

Speech of Hon'ble HRM on National Education Day

1. Respected Pradhan Mantri ji, Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, Director General, UNESCO, Smt. D. Purandeswari, Minister of State for HRD, Secretary (School & Higher Education) noted academics, distinguished guests, senior officers, Members of Press/Media and dear children.
2. I feel privileged to welcome you all to celebrate our National Education Day. Today, we commemorate the Birth Anniversary of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a great visionary, freedom fighter, scholar, secular thinker, eminent educationist and the first Education Minister of India.
3. On behalf of the Ministry of Human Resource Development and on my own behalf, I have great pleasure in welcoming the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh who has very kindly consented to be our Chief Guest. His commitment to ensure quality education for India to meet the challenges of the 21st Century is as visionary as the Maulana's belief in the critical role education plays in nation building. Thank you, Sir for being with us. It is also my privilege to welcome Shri Koichiro Matsuura, Director General of UNESCO who has come to participate in this celebration. While welcoming Mr. Matsuura, I also wish to thank him personally and UNESCO for having agreed to set up the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development as a Category – I Institute of UNESCO in India. I also extend a warm welcome to Secretary Generals and delegates of the National Commission of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka as also distinguished academics, officials and students who have joined us today in this celebration.
4. Maulana Azad was an intellectual par excellence. His profound and vast knowledge, sharp and luminous intellect, steadfastness of purpose, philosophy of life and incisive worldview continues to inspire us all. He contributed to the laying of a strong foundation for education in India. His commitment to provide secular, liberal, modern and universal education is relevant even today and continues to guide us for achieving education for all. The corner stone of his education policy was his conviction that democracy cannot function without the eradication of illiteracy. His philosophy on education is reflected in the

National Policy on Education and remained a corner stone for many commissions and committees which built upon the broad framework of that policy. In fact, addressing the conference on All India Education on January 16, 1948, Maulana Azad emphasized, "We must not for a moment forget, it is a birth right of every individual to receive at least the basic education without which he cannot fully discharge his duties as a citizen." He emphasized on educating the rural poor and girls. As Chairman of the Central Advisory Board of Education, he gave thrust to adult illiteracy, universal primary education, free and compulsory for all children upto the age of 14, girl's education, and diversification of secondary education and vocational training. Maulana Azad had also chaired the General Conference of UNESCO.

5. I am happy to share with you that in the year 2009, we have achieved a key vision of Maulana Azad. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 recently enacted will bring access to quality education to an estimated 160 million children, presently out of school. Our Government has also recently launched the Saakshar Bharat Programme focussing on women's literacy.
6. We in India recognize that the task of nation building, reducing poverty and ensuring education for all, cannot be met without a large stock of human capital equipped with quality knowledge and skills, to foster a knowledge society. To meet the requirements of EFA and to provide secondary and vocational training to the youth, we require millions of teachers. The young may be hungry for learning, but we may not have quality teachers to ignite their minds. The social order must respect teachers who all play a pivotal role in building a peaceful and just society.
7. In higher education, we are faced with four major challenges – access to higher education; ensuring excellence; increasing global interaction and the growing use of technologies.
8. Unlike many other countries, where the young working age population is fast shrinking with higher dependency ratios, India has a demographic advantage with about 70% of the population below the age of 35. But this advantage can

only be realised if opportunities for education expand on a massive scale. India's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of around 12.4% is unacceptable considering that the world average is 23.2%, 36.5% for countries in transition, 54.6% for the developed countries, and 22% for Asian countries. We are committed to achieve a GER of 30% by 2020.

9. The globalisation of higher education has also added newer challenges in terms of quality assurance system, issues of mutual recognition and equivalence of degrees and transparency in the regulatory structures of national systems of higher education. Towards this, our Government has initiated several reform measures. An independent mandatory accreditation system is being proposed. We also plan to introduce legislation to prohibit and punish malpractices and adoption of unfair practices in higher education. Further, a legislation to facilitate the entry of foreign education providers is also under consideration.
10. The implications of new and more diverse modes of delivery based on ICTs including e-learning, open educational resources and mobile technologies needs to be understood and harnessed. The ICT revolution worldwide has facilitated ready access to information and diverse knowledge. It is, therefore, important that our Universities and Colleges develop a system of knowledge management to reap the benefits of the information technology revolution. We have already launched a National Mission on Education through ICT which in the next three years will provide internet connectivity to over 20,000 degree colleges and over 10,000 departments in Universities.
11. A globalised world will ultimately require the outsourcing of human skills in regions which will witness a 'demographic deficit.' Skilled human capital will have to be imported to certain regions to sustain economic growth. In that sense the developed world has a huge stake in ensuring that the human resource available in large numbers in developing economies is adequately empowered by investing in their education and skill development. The presence of DG, UNESCO will help in ensuring coordination and cooperation amongst countries in empowering populations through education.

12. The three major issues of education in today's world, namely access, equity and quality need to be addressed in a holistic manner to ensure that our systems of education and research not only contribute to nation building but also to create a knowledge society, with values of sustainability, peace and development. This was the vision of our great leaders. This is the vision that underlines all our policies and programmes.

13. Let me conclude by quoting Mahatma Gandhi, Father of the nation on Maulana. "Maulana is the Emperor of learning. I consider him as a person of the calibre of Plato, Aristotle and Pythagorus." I again extend a warm welcome to all gathered here to pay tribute to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a freedom fighter, revolutionary journalist, social reformer, champion of communal harmony and a visionary Education Minister. I am sure his vision, ideas and action will continue to inspire us in translating our endeavours to provide quality education for all.

Thank you.