

CEPT UNIVERSITY

Eighth Convocation, January 4th, 2014

Welcome Address by Dr. Bimal Patel, President

1. Friends: We are gathered this morning for the Eighth Convocation of CEPT University. The university will confer degrees on students who have completed their programs of study during the academic session 2012 – 13. It will also confer awards won during that period.
2. On this special occasion, I am very happy to welcome our Chief Guest, Prof. Kaivan Munshi. Prof. Kaivan Munshi is the Frank Ramsey Professor of Economics at the University of Cambridge, UK.
3. Most of us are not economists. Therefore, let me first clarify what it means to be the Frank Ramsey Professor of Economics at Cambridge University.
4. Frank Ramsey was a gifted British mathematician, philosopher and economist who died at the age of twenty-six. He was born in 1903 and died in 1930. Frank Ramsey's contributions to philosophy commenced when, at the age of 19, he first translated Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Before he died he had produced a number of original philosophical papers. John Maynard Keynes encouraged him to work on economics because, as Keynes later said, I quote, "From a very early age, about sixteen I think, his precocious mind was intensely interested in economic problems". Frank Ramsey responded to Keynes' encouragement by writing three papers of fundamental importance in economics. Paul Samuelson, the economist from the other Cambridge, described these three papers as "three great legacies – legacies that were for the most part mere by-products of (Frank Ramsey's) major interest in the foundations of mathematics and knowledge." Ramsey's contribution to mathematics, which included the theorem that now bears his name – Ramsey's Theorem – is also acknowledged to be highly significant. In fact, today there is a branch of mathematics known as Ramsey's Theory, which has been inspired by Ramsey's Theorem.
5. To be holding a Professorship at Cambridge University, named after Frank Ramsey, is indeed a very high honor. Prof. Munshi, we are honored to have you in our midst.
6. Before taking up the Frank Ramsey Professorship, Professor Kaivan Munshi was at Brown University. He has also taught economics at the University of

Pennsylvania and Boston University. Prof Munshi's research has been devoted almost exclusively to the analysis of communities and their interaction with economic activity. His early research focused on social learning in the adoption of agricultural and contraceptive technology, and the identification of migrant labor market networks. His subsequent research examined the effect of community networks on education, health, and mobility, which are key determinants of growth and development. Much of this research has been situated in India, where caste is a natural social domain around which networks are organized. Other work has been situated in diverse locales, including Kenya, Bangladesh, and the United States. His research over the past 20 years has been supported in part by the U.S. National Science Foundation and the U.S. National Institutes of Health. It has been published in top-tier economics journals including the American Economic Review, Journal of Political Economy, Quarterly Journal of Economics, and the Review of Economic Studies. Professor Munshi is currently co-editor of the Journal of Development Economics.

7. Professor Munshi has been interested in development issues since very long. I can personally vouch for that. Our paths crossed in the late eighties when both of us were urban planning students at the University of California at Berkeley. We also have a few common friends who were with him during his undergraduate days at the Indian Institute of Technology at Powai. So I know a bit about what he was up to at that time. Ever since Prof. Munshi was a young civil engineering student at IIT, he was deeply interested in working on and figuring out how the lives of poor families and communities can be improved. His intense interest in the housing problems faced by low-income families set him off on a remarkable intellectual journey. From his beginnings in civil engineering at IIT Powai, from where he has an undergraduate degree, he moved to a program in architecture at the University of Illinois. Then, he went on to pursue urban planning and transportation engineering at the University of California at Berkeley, from where he received multiple post graduate degrees. From there, he moved to the economics department at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, from where he received a doctoral degree in economics. I will let him tell you more about his intellectual journey – about what motivated it and what he thinks about it now.
8. However, before I move on to other matters, let me explain why we thought it fit to invite Professor Kaivan Munshi, an economics professor, as a chief guest to our Convocation. There are two main reasons.
9. At CEPT University we are focused on human habitats – on understanding, designing, planning, building and managing human habitats. Speaking at a

more abstract level, we are concerned with figuring out what makes for good homes, neighborhoods, villages, towns and cities. We are also concerned with the practice of designing, making and managing good homes, neighborhoods, villages, towns and cities.

10. Both of these quests can be considerably illuminated by economics and more particularly, development economics. Unfortunately, at CEPT University, we have paid very little attention to what these disciplines have to tell us. Therefore, to draw our attention to an area that deserves more attention at CEPT University, we thought that it would be a good idea to invite to our convocation a distinguished development economist such as Professor Munshi. We hope that many of you will be interested in finding out what economists have to say about development issues and that you will come to his talk this evening at 6.00 pm at the GIDC Bhavan. Prof. Munshi will be speaking on the economics of the caste system. We hope that this will stir an interest in using concepts in economics to illuminating issues in the design, production and management of human habitats.
11. There is another reason why it makes sense to have Professor Munshi with us this morning. All of last year, all of us have been busy integrating the university and expanding learning opportunities for our students. Instead of the University being an assemblage of many isolated programs we are now functioning as one. This has made it possible for students to more easily move across faculties and programs and to explore many different intellectual worlds. From narrowly focused programs with prescriptive and rigid curriculums, operating in isolation from one another, we are shifting to a more choice based regime where students have more freedom in deciding what they want to learn and when they want to learn it. We are liberalizing the pedagogic regime at CEPT University.
12. In this context it is particularly fitting to have Professor Munshi with us. His intellectual journey exemplifies what happens when we build our institutions to be broadminded, student focused, liberal and choice based. When we build such institutions, it becomes possible for an intellectually curious and socially committed civil engineer to become a distinguished economist. It is only by allowing and supporting such journeys that we can promote excellence and innovation.
13. Once again, Professor Munshi, we are highly honored that you accepted our invitation to be our guest and address us this morning.
14. I also have the pleasure of welcoming our Chairman, Shri Sanjay Lalbhai. Sanjaybhai also needs no introduction. He is a well-known and highly

respected business leader. As Chairman and Managing Director of Arvind Ltd., Sanjaybhai led Arvind in its quest to be one of the largest manufacturers of woven textiles in India and one of the largest denim fabric manufacturers in the world.

15. Besides being a business leader, Sanjaybhai is also the present day torchbearer of a remarkable tradition of enlightened and farsighted civic leadership in Ahmedabad, which is over a century old. It is this tradition, of civic minded business leaders supporting noble, strategic and far-reaching causes, that has allowed Ahmedabad to play a far bigger role in the life of our nation than Ahmedabad's size or history warrants. Let me remind you of some examples. It was Ahmedabad's civic leaders who nurtured India's freedom struggle by supporting Gandhiji when he returned from South Africa in 1912. It was Ahmedabad's civic leaders who incubated India's space technology program when they helped establish the Physical Research Laboratory and the Space Applications Center. Similarly, India's management revolution was kick started when Ahmedabad's leadership established the Indian Institute of Management. It was also Ahmedabad's civic leaders who collaborated with professionals of the city to establish one of India's most avant-garde schools of architecture and supported its development into a vibrant habitat university.
16. Sanjaybhai, as the latest torchbearer of this remarkable leadership tradition, is deeply interested in and involved with higher-level education and research. He is the President of Ahmedabad Education Society and Ahmedabad University. He is also a member of the Board of Governors of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, Chairman of Ahmedabad Textile Industry's Research Association and a member of the Council of Management of the Physical Research Laboratory. Sanjaybhai, we are thankful for the keen interest you take in the development of CEPT University and we are privileged to have you present at this convocation.
17. I am also very happy to welcome Members of the Governing Body, Members of the Board of Management, Faculty Members, alumni and students of CEPT University.
18. And, last but not the least, I especially welcome all the parents of our students; particularly the parents and guests of the students who graduating and winning awards today. It is indeed a special occasion. Today we honor the achievements of our students and all of us at CEPT University are very happy that you are with us to share in our joy and pride.

19. Now, as is customary, let me tell you a little bit about what CEPT University has been up to during the past year along with a bit about what we are looking forward to in the coming year.
20. CEPT University turned fifty years old slightly over a year ago. In this context, about a year ago, our Board of Management mandated us, meaning the faculty and staff of the university, to undertake a deep and critical introspective exercise. They asked us to examine all aspects of the University in the context of challenges that we expect to face in the coming decades. They also mandated us to make plans, where necessary, for restructuring, renewal and rejuvenation of the University.
21. Prompted by this watchful and thoughtful intervention, the faculty and staff of the University undertook a thorough participatory introspective exercise aimed at reimagining the University and come up with an action plan. The University's Board of Management ratified this action plan in February last. I had presented key features of this rejuvenation plan during last year's convocation, which was in March of 2013.
22. Now, ten months later, I am very happy to report that we have made considerable progress in implementing this plan. I would like to tell you about all the many things that have been achieved and to thank all the individuals who have contributed to the remarkable progress by name. However this would take too long. Therefore, here, I am going to restrict myself to describing the broad contours of the transformation that we have been able to effect. Much as I want to, I am also going to have to refrain from naming specific individuals responsible for leading the process of change and transformation. A lot has been achieved; let me get on with telling you about it.
23. The first task in the rejuvenation plan was to refocus the University more squarely on human habitats – as I said earlier, on understanding, designing, planning, building and managing human habitats. The primary purpose of refocusing the university on an intellectual domain, where it has traditionally concentrated and where it has deep competence, was to enable the University to excel at its primary objective of education. As we all know, to excel one has to focus. The second task was to reorganize, restructure and, where necessary, expand its Programs and Faculties to clarify the University's focus and its organization structure and to make it more robust.
24. In accordance with this Plan it was decided that courses and programs not aligned with the University's focus would be discontinued. It was also decided to restructure or merge stand-alone Programs and unsustainable

Faculties to ensure that CEPT has more robust Programs and Faculties. As a consequence, the earlier numerous Faculties of the University now stand reorganized as five robust Faculties: the Faculty of Architecture, the Faculty of Planning, the Faculty of Design, the Faculty of Technology and the Faculty of Management. The last one, the Faculty of Management, is a new faculty that we have set up to train professionals in project management, management of human settlements and in community development. The Faculty's first program offering a Masters in Habitat Management has commenced and I am happy to report that it is doing very well.

25. While this restructuring is widely appreciated and has already started yielding dividends in the form of enhanced academic rigor, higher accountability, better governance and efficient functioning, I am aware that some of the students of the degree programs that have been discontinued are discontent. They are unhappy that they are going to graduate with degrees that are no longer going to be offered at CEPT University. They are worried that this may affect their credibility and job prospects.
26. The discontent of these students is understandable. However, it also needs to be considered that the identity and credibility of graduates from any university are tied more importantly to the overall reputation of their university than to the good reputation of the programs that they have graduated from. The above refocusing efforts will better enable the University to excel in its focus area. This will lead to enhanced reputation of the University in the long term and all students, past, present and future, stand to benefit from this.
27. Along with the restructuring of Programs and Faculties, the rejuvenation plan also called for firmly refocusing the University and its staff on academic and research activities. To ensure this, to better manage its contract research and consulting activities and to insulate the University from the many professional and financial risks that it had over the years become exposed to, we have established a University owned but autonomous organization called 'CEPT University Research and Development Foundation', 'CRDF' for short. It is a Section 25 Company registered under the Companies act. We are in the process of transferring all ongoing consulting and contract research activities to this organization. All new such work shall also be taken up in CRDF. To guide the CRDF's Governing Council, the Board of Management of CEPT University has also ratified a Policy for Consulting and Contract Research that was developed by a special committee. This committee chaired by Prof. Bakul Dholakia reviewed ongoing work and policies before preparing this policy to serve as a broad and comprehensive set of imperatives for CRDF.

28. To better manage all the ongoing work and to be able to more systematically expand its research activities, over the next year CRDF will articulate and clarify its own organization and governance structure. It is broadly envisaged that there will be a number of cross-faculty thematic research groups. These research groups will focus on particular areas of research. Some such groups already exist and they will be incorporated within CRDF. Others will be newly created. The number of such groups will depend on the research interests of the faculty members at the University. Each of these groups will have its own research agenda and will synergize and expand the research work being done at the university. In the coming years, all students at our University can look forward to having lot more opportunities of working on well-funded and better-guided research projects that tie in to larger projects that the University is working on.
29. The rejuvenation plan also called for making CEPT University more self-confident, autonomous and financially sustainable so as to be able to pursue excellence more vigorously. All of these are intertwined – complexly dependent on one another. Without self-confidence one cannot be autonomous. Without being autonomous, that is, without having the control to define our programs, our curriculums, our pedagogy and our admissions policy we cannot hope to excel. It is also true that academic autonomy and self-confidence are dependent on financial independence and sustainability. Simultaneously, to be free to raise resources and deploy them in a manner we think is best suited for ensuring excellence we must have financial autonomy. What this complex interdependency means is that there is no simple, sequential method of tackling the issue of autonomy, financial sustainability, self-confidence and excellence. One can only make progress by simultaneously making small incremental improvements on all these fronts.
30. I am glad to report that we are making these improvements. At crucial junctures we have reaffirmed our resolve to be autonomous with regard to our course structures and curricula. As a mark of our self-confidence, and more than ever before, we are now well committed to relying on our own reputation and merit to establish the credibility of our programs and degrees instead of relying on facile approvals and recognitions. We are gradually reducing our dependence on grant funding and becoming far more financially independent and sustainable than we already were. We have revamped our financial management and budgeting system and made it far more decentralized, efficient and transparent. We have rationalized the fee policy so as to distribute the cost of running the University fairly across batches. We are also instituting scholarships and tuition waivers to ensure

that in making the University financially independent and sustainable we do not make it unaffordable to all but the wealthy. I was very happy when students raised this as an important concern when, last semester, I discussed the university's finances and fee policies with them in several open meetings. I was even happier and when, in meeting after meeting, students spontaneously suggested that the financial burden of partly subsidizing tuition fees of up to twenty percent of meritorious but needy students should of course be borne by the rest of the students.

31. Over the coming years, by slowly reducing our financial burden on the Government of Gujarat, we hope to regain our autonomy to admit at least one half of our undergraduate student from anywhere in India. Today, though our postgraduate programs have a pan-Indian student body, in our undergraduate programs we hardly have any place for students from outside Gujarat. This is not good. For a university to be excellent and innovative it has to have a diverse student body with a cosmopolitan mix. Being parochial does not suit a modern liberal University. Universities by definition must bring together students from diverse backgrounds. As we all know, students learn as much, if not more, from interacting with one another than they do from their teachers. If the student body is diverse then they stand to learn much more. We cannot afford to deprive Gujarat's students of such learning.
32. Over the last year we have also been able to relieve the considerable shortage of space that we were experiencing. The shortage was addressed by moving non-academic activities off-campus, by rationalizing space use and in some programs by trimming the number of new admits to fit the space available. We have also added some new facilities such as the new 225-person lecture hall. I am happy to state that over the last year we have invested approximately Rs. 5 crores in improving and adding to the University's building facilities. We have also significantly improved CEPT University's IT infrastructure. We have rebuilt the entire fiber-optic and wi-fi network, added new tutorial labs and upgraded the central server. To do this we have invested over Rs. 1.5 crores. I am glad to note that we expect investments in facility and infrastructure upgrading to continue over the coming years.
33. One important addition to CEPT University's infrastructure needs special mention. In a matter of a few weeks we will be inaugurating a state-of-the-art Digital Fabrication Lab. It will now be possible for students to use highly sophisticated laser cutters, 3d printers and digitally controlled milling machines. This semester's course catalogue already offers an elective titled 'Fab Lab Bootcamp'. For all of this - the equipment, flying it down from Boston and for providing us with a young MIT graduate to establish the lab –

all of which cost approximately Rs. 75 lacs, we sincerely thank Ms. Asha Jadeja. Ms. Asha Jadeja is a CEPT University alumna and a highly committed philanthropist who lives between Ahmedabad and Silicon Valley. The Fab Lab at our University has been made possible by a generous grant from the Motwani-Jadeja Family Foundation. We are therefore calling it the CEPT-MJFF Fab Lab.

34. At last year's convocation I had announced that we were reorganizing CEPT's calendar. That from next year onwards, besides our two semesters, we will have two more four weeks long teaching sessions. They will be called, CEPT Winter School and CEPT Summer School. At last year's convocation both, the Summer as well as the Winter School were mere concepts.
35. We can now proudly state that the Winter School is no longer just a concept. The Winter School 2013, which ended just a few weeks ago, offered 37 courses. Eight hundred students registered and we had a terrific exhibition of the Winter School's work at the end of the four-week session. Work has already commenced on structuring programs for the 2014 Summer School. The summer school will comprise a very large number of well-structured study tours. We now say that during the Winter School we want the world to come to CEPT University and during the Summer School we want CEPT to go out across the world.
36. The University's Student Services' Office has also made much progress since it was established a few months ago. Its many initiatives such as the home stay program for newly admitted students, its dial a rickshaw facility and the linkage that it provides between the administration and students have all been very well received. Today, I understand that they are launching a bicycle-sharing program.
37. In ending, let me say that perhaps the most important changes that we have effected are the integration of the university and the shift from a prescriptive pedagogy to a more choice based pedagogy. Just last year, all of our faculties and programs were operating more or less in isolation – in silos, as they say. Students joined specific programs, stayed in them and graduated from them without being able to benefit from the many great resources on our campus. Today this is no longer the case. By developing common frameworks, such as common calendars, common course typologies, common timetable slots we have integrated the functioning of the university and made exchange and interaction possible between its many parts. Because we have limited mandatory credit requirements to a maximum of 75 percent of the total credits required for earning degrees, we have now made it possible for

students to explore what is else available at the University and to vastly enrich their learning experience. This is a major shift in pedagogy. The new online registration system has also been launched to support the functioning of this new pedagogic regime. I have absolutely no doubt that as we gain more experience with this new system we will be able to exploit its advantage more fully. By next year we hope to more fully integrate the postgraduate programs that all offer the same degree. What we want is for students in different disciplines to be able to choose what they are going to specialize in after they have joined the program. Some day in the not-so-far future, I hope that we will be a University where it will be possible to join and then, after exploring what is on offer, deciding whether to be an architect, a designer, an engineer, a planner or a manager.

38. This morning a total of 446 students will receive their degrees. Many awards will be conferred. On behalf of my colleagues, Deans, faculty members, staff and myself, I congratulate all those receiving degrees and awards. All of us wish you all the very best in life and hope that you will make the best of it. In doing so you will make us proud. We also hope that you will stay in touch and keep coming back to your alma mater.
39. Thank you.