

**Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry
Higher Education Summit
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Honourable Ministers; Excellencies; Distinguished delegates.

It is an honour to be here today, to celebrate India's National Education Day, to mark the birthday of Maulana Abdul Kalaam Azad, and to begin this sixth annual Higher Education Summit of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

We are here on an auspicious day. November 11th is celebrated in many Commonwealth countries as Remembrance Day, an occasion on which to look back with thanks on the sacrifices that others have made during wartime so that we can live today in free and prosperous societies.

If today is a day to look back with thanks, it is also a day to look to the future with hope. I believe that India's choice to name November 11th as National Education Day is wise indeed. As India's first Education Minister, Maulana Azad, laid an admirable foundation for this country's future, establishing free education at the primary level and laying the cornerstones of intellectual and economic success by helping to found the Indian Institutes of Technology.

Maulana Azad made personal sacrifices in support of his fervent belief that people of different cultures and different religions could live and work together for mutual benefit. That, clearly, is a lesson that we can and must learn many times over and I will argue today that the people who learn it best will enjoy the greatest success.

I have three goals in speaking to you today. First, I would like to bring greetings from Canada, and especially from our Canadian institutions of higher education.

Second, I want to propose to you what I believe is the very high value proposition of partnering with Canadian universities.

Third, I must commend the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, as well as the governments of India and Canada, for their support of higher education.

I am proud to say that I have come from Canada as part of the largest delegation of Canadian university presidents ever to go abroad together. It was a nightmare coordinating our schedules!

I hope you will recognize this venture as evidence of our commitment to building and enriching our relationship with India.

I would not presume to tell you what a magnificent future stretches out before India today. All of you are much more directly involved than am I in the flourishing successes in India's economy and society.

But I think it is important to say, in the clearest and most enthusiastic terms, that we in Canada have noticed what is happening here. We are engaged. We are excited. We want to be part of your success and we believe that we have the resources – intellectual as well as material – to join with you endeavours.

Our trip to India has been the catalyst for extraordinary collaboration among Canadian universities. Fifteen university presidents have come to Delhi. Together, we are working to provide opportunities for undergraduate students, and to build research and teaching links with our Indian counterparts.

Members of the Canadian delegation have today already

announced new financial commitments, and have set in motion many activities that will bring Canadian universities closer to Indian students and institutions. At home in Canada, other universities have joined us to create the joint funding of 50 full fellowships for Indian graduate students to complete their Masters or Doctoral degrees in Canada.

This Fellowship program is an interesting investment for three reasons: First, it acknowledges the high value that we put on talented and hard-working Indian students. The great universities of the world are always competing for talent and it is increasingly clear that some of the very best talent available today is coming out of India's educational system.

Second, this investment demonstrates that when it comes to attracting India's great students, Canadian institutions have chosen to compete as a group, rather than to battle among

ourselves. The particular program I mentioned involves 8 Canadian universities that have decided to work together to attract and provide opportunities for stellar Indian graduate students. That leads to the third thing that makes this an interesting investment for us: in a world where innovation is increasingly the most valuable of all resources, our Canadian institutions want to do whatever we can to help India innovate – to help you build your own intellectual and research capacity – and we want to stay closely connected so that we may also learn from you.

Lest you think that we are here simply to tempt away your best students, let me stress that it is in our interest to ensure that this is a mutually beneficial relationship. We know that the connections made by students turn into academic and business contacts in the future. Of course Canada wants to attract talent. But we are also committed to seeing many Canadian-educated

students return to their home countries, helping to build bridges that will ensure future social and cultural exchange as well as business opportunities.

The University of British Columbia has considerable experience in building these bridges. We already have formal agreements in place with Indian institutions including the University of Delhi and various Indian Institutes of Technology. We have regularly received and sent out talented students through an active student mobility agreement with IIT Delhi that has been in place for more than a decade. We also have other exchange agreements linking us to institutions across the country in a variety of disciplines. And, I can tell you, each such agreement creates not just a lasting connection, but an appetite for more extensive collaboration.

Now, permit me to say a little about what Canada has to offer to prospective Indian students – what is that “value proposition” that I noted earlier?

I should perhaps first say that none of my comments should be taken as criticism of the offerings from other jurisdictions. My colleague and the next speaker, Georgetown University President Dr. John DeGioia could, I am sure, make a compelling argument for the value that American universities provide.

That said, 225,000 Indian students choose to study abroad each year and a further three million Indians between the ages of 18 and 24 are currently struggling to find available or affordable options for higher education.

There are obviously many great students who are looking for options inside and outside India. I want to ensure that when those

students are contemplating their choices for gaining a high quality education, Canada is among the destinations they consider.

A distinguishing characteristic of the Canadian system is that it is overwhelmingly public and relatively affordable. And the best of our institutions are consistently rated among the very top research intensive universities in the world. In Canada, outstanding quality and accessibility go hand in hand.

Indian students who choose to study in Canada arrive to discover a safe, open-minded, democratic and highly multicultural society that welcomes, indeed embraces, diversity. Alongside the several hundred Indians studying at the University of British Columbia as International Students, more than five per cent of our “domestic” students are of South Asian ancestry. Almost half of our student body boasts origins in Asian countries.

We take intercultural understanding very seriously. As I implied earlier, societies that have promoted cultural understanding and cooperation (India prominent among them) have proved in the past to be the most resilient, the most innovative and the most creative.

People who live in an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding are more comfortable to do their best work. At UBC, we have found that cultural diversity creates an intellectual and social vitality that is itself so valuable that we – as with many other Canadian institutions – now actively work to further diversify our student body, and our faculty.

Indian students who have already studied in Canada have also reported finding a concentration on critical thinking and problem solving rather than rote learning. We work hard to ensure that

our students understand *how* to think, rather than trying to convince them of *what* to think.

Our universities are widely varying in size. But many provide students with access to research. Our students find that they can enjoy a hands-on research opportunity even at the undergraduate level. And they are highly likely to wind up working in teams in which undergrads, graduate students and faculty members work together in a relationship that is collaborative rather than hierarchical.

Those were attributes that were reported by some of the 105 Indian students who participated in the Global Link program this summer. In the Global Link program, we have launched a series of summer internships in which international undergraduate students get to work alongside top-flight Canadian researchers. It is all organized through something called MITACS, a Canadian

research network that connects university-based researchers with industry, government and the not-for-profit sector to develop the tools and technologies that help support and expand Canada's knowledge-based economy.

The industry connection is immediate. Global Link students are usually working on applied research. They are searching directly for answers to challenges that Canadian and international industries and NGOs are facing in the highly competitive world.

The Indian students who have participated in the MITACS Global Link program are superlative.

Here in India, MITACS works with leading educational institutions, including IITS that are recognized as among the best in the world.

As you know, to be admitted to an IIT, students have to achieve the top 2 % in the IIT Junior Entrance Examinations. From this

impressive starting point, the Global Link students go on to achieve a CGPA average of 9.06. That's out of a total of ten.

In fact, one Global Link student came to UBC from BITS Pilani with a perfect score of ten. He is absolutely amazing – not only an outstanding scholar, but also a black-belt in Karate and a volunteer in the National Service Scheme. He is a shining example of the kind of person growing up in India today – someone with so much to contribute. He deserves every opportunity to thrive.

Ladies and gentlemen, we all must live – and I hope prosper – in the same, competitive world. And for that reason, I want to close by saying how impressed I am by the foresight that the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry shows in supporting a conference on higher education.

It is clear from developments over the last 20 years that India has three enormous advantages when it comes to building one of the world's great societies. The first I have already noted: India's great diversity and its democracy. Second is an ambitious spirit that has long been evident, sometimes to an exhausting extent, in India! And the third is a burgeoning education system that, I would argue, has empowered India's business leaders to be among the most creative and driven in the world.

What good fortune for Indian industry. You energize the domestic economy to such an extent that I understand the Indian growth rate is predicted to be at least 8.5% this year – a year in which many of the world's largest economies are still struggling at the edge of recession.

What a tribute to the Indian government's support of education – at every level. Maulana Azad's legacy is everywhere apparent.

I am equally grateful for the support that governments – and industry – show for education in my own country. At the provincial and national levels, Canadian governments recognize the value and underwrite the success of institutions engaged in everything from basic education at the primary level to university based research that often leads the world.

I am delighted to note that next year has been designated as “the Year of India in Canada.” I hope that this designation will last for many years to come. I also hope that we will be able to share more of what is best about Canada with you as you share your best with us. On behalf of all my colleagues, fifteen Canadian university presidents, let me thank you for your warm welcome. And let me conclude with the hope that you will look to us as eager partners in the further development of Indian society.