

India must move forward as whole: Prez



President Pranab Mukherjee on Thursday highlighted India's rich diversity, saying the country must move forward as a whole and not by caste or community. The President's assertion comes in the backdrop of recent incidents of violence against some members of a minority community in the country.

Addressing a function here, Mukherjee said India is diverse with 130 crore people who follow seven religions, speak 200 languages and 1,800 dialects. Three major ethnic groups live under one flag, one Constitution and one administrative process.

"This is the ethos of India. Yes, we must have change. We must have improvement. We must move forward. (But) Not in isolation, not in groups, not in individual, not in caste or community but for the entire land mass of India," the President added. "We are not indulging in the flow of blood, rolling of heads to achieve our objective," he said. Mukherjee referred to the end of colonial rule during which, he said, people did not part with hatred but with smiles.

Mukherjee also referred to the major reforms brought by the Narendra Modi-led government including the presentation of budget in February 1 instead of February 28, among others.

He appreciated the Goods and Services Tax (GST), slated to be rolled out from July 1.

The President said there have been a series of central and state taxes including excise, service tax and Value Added Tax. "From tomorrow (Friday) midnight when the Prime Minister pushes the button, 130 crore people living in such a vast area will come under one taxation system. One nation, one taxation – GST," he said.

The President was speaking during the inaugural session of a global summit on "Academics and economic reforms – role of cost and management accountants". The event was organised by the Institute of Cost Accountants of India (ICAI) and attended by Bengal Governor Keshari Nath Tripathi, among others. Mukherjee said he had introduced in 2011 a Constitution amendment bill to facilitate the GST but it could not win the majority. He said India has delayed the process of bringing changes with consent of the people so that views of a majority of people can be accommodated for which the country, the largest functioning democracy in the world, is being praised. The President emphasised on providing quality education and skills to young population of the country which can act as the biggest workforce provider to the world.

Earlier, in another event, a visibly emotional President said this was perhaps a special visit to the City of Joy.

"This may be my last visit to Kolkata in my capacity as the President of the Republic of India," he said. He completes his term next month.

Mukherjee, who has lived here and also made several visits to the city as the President, as a minister and an MP, was here to inaugurate celebrations of the 125th birth anniversary of P C Mahalanobis at the Indian Statistical Institute here.

He expressed happiness at having received an opportunity to address "mighty minds" in the form of teachers, researchers and students during the function at a time when he was nearing completion of his tenure. With agency inputs