

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS BY SMT. D. PURANDESWARI, HON'BLE MOS-HRD (HE) AS
CHIEF GUEST FOR "UNIVERSITIES OF INDIA" CONCLAVE IN BANGLORE ON 24-1-2009

Distinguished friends and guests and ladies and gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to deliver the valedictory address in the Universities of India Conclave which is being attended *inter alia* by eminent personalities like Vice-Chancellors of the various universities and leading heads of some front ranking Corporate Houses in the country.

Universities play a pivotal role in creating a pool of qualified people with the knowledge and skills to contribute significantly to the economic development of a country. In an era of globalization and knowledge, countries around the world have recognized the necessity and significance of higher education in order to compete with each other. The Indian higher-education sector, in the past decade, has undergone many structural and academic changes to establish institutions of academic repute on par with international standards. However, the changing nature of a growing economy demands that the education sector is capable of continuous innovation to meet corporate requirements.

Recognizing the strategic importance of the education sector in India, Dun & Bradstreet (D&B), the world's leading provider of business information knowledge and insight, in association with Mindlogicx InfoTech Limited, the R&D based technology development company for knowledge management services has decided to announce the launch of its publication, '*Universities of India 2008*'. The publication is a repository of

the leading Indian universities with brief profiles and key statistics. It is a ready reference tool on the education sector and universities in India highlighting their viewpoints and some of the prominent issues and challenges faced by them.

The publication I understand, would be an annual initiative starting from 2008. The objective is to show-case the knowledge base of Indian universities to the world and more specifically to the corporate and industry partners. The publication will be made available to all leading educational institutions, industrial houses, universities in India and in select countries abroad. This will enable Indian universities to reach out to the global market in order to create employment opportunity for their students in the global market place.

I welcome this initiative because for the first time, the UoI will be connecting the industry and academia and bringing them together under one roof. It will create the opportunity for the academia to network with the CEOs, thought leaders, entrepreneurs and corporate decision makers from around the world. This event would be an ideal launch pad for students of participating universities as they would gain immediate access to world class employment opportunity. I am sure this will enable fostering of industry-academic collaboration and result in a meaningful partnership between them in the long run.

While India has a great history of education, we do face some challenges. India is fast becoming one of the leading economies of the world on one hand, while on the other we are still in the process of taking education, especially higher education, to a global level. The age group of

6-24 years, which is the most prospective age group in terms of academic enrolments and accounts for more than one third of the country's population, gives an indication about the potential that the education sector holds for us. However, while we are faced with prospects of churning out more graduates annually, unfortunately only 25% of these are likely to be suitable for employment. On the brighter side, the country's higher education system has changed its unidirectional approach and is slowly transitioning into producing professionals with better quality education. The education system is now gearing itself for the challenges ahead and meeting the requirements of the evolving economy. The XI Five Year Plan intends to achieve a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of at least 15% by end of the plan period (2007-2012). Additionally, the government has approved expansions in secondary and higher education, and has proposed to set up eight new IITs, seven IIMs, five Indian institutes of science, 16 central universities, 14 world class universities, 20 Information technology institutes, 10 new National Institutes of Technology and 1000 polytechnics. Albeit on a gradual scale, the desired changes in higher education have thus started taking place.

The issue of industry-academia relationship has gained a sense of immediacy because we now live in a global economy. Collaboration with industry should be an important feature in university development. A combination of factors such as the difficulty faced by graduate in the job market, unsuitability or traditional courses for industrial purpose, insensitiveness or ignorance of academics about specific problems facing industry, rapid development of new technologies and the scope for universities to seek new resources as also need to provide practical

training and exposures to students and teachers, signify the urgent need to establish close collaboration between university institutions and industry. To-day the competitiveness of companies determines the prosperity of which is in turn determined by continuous upgradation of ones skills, capabilities and output. Learning, rather lifelong learning which is an important value on its own right, has now become an economic compulsion. Hence, a country's educational system is in the current scenario central to its competitiveness. Of the nine parameters used by the World Economic Forum, Geneva to judge an economy's competitiveness, five are connected to the quality and quantity of its education system. This means not only the skill sets that students possess on graduating but also the attitude sets that are inculcated in the process of their learning and capabilities that arise from the interaction of skills and attitudes in performing tasks successfully, are important. On training people our IITs especially, have become a global brand. If any proof was needed that it is the quality of human capital that determines the economic performance of a country, then it is India. We have to leverage our young demographic profile to sustain and enhance this advantage. How our education system performs is critical to this process. When we speak of Academia-Industry interaction, we have to focus on two major points. One, the ability of academia to meet the requirement of industry for trained manpower. Second, the co-operation between academia and industry in finding solutions, even ideas that may lead to solutions, to issues facing industry.

In my view, there are five critical issues in our education system which have to be continually reviewed . First, is the declining quality of our teachers. Second, we are allowing far too many disinterested students into

higher education leading to 'quantity' rather than 'quality' as end-products of our higher educational system. Third, our education system lacks vocational bias and opportunities. Fourth, we have too little of practical work to neutralize the overdose of theory and fifth, there is very little teamwork. All study and its evaluation is based on individual effort and performance. In an annual ranking of the top 200 universities in the world by the respected "The Times Higher Education" we have only 3 institutions, IITs, IIMs and JNU. Of these only JNU is a university. Tiny Israel has 3 universities in this list and China 5. This should make us sit up and do some self searching. Perhaps, the governance of our universities and the lack of coordination between research and teaching, especially in the sciences, are key reasons for this situation. This calls for an indepth investigation and appropriate remedial measures.

As I said earlier, we have adequate quantity but not enough quality. Various estimates suggest that even in professional courses like engineering, less than 25% of the graduates are really employable. In industry today quality is a non-negotiable requirement. There is no market for poor quality, It is this systemic devaluation of quality in the education system which is worrying the industry.

I believe some of the measures needed to improve the quality of education in our country are: (1) Greater freedom to set up and manage educational institutions, including to reputed foreign educational institutions subject to appropriate regulatory control. (2) Regular updation of curricula in consultation with industry. (3) Improved remuneration to faculty based on performance. For example, as in the US, faculty compensation should

partly be linked to research funding obtained by a faculty, so that there is an incentive and reward for doing research. When the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research was setup it was decided that specialized labs would do industrial research. The budget of CSIR of over Rs. 1000 Crs annually exceeds the research spending of all the Universities put together. But even after nearly five decades, only 25% of the earnings of CSIR labs come from outside and 75% comes from government grants.

Let me now turn to industry which is fundamentally different from what it was in the nineties of the last century. Today, it competes successfully with global players because very many major world players are present in our markets. Our industry is now investing more in taking over companies abroad. During last two or three years Indian companies have spent Rs. 20,000 Crores in overseas acquisitions. Spending on R&D by Indian companies in some sectors, though still low, is now gradually looking up. The encouraging thing in the manufacturing sector is that its not just the newer companies, but even many of the older companies which have done well. This is because companies have restructured in response to the altered operating environment which has become highly competitive. Our industries have realized that to survive, let alone prosper, Indian companies need globally competitive manpower. Between 1990-91 and 2004-05 R&D spending by Indian industry grew eight fold. This is an encouraging trend.

Knowledge and business are intimately linked and in today's knowledge driven economic environment, national educational strength is the basis for a nation's economic and social prosperity. We should

continually strengthen our educational institutions and industry-academia interaction must play an important role in this process. I believe a start can be made by allowing our faculty to take one year sabbaticals in R&D units of companies. They will understand the logic of industrial R&D, and industry would have the opportunity to assess the value of the better power of conceptualization and idea generation that academicians have.

The future, as an eminent American philosopher, John Schaar, put so well, and I quote **"is not the result of choices among alternative paths offered by the present, but a place that is created- created first in mind and will, created next in activity. The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths to it are not found but made, and the activity of making them, changes both the maker and the destination"**. Unquote

With these words, I have great pleasure in sharing my perception with you on a matter of topical importance.

Jai Hind.