



Speech of the Hon'ble Governor of Andhra Pradesh

Sri Biswa Bhusan Harichandan

at the Video Conference with Vice Chancellors of Universities in AP
on "Challenges being faced by the Institutions of Higher Education
during the COVID-19 pandemic and the way out"

Sri A. Suresh, Minister for Education, Prof. K. Hemachandra Reddy, Chairman, AP State Council of Higher Education, Sri Mukesh Kumar Meena, Secretary to Governor, Vice Chancellors of State Universities and other Officers, a very Good Morning to you all.

I consider today's meeting as very special as we are all passing through an unprecedented global pandemic posed by the COVID-19 and the kind of turbulence created by it, more particularly for the institutions of higher learning.

In the conference held in December 2019, we have discussed many issues and decided to strengthen the Universities and colleges and to work on a holistic perspective to improve quality and standards of higher education in the state.

With the resolve of the government, the leadership provided by the Vice-Chancellors and strategic support from the Andhra Pradesh State Council of Higher Education, the higher education in the State is headed in the right direction.

However, the COVID- 19 pandemic is posing a real threat to the mankind and the higher education institutions are constrained to give a break in the Academic year, in the interest of health and welfare of the students and employees.

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced schools and colleges to shut down temporarily and is causing havoc in the education system. According to UNESCO report, more than 157 crore students across 191 countries, including 320 million students in India, are severely impacted by closure of educational institutions due to corona virus. The issue of the COVID-19 and its impact on higher education is a emergent focus of debate worldwide. Closing universities and cancelling classes has become a reality in many countries of the world, leading to enormous anxiety and uncertainty.

Though the COVID-19 pandemic has created a crisis situation, it is necessary that a way is found in which the academic activity is carried forward without any hindrance. Innovation is the key in such circumstance and new avenues have to be explored. A new dimension and direction is needed in continuing the process of teaching, learning and evaluation system.

The objective of today's conference of Vice Chancellors is to assess the challenges being faced by the Higher education institutions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and to discuss the ways in which their functioning is continued without diluting the quality or standards.

The University Grants Commission has been providing guidance to all the higher education institutions in the country on the ways to engage students as well as faculty members productively during this turbulent time. I am confident that all Universities are following the UGC guidelines issued from time to time and initiating activities accordingly.

The COVID-19 pandemic is certainly a short term phenomenon. Though it is not possible at this juncture to predict when the this pandemic is going to end, scientists all over the world are making dedicated efforts to find a viable vaccine for the COVID-19. Until such time, it is necessary for us all to face the challenges posed by the virus and devise innovative strategies to overcome the difficulties posed by the pandemic. There are certain areas in the higher education which can be focused upon during this period by utilising available resources in a productive manner. Curriculum design and development being one such area.

It is the right time to review the existing academic programmes at under graduate and post graduate level thoroughly and tune them in accordance with the future needs.

We are in the midst of fourth industrial revolution and digitalisation is the core theme of it. It is necessary to make digital skills part of all academic

programmes irrespective of the discipline of learning. Encourage students to take up short term courses such as Artificial Intelligence, Data Analytics, Big Data, Cloud Computing, Business Analytics etc. Academic programmes offered by Universities should ensure that effective skills such as creative thinking, problem solving, reflective thinking, communication across cultures, leadership, team building, content development, creative writing, and so on are adequately addressed and students are leaving the institution are equipped with relevant competencies and confidence to face new challenges in the real world.

I am glad to know that the Andhra Pradesh State Council of Higher Education has taken up the task of developing model curriculum for under graduate programmes including engineering and the same will be implemented from the Academic year 2020-21. This new curriculum consists of life skills, skill development courses, skill enhancement courses along with required number of core courses. The uniqueness concept of this design is to include 10-month mandatory internship/on-the job training for every student to make them employable immediately after completion of their degree.

Community service project for two months is also made as an integral part of the curriculum to connect students and colleges with the neighbourhood villages/localities and to make them part of the development process of such villages and localities. I think it is for the first time that a comprehensive outcome-based curriculum is designed and it is certainly a welcome step in the process to redefine higher education in the state.

All the Vice-Chancellors are requested to focus their attention to redesign the academic programmes as per the national and global needs by involving experts from the industry, businesses and academicians around the globe for the purpose.

It is probably first time in our country to experiment with the education system and make a paradigm shift to the virtual world, blending classrooms

with online learning. It is true that the conventional system of education is time tested and superior on many counts. But when the situation demands, it is necessary to explore other means to continue the teaching and learning process. Online teaching through digital mode is certainly an alternative available to face this challenge. However, there are certain constraints in online mode in reaching out and engaging students.

The Universities and Colleges should focus on development of e-infrastructure adequately to address the challenges of online teaching. Student engagement in a free environment of learning is yet another major challenge.

It is of paramount importance to prepare quality e-content as per the requirements of the different academic programmes. The content developed should be made accessible online for the benefit of the students.

The University Grants Commission has directed all the Universities to conduct examinations to the final year students before September 2020. All the Universities are required to make necessary preparations for the conduct of examinations by following COVID –19 protocols.

It is necessary to also train the teaching faculty on content development suitable for online delivery, technology applications, presentation techniques and evaluation methodologies. The Universities should take a lead in organizing capacity building programmes for the teachers working in Universities as well as in Colleges.

The COVID – 19 pandemic is, no doubt an unforgettable experience to the entire mankind as it has caused disruption to every aspect of human life. Need of the hour is to learn lessons from these experiences and explore new ways to protect ourselves from the pandemic. The COVID-19 may end soon but the damage it created will have long lasting implications. The Higher Education Institutions can play a greater role as a torch-bearer in

guiding the society and the government in taking measures to prevent such occurrences in the future.

I take this opportunity to inform you all that the Government is ready to extend all possible help and support to the Higher Education Institutions in the State to overcome the challenges faced by them due to the COVID – 19.

I am glad to note that Andhra Pradesh State Council of Higher Education is monitoring the situation closely and is providing necessary guidance to the institutions at various levels.

Jai Hind