

Need to have clear regulatory framework : PM Modi

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While inaugurating the Indian Science Congress in Mumbai on January 03, 2015, the prime minister, Mr Narendra Modi appreciated the role of scientists. In his words, " I feel humbled by the work that scientists do. And, I find science and technology an invaluable ally in governance and development."

Mr Modi also mentioned the role of science in ancient Indian culture and said that it is a search driven by the belief in what our Vedas described as, Satye Sarvam Pratisthanam - Everything is established in Truth.

"Science and technology has helped reduce poverty and advance prosperity; fight hunger and improve nutrition; conquer diseases, improve health and give a child a better chance to survive; connect us to our loved ones and the world; spread education and awareness; and, given us clean energy that can make our habitat more sustainable," added Mr Modi.

Modi also talked about the higher level of scientific involvement in diplomatic relations. He mentioned that as a PM, he placed agriculture, biotechnology and nanoscience on focus during his talks with leaders while travelling abroad.

Modi also talked about importance of science in building great economy. "A nation's progress and its human development are linked to science and technology. In more recent times, China's emergence as the second biggest global economy is in parallel to its rise to the second place in science and technology activities," said the prime minister.

In his inaugural speech, PM Modi asked scientists to make agriculture more resilient and yield more; to develop appropriate and affordable technologies for rural areas. At the same time, he asked them to help in preserving the biodiversity; and keep environment clean.

Modi emphasized on methods to improve healthcare and develop medicines and medical devices that is within the reach of poorest. He asked researchers to make clean energy affordable and its use more efficient.

"Too often, a discussion on science and technology is reduced to a question of budgets. It is important; and I am confident that it will continue to grow. But, our own achievements have shown that very often a need and vision and passion are more important than resource for success," said Modi on the references to miniscule allocation of funds.

Modi owned the responsibility of his government as major source of science and technology efforts in the country.

"When I speak of ease of doing business in India, I also want to pay equal attention to the ease of doing research and development in India. Funding proposals must not take too long to clear; meeting application requirement should not become more complex than research; approval process should not become a deterrent for international conference; and, our scientific departments must have flexibility of funding decisions based on the uncertainties inherent in research activities.

"We want our scientists and researchers to explore the mysteries of science, not of government procedures. We want them to consider publications, not government approvals, to be the epitome of their success," added the prime minister.

We must also have clear regulatory policies for research and development in areas like biotechnology, Nano-Science, agriculture and clinical research.

We should ensure that our strong intellectual property regime continues to work effectively and provides the right balance between private incentives and social good.

Further, not just scientific departments, but every other department in the Government should see how to apply science and technology and promote research to improve their work. Each should have an officer focusing on science and technology relating to its area of work; and, allocate a percentage of its budget for such activities. We have begun this experience with Space technology.

Investments in science and technology activities should also become part of the expenditure on corporate social responsibility - to be funded directly or through an autonomous fund.

We also need to foster a strong culture of collaboration between institutions and across disciplines to take advantage of developments, innovations and expertise in diverse areas. My impression is that this is far from the ideal in India

Prime minister assured that he will ask his ministries to make collaborations a critical requirement for their institutions and for supporting funding requests for research.

"We have to place the university system at the cutting edge of the research and development activities in the country. Our investments in science and technology are far too concentrated in the agencies of the Central Government and must become more broad-based. Our universities must be freed from the clutches of excessive regulation and cumbersome procedures. They must have a higher degree of academic freedom and autonomy; and, there should be as much emphasis on research as on teaching. In turn, the universities must also subscribe to the highest academic and research standards and accountability."

Modi asked the industry to step up investments in science in its own interest. India's own pharmaceutical industry has carved out a place for itself in the world, because it invests significantly in research, he said.

"Indeed, our long term global competitiveness will depend not on replicating what others have done, but through a process of sustained development and innovation. There is a growing trend of international collaboration in research and development, not just among business enterprises, but equally among researchers and scholars at universities and laboratories. We should take full advantage of this."