



# Address by the President of India to students and faculty of higher educational institutions and officer trainees at civil service academies through video conference

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Vice chancellors of central universities;  
Directors of IITs, NITs, IISERs and other institutions of learning;  
Heads of various civil service academies;  
Faculty members;  
Officer trainees of civil services;  
My dear students:

1. Let me begin by wishing you all a very happy, healthy and prosperous New Year. May this year see the fulfilment of your dreams and aspirations! May this year be full of peace, prosperity and harmony for our beloved country!

Friends:

2. After I started addressing you through video conference in January 2014, I have had the occasion to interact with you on this platform six times. Let me thank the teams from National Informatics Centre and the National Knowledge Network for facilitating this interface. In the past, I have spoken on various themes such as democracy and governance, parliament and policy-making, energizing higher educational institutions, youth and nation building, and making innovation a way of life. I have enjoyed speaking to you as much as I have, listening to the teachers and students. For today's talk, I have chosen the topic, "building a happy society".

3. You may well ask me why I have chosen to speak to you on this somewhat abstract theme. I was looking at the progress that India has made in the last sixty-five years. In 1951, our population was 360 million. Today, we are a 1.3 billion strong nation. In these six and a half decades, our annual per capita income has gone up from Rs. 7,500 to over Rs. 77,000; GDP growth rate from 2.3 percent to 7.6 percent in 2015-16. The poverty ratio has declined from over 60 per cent to less than 25 percent. The average life expectancy has gone up from 31.4 to 68.4 years. Literacy rate has gone up from 18 to 74 percent. Food grains production has gone up from 45 million to 252 million tonne in 2015-16. From a nation dependent on imports to feed its population, we are a food surplus country and a leading exporter of food commodities.

4. We are today the fastest growing amongst the major economies of the world. We are the second largest reservoir of scientific and technical manpower, the third military power, the sixth member of the nuclear club, the sixth in the race for space and the tenth industrial power.

5. In stark contradiction, on the ranking of happiness as reported in the World Happiness Report 2015, we are at the 117<sup>th</sup> position out of the 158 countries mapped. This is even more surprising when we look at our civilizational legacy. We are a nation of festivals. Celebration of life is a part of our nature. The concepts of *bahujan sukhai bahujan hitai* and *sarve bhavantu sukhinah* have been as old as our civilization. Our prayers are not complete unless we pray for peace, or "*shanti*" of universe, earth, trees, forests and all others, both living and non-living. Sages taught us time and again that material gain alone cannot fulfil all our needs. Our search for peace, happiness and well-being extends much beyond.

6. Happiness is fundamental to the human experience of life. Ever since the Prime Minister of Bhutan brought up a resolution in the UN General Assembly in 2011, inviting member nations to measure happiness of their people and to use it to guide public policies, the subject has deeply engaged the minds of policymakers. Today, large numbers of countries are looking at happiness and well-being as the touchstones of public policy. These facts set me thinking! Why cannot we make attainment of happiness and well-being as a touchstone for our education system as well? And what better occasion to talk about it than at the beginning of a new year with a bright, educated, energetic and talented audience which I see in front of me?

My young friends:

7. Youth today are brimming with hope and aspirations. They pursue their life goals, which they perceive will bring them fame, success and happiness, with single-minded devotion. They consider happiness as their existential objective, which of course is understandable. They search for "affective happiness" in the highs and lows of day-to-day emotions, and "evaluative happiness" in the fulfilment of life objectives they have set for themselves. At the individual level, happiness is a state of mind. At the societal plane, happiness is a complex phenomenon as it is intrinsically linked to the harmony amongst and fulfilment of goals of the society and its members.

8. Happiness is equally the outcome of non-economic and economic parameters. The quest for happiness is closely tied to the quest for sustainable development, which is the combination of human well-being, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. The focus has to be on eliminating poverty, ensuring environmental sustainability, working towards social inclusion, and providing good governance to achieve the goals of sustainable development. Eradication of poverty would provide a strong boost to happiness. A sustainable environment would prevent irreparable harm to the planetary resources and to future generations. Social inclusion would ensure access to the fruits of progress to all. Good governance implies the ability of people to shape their own lives through transparent and accountable participatory political institutions.

9. Detailed research has shown that there are some basic attributes of happiness and well-being. Factors that have been found to differentiate the level of happiness in the different regions of the world are: per capita income; healthy years of life expectancy; social support; level of trust; perceived freedom to make life decisions; and generosity. Higher income is no doubt important. But equally important are a better frame of mind and body, and existence of trust in the society. Material wealth can provide comfort but not necessarily happiness.

Friends:

10. In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, Sage Yajnavalkya tells his wife Maitreyi that whatever we do, we do it for our happiness. And that happiness is derived from the perceived promise of fulfilment of our own incompleteness. If I extend this thought to our day-to-day work life, I can say that when I perform my duty, I do it because it brings me joy; it gives me happiness.

11. If an educational institution evokes in a student that feeling of being fulfilled, it will create in the student a happy frame of mind where learning will become a joyful experience. Good infrastructure; inspired teachers; closeness to nature will all contribute to promoting a feeling of well-being. Students will look forward to education and desire to become a part of that education eco-system. The institutions of higher learning - its academic leaders, faculty, students and alumni - have to work together to create that eco-system where learning becomes a joyous experience; where education leads to gaining of knowledge and wisdom, and breeds a feeling of happiness. It is our educational institutes, the temples of learning, which must create these waves of happy human beings, who will build a happy India. Only those who are happy can spread happiness. Youth comprises more than 65

percent of India's total population. If we have happy youth, they can work towards happiness in the society.

12. The question that now arises is: what is the path to happiness? I present a tool box which you may like to use:

a) Happiness is associated with joy and pride, smiling and laughter, good health and enjoyment, creativity and innovation, feeling of safety and other positive actions. You can enhance happiness by learning to wear a smile always; laugh at life; connecting with nature and getting involved with the community. Take interest in sports and nurture a healthy body. Be mindful of what you eat. Distinguish between need and greed. Bringing smiles on the faces of the deprived and the under-privileged can be a truly rewarding experience. Kabiguru Rabindranath Tagore had said and I quote: "*I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy*" (unquote). You can do that.

b) Unhappiness is associated with anger, sadness, worry, depression, stress and pain. We see abundance of such negative feelings around us. Incidents of violence against women, road rage, substance abuse, and suicides are all manifestations of this unhappiness. This has to be dealt with by inculcating positive emotions and by displacing negative emotions. Seek help if you need it. Practice yoga and meditation. Every person suffers from negative feelings associated with unhappiness some time or the other in their lives. The success lies in decreasing the occurrence of such feelings by increasing the strength of positive feelings associated with happiness. You can leave behind a bad experience quickly by pro-social behaviour, including empathy and altruism. Look inwards for happiness.

c) Make books your best friends. Develop a love for books and inculcate the habit of reading. Develop an interest for art and culture. Become a keen observer of your surroundings and environment. Develop a habit of life-long learning. Think through the problems and their solutions. Remember that our happiness is not divisible. If we care for 'others', then we also share our knowledge and other resources with them. Happiness then becomes an inevitable derivative of a humane pursuit.

13. I invite you to use this toolbox. I wish you Godspeed in achieving a state of true happiness.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.

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