

CEPT UNIVERSITY

Ninth Convocation, February 7th, 2015

Welcome Address by Dr. Bimal Patel, President

1. Friends: We are gathered this morning for the Ninth Convocation of CEPT University. The university will confer degrees on students who have completed their programs of study during the academic session 2013 – 14. It will also confer awards won during that period.
2. On this special occasion, I am very happy to welcome our Chief Guest, Prof. Pratap Bhanu Mehta.
3. Pratap Bhanu Mehta is President, Center for Policy Research, New Delhi. ‘CPR’, which is what the Center as, is India’s leading Think Tank. Prof. Mehta has also taught at Harvard, Jawaharlal Nehru University and the law School at New York University. His areas of research include: political theory, society and politics in India, governance, political economy and international affairs.
4. Prof. Mehta has a B.A. in Philosophy, Politics and Economics from Oxford University and a Ph.D. in Politics from Princeton University. He is the recipient of the Malcom S. Adishehshiah Award for distinguished contribution to the Social Sciences, 2010. He is also the recipient of the prestigious INFOSYS PRIZE 2011, for contributions to Political Science, and the Amartya Sen Prize for contributions to Social Science.
5. Prof. Mehta has published extensively in several fields. He has published dozens of scholarly papers in important journals and edited volumes in areas of political theory, constitutional law and political economy. His recent books include: ‘The Burden of Democracy’; three co edited volumes called ‘India’s Public Institutions’; ‘The Oxford Companion to Politics in India’, and; ‘Shaping the World: India and Multilateralism’. He is also a member of the collective that produced the influential ‘Non-Alignment 2.0’ a document that attempts to lay out a framework for India’s foreign policy. His forthcoming work include: ‘The Oxford Companion to Constitutional Law in India’ (co-edited with Madhav Khosla and Sujit Choudhary); a book on ‘Public Reason and Democracy in India’, and; ‘Rethinking Indian Intellectual History’.
6. Prof. Mehta has also done extensive public policy work. He was member of the National Security Advisory Board, Government of India. He was Member-Convenor of the Prime Minister of India’s National Knowledge Commission. He was Member of the Supreme Court appointed committee on elections in Indian Universities. He was also a member and Vice-Chair of the World Economic Forums Global Governance Council.

7. Prof. Mehta is a prolific participant in public policy debates. He is editorial consultant to the Indian Express. His columns have also appeared in a number of national and international dailies including the Financial Times, International Herald Tribune, etc. He was named as India's most influential public intellectual by several leading dailies. He is also on the Editorial Board of numerous journals including the American Political Science Review and Journal of Democracy.
8. Once again, Professor Mehta, we are highly honored that you accepted our invitation to be our guest and address us this morning.
9. I also have the pleasure of welcoming our Chairman, Shri Sanjay Lalbhai. As many of you already know, 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.
10. 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 economy warrants. It was Ahmedabad's civic leaders who supported Gandhiji when he returned from South Africa in 1912. It was these same leaders who also led the establishment of the Physical Research Laboratory, the Space Applications Center and 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.
11. Sanjaybhai 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.
12. 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.
13. And, last but not the least, I especially welcome all the parents of our students, particularly the parents and guests of the students who are 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.

14. It is customary at this point of my speech to tell you about the many achievements of the University's students, faculty members and staff, and, to tell you about what we are looking forward to in the coming year. However, the list of achievements is long and our plans are many. Listing them all would take too much time. Therefore, I am going to focus on a few developments that have specifically worked to strengthen CEPT's core values and mission.
15. *First - ever since CEPT University was established, it has prided itself as a cosmopolitan institution.*
16. Let me explain. For a university to be excellent and innovative it has to have a diverse student body – students from different cultures and backgrounds, students from far and wide. Being parochial does not suit a modern university. 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 and cosmopolitan then they stand to learn much more - about themselves and about others.
17. Unfortunately however, over the last decade or so, CEPT was able to offer only ten percent seats in its undergraduate programs to students graduating from Boards other than the Gujarat Higher Secondary Board. This was a consequence of restrictive admissions policies tied to the fact that our undergraduate programs were state funded. This meant that in a class of forty only four students could be from outside of Gujarat. All of us - students, faculty members and staff – were unhappy with the erosion of CEPT's cosmopolitan character and its impact on the quality of our programs. We were convinced that, not having the opportunity to study with a pan-India set of students was a big disadvantage for Gujarat's students.
18. Last year I had mentioned that 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. I am happy to note that since then, with the support of the Government of Gujarat we have accomplished half of that goal. Last summer, just a few weeks before our admissions process was to commence, the Government approved an increase in intake of out of state students from ten to twenty five percent of the total seats, on the condition that we would not decrease the absolute number of seats available to Gujarat students. We complied with this condition by increasing the overall intake in our undergraduate programs. We were thus able to increase diversity in our incoming class and start reestablishing the cosmopolitan character of our University.

19. For this development, I want to sincerely thank the Hon. Chief Minister of the Government of Gujarat, Smt. Anandiben Patel. I also want to thank the Minister, Dept. of Education, Shri Bhupendrasinh Chudasma and the Minister of State, Dept. of Education, Smt. Vasuben Trivedi. All of them were highly supportive and we know that without their openness and vision this would not have happened. I also want to thank the Secretary, Dept. of Education and the Director of Technical Education. They too were very open and supportive. The Council of Architecture also had an important role to play and I thank them for their support.
20. Next year, with the support of all of those who helped us last year, we hope to further expand our programs and to bring the level of students from outside Gujarat to fifty percent of the total intake without reducing the intake from Gujarat. By doing that all of us at CEPT University are convinced that we will be able to provide a better learning environment to all our students – those from Gujarat and from outside it.
21. *Second - ever since CEPT was established, we have prided ourselves in being a liberal institution.*
22. We have long believed that a student's life is his or her own project. At CEPT, since its inception, we have always seen our task as building students' capacities to learn and, as offering students a wide variety of learning opportunities for them to choose from. We do not see our task as trying to shepherd students in a particular direction. As a consequence of this liberal philosophy of education, over the years, we have nurtured students who have been particularly capable of navigating the tumultuous transformation of India's economy and society and notching high accomplishments worldwide.
23. I am happy to report that with the number of innovations that we have introduced over the last two years we have been able to considerably strengthen CEPT's liberal character by maximizing students' freedom to decide what they want to learn and when they want to learn it. "*Choice based learning*" is not just a mantra, it is now a core part of academics at CEPT. I am happy to note that when the UGC sent a questionnaire to the university in order to find out how many parameters of the *Choice Based Curriculum* we were complying with, we met with all their parameters.
24. The five faculties at CEPT are now much better integrated and it is possible for students to make use of learning opportunities all across the University to fulfill their elective requirements. Going forward, we plan to also expand choices in the mandatory portion of their curriculums.
25. The University has also initiated Summer and Winter Schools Programs since 2013. The goal of these Programs is to provide varied, intensive and unique educational

experiences to students, that are outside of their core curriculums. These programs also allow faculty members to experiment with pedagogic tools and teaching methods. They also allow travel to near and far away places for study and greater exposure. Courses in these programs are open to students of CEPT and other universities from India and abroad. Courses are offered by faculty members from CEPT or other Universities, or by practicing professionals. So far, in 3 sessions, a total of 2050 students have participated in these programs and 162 faculty members have offered courses on this platform. I believe that going forward the Summer and Winter School Programs will become a key event that students, from CEPT and other universities, will look forward to as part of their annual activities.

26. *Third – ever since CEPT was established, we have prided ourselves on being open to students from all economic backgrounds.*
27. However, earlier, it was easy to be open to students from all economic backgrounds. Today it is far more of a challenge today to be so. Earlier – I am thinking of twenty years ago - life was simpler and needs and wants were few. As a consequence, one could expect high quality teachers to volunteer their services more or less for free. Teaching needed only rudimentary infrastructure. Tables, stools, a few library books, blackboards and chalk were all that were needed. As a consequence of this, the meager amount of money doled out by government was enough to meet the low cost of providing a good education and, the fees that CEPT needed to charge were very low. To put things in perspective, when I was a student at CEPT, not very long ago I might say, the fee for a semester was merely Rs. 420. With such low fees it was easy for CEPT to be open to students from all economic backgrounds. Today, it is far more of a challenge to be so. Nonetheless, we remain committed to being accessible to students from all economic backgrounds.
28. To do this, we are doing three things. First, we are expanding our scholarship programs. Second, we expanding our Student Assistantship Programs. Third, we are expanding our Teaching Assistantship Programs.
29. In the last two years, CEPT University has had to raise its fees - to meet its expenses and to make it financially sustainable. Simultaneously, by ensuring that Scholarships and Tuition Waivers are available to truly needy students we have been able to ensure that CEPT remains open even to those students who cannot afford its fees. Going forward, we plan on vastly expanding the availability of Scholarships and Tuition Waivers. For this, we will institute a comprehensive scholarship policy and appeal more vigorously to our alumni and other well-wishers to help us build a dedicated corpus.
30. This year onwards, the University will also vastly expand its program for Student Assistantships and Teaching Assistantships. Teaching Assistantships are paid

positions for students to assist faculty members in teaching of courses. The learning advantages from being a Teaching Assistant are self-evident. Teaching Assistants are able to deepen their academic understanding and avail of special mentoring from faculty members who they are assisting. They are also able to earn through the process. Student Assistantships are paid positions in University Offices and Services where students assist with the work of the various offices services. Examples of student assistantships include working for the library, IT Lab, outreach office, workshops etc. All of these also provide students an opportunity to earn money and understand professional work ethics while being a student.

31. Giving students an opportunity to work while they learn provides two benefits: one, it allows them even more opportunities to learn and second, it allows them a good way to finance a portion of their education expenses. Starting this January, the university has doubled the hourly payment for Student Assistantships and Teaching Assistantships.
32. *Fourth, CEPT has a long prided itself on being an excellent teaching and research institution.*
33. Over the coming year, the University will undertake a comprehensive and thorough review of its curriculum and pedagogy. Curriculum will be revised to bring focus on core competencies needed for professionals to meet the challenges of tomorrow. This will include a review of all programs and courses. Student work load for each program will be reviewed. Faculty teaching loads will also be reviewed to ensure adequate student to faculty ratio. Faculty members will be further encouraged to involve more students in their research work.
34. As mentioned last year, we had set up the CRDF – CEPT Research and Development Foundation – to manage the various consulting and research activities of CEPT. CRDF includes research centers focused on thematic areas such as Centre of Excellence – Urban Transport, Centre for Urban Equity, Centre for Advanced Research in Building Science and Energy and the Design Innovation and Craft Research Centre. Under the umbrella of CRDF, this year we have launched the Centre for Urban Land and Real Estate Policy. All of these centers are focused on deepening research in their respective areas.
35. *Fifth, CEPT has long prided itself on its steady expansion. From a small school for a hundred and fifty architecture students it has emerged as a well-diversified Habitat University.*
36. In 2013, we commenced offering a new postgraduate program in Habitat Management. This year, CEPT is contemplating the initiation of two new programs. The first one is a postgraduate program offering an M.Tech in Building Energy

Performance and the second one is a new program offering a Masters in Design with an initial focus on Furniture Design. We intend to continue diversifying our portfolio of programs while maintaining our focus on human habitats

37. *Sixth, CEPT has always been proud of its excellent setting and good facilities.*
38. Like last year, this year too we have made considerable investments in improving the University Infrastructure. In the first half of this year we have already spent approx. 2.5 crores to improve the Auditorium, Faculty and Admin spaces, facilities in the Faculty of Design, the boys hostels and facilities for our newly established CEPT Archives.
39. I am very happy that this year, we will also be starting with the construction of a new library building, not too far from where you are seated right now. The New CEPT Library is being made possible through a generous grant of Rs. Six Crores from Ben Lilavati Lalbhai trust, which will pay two thirds of the buildings cost. We thank our Chairman Shri Sanjay Lalbhai for his support in making this possible.
40. I am also very happy that Rahul Mehrotra a highly accomplished architect who is also alum of CEPT, is designing the new library. The new library will serve as a new focus on the campus integrating all Faculties of CEPT through its central location and its design.
41. Finally, before I return to the program at hand I want to remind all of us that without the hard work of the faculty members, both, permanent and visiting, and the staff of CEPT University none of the developments that I am taking about would have been possible. I want to sincerely thank all of them. Thank you very much. I am sure that all of the students also want to. A round of applause is in order.
42. This morning a total of 516 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.
43. Thank you.