

**Valedictory Address of Smt. D. Purandeswari Hon'ble Mos, Hrd
at The National Conference On
“Development Of Technical Education In India”
held in New Delhi on 18-12-2007**

It gives me pleasure to deliver the valedictory address at this National Conference of on Development of Technical Education in India, organized by the A.I.C.T.E to discuss the problems relating to the technical education in this country in the background of emerging global scenario. I think that we all should be concerned about the urgent need to gear up our technical education so as to yield world-class research and trained scholars, scientists, engineers and managers who would enable to boost up and sustain the economic and technological growth of the nation. We must realize that in order to compete successfully in the future knowledge-based economy we have to ensure that the higher and technical education and the university system should play proactive role in this regard.

India has significant advantages in the present knowledge race. It has a large higher education sector — the third largest in the world in student numbers, after China and the United States. It uses English as a primary language of higher education and research. It has a long academic tradition. There are also a number of high quality institutions, departments, and centres that can form the basis of quality sector in higher and technical education. India educates approximately 10 per cent of its young people in higher education compared to more than half in the major industrialized countries and 15 per cent in China. Now as we strive to compete in a globalised

economy in areas that require highly trained professionals, the quality of higher education becomes increasingly important. To be world class, our institutions require professors and students who are committed and dedicated - and a culture that sustains and stimulates them. Can we prepare ourselves to build such system of technical and higher education that will further boost up sophisticated research in scientific and scholarly fields and generate knowledge and technology for the expanding economy? To my mind this is the basic question.

The quality of our technical education is coming under increasing scrutiny as we move up on the ladder of globalization and economic growth. Euphoria of our 300,000 technical graduates, post-graduates and doctorates being churned out year after year has started evaporating. What is coming to the fore instead is the question of their employability. The greatest road-block in that journey is the inability of our technical education to ingrain conversion of intellectual capital into knowledge. That capability is critical in today's ruthless technology-ruled world. Without that ability, sustained economic growth and global aspirations will remain a distant dream.

I often feel depressed and anguished when I see neighbouring China which had the guts to tell the World Bank to get off its back and build the Three Gorges Dam on its own. It built it cheaper beating all timelines.

The recent inauguration of the 1140-km Golmud-Lhasa railway track, the highest in the world, was another among its crowning feats.

It entailed hundreds of innovations: foundations in permafrost; rail-track across Richter 8.5 earthquake fault-lines; pressurized trains; UV-protected windows; and piped oxygen in every coach. Chinese engineers not only did it all, but beat the five-year time-goal by several months. Technology was re-tailored all the time to suit China's need of mass employment. The pity is that while we continue our downhill slide, the rest of the world is galloping ahead at a mind-boggling speed. It is high time we face the reality honestly and find solutions which work. The key question is the ability to take more challenging responsibilities and deliver. The question is: do our technical graduates qualify for the challenge?

Technical education is the first option of our brightest children. Therefore, the onus is on our system of technical education to groom them to become king-pins in the technological thrust of our industry to compete with the best of the world. Education must also keep in step with the super fast and miraculous advancement of technology across the globe. If our NRI engineers deliver outstanding performance in every corner of the world, why can't we do the same in India? The critical link is our technical education system. It must not only be abreast with, but also keep pace with today's blistering pace of technological evolution. The gap is unfortunately large – industry is way ahead in technology. And the gap is widening by the hour. The only way to keep pace is proactive partnership with industry. If a frigid ice-wall has been built between academics and industry over the decades, it is time that the wall is destroyed.

Today, the door for industry to go abroad and pick up the best is wide open. Imports are easy. Duties are negligible. In a world of stagnant markets, the unshackled billion-strong Indian market growing at a fancy clip is a powerful lure for the best of the world to enter India. Direct entry, joint ventures, technology transfer or independent support for design and manufacture are there for the asking. Foreign money is freely available.

The administrative report of the Department of Education, Government of India for 2006-07 highlights some of major deficiencies in this respect. I quote:

”There are many challenges before the Technical Education system in the country. on the one hand there are sectoral imbalances in terms of the availability of opportunities and on the other there is uneven density of Professional Education Institutions in some of the regions. Some States are considerably lagging behind national average in availability of seats for admission. Making available adequate opportunities for admission and upgradation of Technical Education system are thus seen as the challenges before the Government.

Another area of concern is inadequate availability of faculty both in terms of quality and in numbers. Assuring quality of technical faculty and constant upgradation with reference to the fast changes taking place in the world, are the areas which need to be addressed. Promotion of R&D

efforts, improvement in employability of trained graduates and postgraduates coming out of the technical institutes, are some of the areas where efforts are required to be concentrated". Unquote

The phenomenon of privatization has led to the emergence of market economy. In the field of education too, there have emerged various compulsions in the public provision of education, which have given rise to the growth of private educational institutions in the last two decades. It is however imperative that a regulatory frame work is put in place so that there is no commercialization of education and also there is effective prevention of racketeering and exploitation in this regard. Subject to this, we should have no inhibition to allow private players to function in the country with a reasonable degree of autonomy and freedom for providing quality education. We need to draw up proper regulatory guidelines for the private sector, to ensure the quality of higher education. it is, therefore important that we develop effective regulatory framework for the private universities, particularly in terms of their admission, fees, teaching-learning process and governance. We must ensure that in the name of *regulating* the private institutions, we desist from making any attempt for *controlling* them. All we should do is to remove the bureaucratic shackles which lead to the undermining of the initiative and independence of private players.

These issues I have highlighted in this address deserve focused attention so that we may arrive at some meaningful conclusions and develop appropriate strategies in this regard. With

these words, I thank the AICTE for organizing the conference to discuss the need and feasibility for reforms in the sector of Technical Education.

Jai Hind