries around jute and tea, iron ore, coal and petroleum. It is upon your shoulders now to drive the engines of growth, and the growth models and techniques you employ must essentially take into account ways and means that ensure equitable growth.

11. It is a matter of great pride for not only Bihar but also for our country that Eastern India is making its presence felt in the region by inculcating a robust system of education. Education empowers and enables a nation. A sound education system is the bedrock of an enlightened society. To build India of our dreams, the foremost task before us is to improve the quality of education infusing modern technologies and addressing the concerns of equality.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

12. Our future progress will depend increasingly on our ability to innovate, to devise efficient processes for the industrial sector and better solutions for governance. For that, it is necessary to permeate the spirit of innovation to all sectors – business, government, education and society. The Indian innovation strategy must focus on generating ideas that promote inclusive growth and benefit those at the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid. There are many grassroots innovations that can be developed into suitable products if provided with technological support. Our higher academic institutions must play an important role in mentoring such innovative endeavours.

13. Every student has the potential to contribute, in their own individual capacities, to nation-building. You must understand that considerable resource, effort and sacrifice has gone into your education. Society has invested in you and it is legitimate to expect that you would pay a dividend back to society for this investment.

14. There is an immense potential for human development for promoting economic development in the eastern regions like Bihar, Odisha, Bengal and Jharkhand. The international experience shows that, for specially disadvantaged regions, human development could indeed be an alternative development strategy. Under this strategy, it is possible for disadvantaged

regions to change their comparative advantage from low skill labour-intensive goods and services to more skill-intensive goods and services provider through deliberate human development. A logical requirement of this alternative development strategy will be prioritizing investment on education beyond what would happen under 'normal' circumstances. One may also note here that education does not mean economic advantage for educated people alone. It has some other important advantages as well — it empowers people and also promotes their participation in both development programs and the political process.

15. The need of the hour is to re-define the relationship between education, employment and skills development. Furthermore, as a very large population, India would never be able to upskill all of its youth across the country through the conventional education framework. Government alone cannot accomplish this task. It calls for a concerted effort on part of the government, private players and NGOs to address the issue in a comprehensive manner.

16. To my mind, it is through work-Integrated Learning activities that the needs of industry can be met by the students and universities in developing, delivering and reflecting upon learning experiences that benefit all stakeholders. Such learning helps students get a professional identity and allows them to advance their theoretical knowledge and transferable skills.

17. I am pleased to note that the Patna University has taken a holistic view in this connection. Not only is it developing newer programmes which will prepare its students to face the challenges of the changing economy; it is also investing in creating an eco-system conducive to basic research and to incubate innovation.

Dear Students,

18. The intellectual, social and technical skills you have acquired here from the teachers and members of the faculty would stand you in good stead. And I would like to tell my young audience here that in your career, there will be many professional accomplishments to your credit. Your parents, teachers and alma-mater will be proud of your achievements. And this is a proud

moment not just for you, graduating students, but also your teachers, mentors, faculty members and parents. Sail forth into the world with confidence. Lead us in the building of a better India – a better world.

Thank You

Jai Hind!