

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea: 29-04-2016

Distinguished members of the Faculty, Dear Students, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be here amidst you this morning. I am touched by the warmth of the reception accorded to me and to my delegation since my arrival at your beautiful country. We bring to you the best wishes of the people of India.

As I make this historic visit – the first State Visit by a President of India to Papua New Guinea, I am accompanied by Dr. Sanjeev Kumar Balyan, Hon'ble Union Minister of State in the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare and senior Members of the Indian Parliament representing different political parties and different regions of India.

Just before entering this auditorium, I had the opportunity to pay my respects at the statue of Mahatma Gandhi that had been installed in 1997 by Late Hon'ble Bill Skate, the then Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea. Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Indian Nation continues, to this day, to be revered all over the world as a beacon of peace and apostle of non-violence. His vision and teachings remind humanity of the true values of harmonious co-existence and mutual respect and the need to work together for the equality and freedom of all individuals. In a world that is increasingly vexed by intolerance and extremism, the life and message of this great man remain an inspiring example of the power of truth and universal brotherhood.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have just had the honour of planting a sapling of a banyan tree to mark my visit to this University. The choice of the Banyan sapling is highly symbolic – as the Banyan is the national tree of the Republic of India and is considered by our people to be a sacred one and a symbol of eternal life. I have no doubt that as it grows and spreads its branches, this tree will signify the enduring friendship between people of India and people of Papua New Guinea.

Gandhiji had viewed education as an integrated approach to all round personality development. He was emphatic about the difference between 'learning' and true education, 'knowledge' and actual wisdom and between 'literacy' and the real lessons that we learn from life. We, in India, have tried to adhere to these principles as we pursue our goals in the education sector through our national planning and human resource development programmes.

As we succeed, India has always been happy to share her technical expertise with other developing countries. At the Second Summit of the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Co-operation held in Delhi and Jaipur in August last year, we had announced the doubling of the number of scholarships earmarked for students from the Pacific Island Countries under our Indian Technical and Economic Co-operation Programme. I invite more students from Papua New Guinea to take advantage of these schemes and attend our institutions of higher education and centres of excellence.

The Indian higher academic system was known the world over in past. There were some seats of higher learning like Nalanda, Takshashila, Vikramashila, Valabhi, Somapura and Odantapuri which dominated the world higher education system for almost eighteen hundred years from the beginning of the sixth century BC till 12th century AD. They attracted scholars from far and wide. University of Taxila was confluence of four civilizations. However, we can not claim that status today. That's why we now focus on quality of education by establishing institutions of higher learning and technological institutions in different parts of India. There are 730 universities, 13500 colleges, 16 Indian Institute of Technologies and 30 National Institute of Technologies. Two Indian institutions are placed within the top 200 universities in the global ranking system. Two others are ranked within the top 20 young universities in the world.

Friends,

Even though India is separated from this region by the oceans and continents, we attach high value to the close friendship that exists between India and the island countries of the Pacific Ocean. Our relationship is based on the strong foundation of our historical ties - forged by our cultural and economic exchanges over the centuries. These bonds have contributed to the mutual understanding between our Governments and our peoples and are at the root of our shared desire to collaborate in areas of our common interest.

The cooperation between our two countries at the United Nations and other multilateral fora has also been close and fruitful. India appreciates

Papua New Guinea's steadfast support for India's candidature for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council and also the reforms of this world body which was established after the 2nd World war. At the present time, seven decades after the United Nations was created, we are agreed on the urgent need for reform of its organs to make them relevant and effective in the significantly altered world of the 21st century. We count on Papua New Guinea's continued support and co-operation in the United Nations and other multilateral fora.

During the first Summit of the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Co-operation held at Fiji in November, 2014, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi had announced a number of initiatives for assisting the Pacific Island Countries. These were aimed at supporting their efforts towards their developmental goals and aspirations and addressing their specific concerns related to climate change and sustainable development. I am happy to note that my Government has delivered on these – through financial assistance, deputation of Indian experts to Papua New Guinea, training of your citizens in India and simplifying the visa process which has been reciprocated by Government of Papua New Guinea yesterday at the banquet hosted in my honour.

We believe that Papua New Guinea has a key role in India's extended "Act East" policy and view this nation as a gateway to closer cooperation with the Pacific Island Countries. India stands ready to share other knowledge and experience in the field of renewable energy, sustainable agriculture and best practices for increasing food productivity. There are many complementarities between India and Papua New Guinea - on which our bilateral cooperation must be based. We are focussed on skills development and innovation with special emphasis on simple and cost effective technologies that are easily adapted to be locally relevant, efficient and successful. Our public sector enterprises and our private sector are keen to work with Papua New Guinea in harnessing its mineral, marine and hydrocarbon resources. As we identify the areas where we would both like to focus our joint efforts, I would say that in this area of cooperation the sky is the limit. We should waste no time in bringing the benefit of our cooperation to our peoples.

Before I conclude, young students, a few words for your success in future endeavours:

Your dreams will come true if you pursue them with courage; never hesitate to be an agent of positive change; judge your success not by your personal achievements alone - but by the harmony and advancement that it brings to the people around you.

With these words, I extend to you and, through you, to the people of Papua New Guinea, my heartfelt thanks for this memorable visit. May the friendship between our nations grow from strength to strength!

Thank you.
