



Speech by the Hon'ble President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind at the 'Vigyan Chintan- scientific ecosystem in Kolkata' (interaction with scientific community)

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1. It gives me great pleasure to be at this special gathering of the scientific community of Kolkata and to interact with and learn from some of our country's finest intellectual minds. I am happy to know about your work and future plans.
2. In many senses, I am in a city that has been the capital of modern Indian science. As far back as 1876, the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science was set up by Dr Mahendra Lal Sircar in Kolkata. As the name suggests, it was felt that there was a need to cultivate and promote the spirit of science and inquiry among Indians.
3. In subsequent years, this city contributed many illustrious names to our galaxy of scientists and technologists. J.C. Bose and S.N. Bose and Meghnad Saha are household names across India. C.V. Raman worked here in Kolkata and won the Nobel Prize for his findings and discoveries. In the 19th century, the brilliant mathematician Radhanath Sikdar was the first to measure the height of Mount Everest. But he was denied the credit by the then colonial government.
4. And Bengal's scientists did not just confine themselves to the laboratory. The chemist Acharya P.C. Ray was an ardent nationalist who used his knowledge to set up the first Indian-owned pharmaceutical company - Bengal Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals. A few weeks ago, I visited Bengaluru and had a similar interaction with scientists at the Indian Institute of Science in that city. I learnt that the Indian Institute of Science was started after Bengal's very own Swami Vivekananda requested Jamsetji Tata to set up a world-class science research institution in our country.
5. There is truly something special about Bengal. On this soil even a Swami devoted to spiritualism can have a sensitive appreciation for - and a fascination for - modern science.
6. To this day, young students from Bengal, young science graduates and scientists, young engineers and technologists, contribute so much to the furthering of science and of knowledge. They do so all over the country and all over the world. It is important to harness that scientific talent pool in Bengal for the good of Bengal itself. And to once more convert Kolkata into the tech hub of India that it was a century ago, or even 50 years ago.
7. I appreciate the commitment of scientists to the nation. You make India proud. I can say without doubt that you are true nation builders and have a major responsibility for the realisation of New India - an India that will achieve certain developmental milestones by 2022. New India cannot be achieved without New Bengal. And neither New India nor New Bengal can be achieved without the scientific community here contributing in strong measure.
8. And yet, I would not want to confine the excitement of science to the narrow achievement of developmental goals - whether in healthcare or sanitation, agriculture or renewable energy.
9. In its essence, science is about human fascination and curiosity. It is about that endless quest for new frontiers. For thousands of years, from the age of Aryabhatta and Charaka, India has embraced science and its sense of inquiry. Science has been our intellectual trigger as well as our force multiplier.

10. In modern times Kolkata and Bengal have been central to this process. Today the challenge is to widen that culture to other geographies, both within the state and outside. As well as to deepen that culture by incubating a society that understands, encourages and embraces innovation – down from our leading scientific institutions to our schools and our educational system.

11. After listening to all of you today, I am confident we are on the right track. To borrow the words of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, we can look forward to a dynamic era when it will be said: “What Bengal innovates today, India innovates tomorrow!”

12. Thank you all for making excellent presentations. I am sure after this interaction you will go back both energised and determined to do more. I wish you and your colleagues the very best in your endeavours to achieve excellence and contribute to nation building.

Thank you

Jai Hind

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