

**HON'BLE VICE-PRESIDENT OF INDIA, THIRU. JAGDEEP DHANKHAR  
INAUGURATED THE VICE-CHANCELLORS' CONFERENCE OF STATE,  
CENTRAL AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES OF TAMIL NADU – 2025 AT  
RAJ BHAVAN, UDHAGAMANDALAM TODAY (25.04.2025)**

Thiru Jagdeep Dhankhar, Hon'ble Vice-President of India, inaugurated the Vice-Chancellors' Conference of State, Central, and Private Universities of Tamil Nadu at Raj Bhavan, Udhagamandalam, today (25.04.2025), as the chief guest. The session began with a moment of silence to honor the innocent victims of the brutal terrorist attack in Pahalgam.

Thiru R.N. Ravi, Hon'ble Governor of Tamil Nadu and Chancellor of state universities, presided over the fourth consecutive Vice Chancellors' Conference. The conference serves as a vital platform for academic leaders to engage in dialogue, share best practices and shape the future of higher education in Tamil Nadu. This year's event brought together Vice Chancellors, Directors, Dean, Registrars from Central, State and Private universities, policymakers, educationists and industry experts. Sessions will focus on technology integration in education, capacity building for learners, financial management in universities and strategies for wealth creation. Past editions of the conference have resulted in key policy recommendations and collaborative initiatives that have significantly impacted the state's higher education landscape.

The Vice-President of India, Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar, lauded the Governor of Tamil Nadu at the Vice-Chancellors' Conference, affirming that the Governor's initiative reflects his constitutional obligation under Article 159 — to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution and serve the

people of Tamil Nadu. He commended the Governor for instituting this series of conferences in 2022, calling it a thoughtful and timely intervention in the field of higher education.

The Hon'ble Vice-President underscored the pivotal role of Vice-Chancellors as transformative academic leaders. He urged governments at all levels to uphold the autonomy and institutional authority of Vice-Chancellors, enabling them to discharge their responsibilities without interference. Thiru. Dhankhar reflected on the unprecedented challenges of the contemporary global landscape — marked by rapid technological shifts more disruptive than previous industrial revolutions. He emphasized the urgent responsibility of universities to act as intellectual stewards of the nation and highlighted faculty recruitment, retention and collaboration as core priorities. He called for increased inter-institutional cooperation and technological integration to overcome resource gaps.

Expressing profound grief over the recent terrorist attack in Pahalgam, he called it a grave reminder of the global menace of terrorism and reaffirmed India's foundational commitment to peace, rooted in the civilizational ethos of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. He emphasized the primacy of national interest, recalling Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's address to the Constituent Assembly. National interest, he noted, must transcend political or partisan concerns.

On the National Education Policy (NEP), the Vice-President described it as a landmark shift shaped by wide consultation, aligning with India's civilizational values. He praised its emphasis on multilingualism, holistic development and the provision of technical education in regional languages — including medicine and engineering. He urged institutions to adopt the policy in full spirit, stressing that NEP is not merely a government policy, but a national one. He further emphasized the need for convergence among

academic institutions. The era of isolated excellence, he said, has passed; institutions must embrace a multidisciplinary, collaborative future. He called for openness to differing viewpoints, cautioning that intolerance toward diverse ideas is antithetical to the spirit of a university.

Highlighting Tamil Nadu's historic role in shaping Indian education, Shri Dhankhar cited ancient centers like Kanchipuram and Ennayiram as beacons of learning. He envisioned the conference as a modern crucible of ideation that could revive such a legacy. Tamil Nadu, he said, must take pride in institutions like the University of Madras, established in 1857, which laid the foundation of modern Indian education. Concluding his address, he paid tribute to India's linguistic and literary heritage, emphasizing the global significance of classical languages like Tamil, Sanskrit, Kannada and others. He noted with pride that Tamil was the first language to be granted classical status in 2004, urging institutions to preserve and promote the profound intellectual and cultural wealth embedded in India's linguistic traditions.

He concluded with a stirring reflection on India's rich linguistic heritage, particularly Tamil's historic recognition. "Our languages — with their immense richness and depth — are the pride of our civilisation," he said. "They reflect the uniqueness of our culture and are a goldmine of knowledge and literature with global relevance. Educational institutions must take focused responsibility to preserve and promote this treasure."

Highlighting Tamil's distinction, he noted, "It is a matter of immense pride for Tamil Nadu and the nation that Tamil was the first Indian language to be accorded classical status in 2004 — a significant recognition of its antiquity and cultural depth." He shared that 11 Indian languages now enjoy this status, including Tamil, Sanskrit, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, Odia, Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese and Bengali — all recognised for their civilisational contributions.

He concluded with a call to self-awareness: “We must realise our cultural power. The world cannot match what we have. Let us not be distracted by the trivial — but focus on preserving what truly defines us.”

Hon’ble Governor Thiru R. N. Ravi highlighted the impacts of the annual Vice Chancellor’s Conference where heads of higher education in states meet and interact in the past three years on the educational standard of state universities despite numerous constraints. It was envisioned as a platform to strengthen collaboration, drive reform and uplift the academic ecosystem of Tamil Nadu — particularly its state universities. Today, that vision is beginning to take shape in measurable ways.

The Governor then reflected on the sad state of affairs prevailing in the state universities, which he encountered upon assuming office as Chancellor. Despite having some of the brightest minds — including meritorious students and even gold medallists — there was a striking lack of aspiration, institutional support and academic direction. While private and deemed universities were performing remarkably well and steadily improving their positions in national frameworks like the NIRF rankings, the performance of our state universities, in stark contrast, was on a steady decline.

Such a decline of standards in state universities has an adverse impact on social justice as a greater number of students from marginalized and Dalit communities are compelled to study in these underperforming institutions, which only served to reinforce longstanding cycles of exclusion and disadvantage. The inequality in higher education was not merely institutional — it was deeply structural. The ASER Report further highlighted the declining quality of school education, a troubling trend that, he noted with concern, was now persisting into higher education as well.

It was against this troubling backdrop that Governor Ravi conceptualized the annual Vice Chancellors Conference, a sustained and strategic intervention towards improving Tamil Nadu's higher education. The objective was to draw state universities out of long-standing isolation, dismantle bureaucratic silos and foster direct collaboration among institutions — with a focus on improving academic standards, intellectual property generation, research output and student outcomes.

Encouragingly, the initiative has begun to yield tangible and meaningful outcomes. Universities that once functioned in isolation have begun actively collaborating — sharing best practices, academic resources and ideas. Qualification rates for NET and JRF have shown measurable improvement, reflecting stronger academic preparation and support systems. There is a growing emphasis on cutting-edge research and emerging technologies, alongside a visible rise in intellectual property generation. Faculty development and student capacity-building efforts have deepened, while dedicated sessions on financial governance have strengthened institutional sustainability. Step by step, a more enabling, accountable and future-ready academic environment is taking root.

Unfortunately, this year's conference saw the state universities' non-participation, as they were threatened/ explicitly instructed by the state government to not attend — some even shared their grave concerns in writing. A Vice-Chancellor was detained at a police station under the pretext of an unrelated case — a move that effectively ensured he could not participate in the conference. Several other Vice-Chancellors who had managed to reach Ooty were met with midnight visits from the special branch police, who threatened them with not return home and meet their families if they attended the conference. This series of actions including

gross abuse of police reflects a grave, unprecedented and deeply disappointing interference in the academic freedom and progress of our institutions.

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Raj Bhavan, Chennai-22

Released by:-

Date: 25.04.2025

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