Pranab Mukherjee addresses AIIMS 40th convocation

New Delhi, Tue, 16 Oct 2012

President Pranab Mukherjee Tuesday said that development in the health sector is an important aspect of India's future place of prominence in the world and sought a high quality national health system that could serve the poor and the rich alike.

He was addressing the 40th annual convocation of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) here. The president said: "Progress in the health sector is key to India's future place of prominence in the world."

"The nation's productivity depends on the health and well-being of its citizens. Economic growth that does not go hand-in-hand with reduction in avoidable mortality and ill-health is neither sustainable nor desirable," he added.

He also asserted the need to create a high quality national health system that could serve the poor and the rich alike.

"It is unacceptable that almost 80 percent of the expenditure on healthcare by our people is met by personal, out of pocket, payment. I am shocked to note that as many as four crore people of our country plunge into poverty each year due to expenses on medical treatment. Yet, we should remember that the health services for the poor cannot be poor health services. We need to craft a high quality national health system that is used by the poor and the rich alike," Mukherjee stated.

Mukherjee said that the country should aim at achieving universal health coverage in the next two to three five-year plan periods.

"I visualise public spending on health rising to 2.5 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) by the end of the Twelfth (Five Year) Plan period," he added.

He also advocated the need for more nurses, doctors, paramedics and health workers. He emphasized the need to decentralise planning and implementation of healthcare to the district level and below.

"We need to take health services closer to the homes... the foundation of India's national health system must be strong, sensitive and efficient," Mukherjee said.

--with inputs from IANS