

CEPT UNIVERSITY

Tenth Convocation, February 6th, 2016

Welcome Address by Dr. Bimal Patel, President

1. Friends: We are gathered this morning for the Tenth Convocation of CEPT University. The university will confer degrees on students who have completed their programs of study during the academic session 2014 – 15. It will also confer awards won during that period.
2. On this special occasion, I am very happy to welcome our Chief Guest, Shri Girishbhai Patel.
3. Girishbhai Patel is a Senior Advocate at the Gujarat High Court, a jurist of high repute, a widely respected human rights activist and a public professional.
4. He completed his masters education in law at the Harvard Law School, and later did a course at Den Hague Academy of International Law. After returning to Ahmedabad in 1958, he joined the law college of the Gujarat Law Society as a teacher, and was nominated principal of the college a few years later. In 1972, he was appointed as a member of the Law Commission of Gujarat State. On Republic Day in 1975, Girishbhai left his comfortable and secure government service to start his own practice as an advocate with the intention of securing justice for the disenfranchised and marginalized citizens of our country.
5. Girishbhai was always sympathetic with the conditions of the poor and marginalized. Around the same time as he set up his practice, Public Interest Litigations (PILs) started to gain prominence. He saw this as the perfect way to make a meaningful contribution to society. Since then, he has filed over 150 PILs—the Kalol Iffco factory case, Surat textile processing workers case, sugarcane workers case—among many others. He also established the Lok Adhikar Sangh, set up in 1977 to help poor people access legal support. He has played an active role in the Gujarat Navnirman agitation, the Narmada Bachao Andolan and more recently as the lead lawyer fighting for resettlement rights of the riverfront slum dwellers. He has received a number of awards for his work.
6. He received a fellowship from Washington based Institute for International Education in 1998. He was awarded the first Bhagirath Human Rights Award in 1999. He was also awarded with a civilian honor (*nagarik sanman*) in 2009.
7. Once, for some public policy work that I was doing, I asked a lawyer friend, who is also a Senior Counsel at the Gujarat High Court, if he could suggest names of *respected* lawyers in Ahmedabad who I could contact for advice. Without a moment's hesitation he told me: "Ahmedabad has many successful lawyers, but, at

this time, respected, I can name only one – Girish Patel”. The distinction is of great importance so let me say a few words about it.

8. It is natural to aspire to success. Having earned a professional degree, I am sure that many of you are now thinking of getting jobs, gaining experience, maybe studying some more, then, maybe establishing your own practice. You want to start earning so that you can provide for yourself and your families. Then you want to earn some more, so that you and your dear ones can enjoy the good things that the world has to offer. It is natural to aspire to success and to desire the good things that money can buy.
9. However, while one strives to succeed, one must keep in mind that one of the most exquisite and delicious things that the world has to offer is respect. Being held in high regard by others beats many joys that money can buy. And, for professionals, nothing quite beats the joy of being held in high regard by one’s fellow professionals. This is the type of joy that Girishbhai has earned for himself. This is why it is fitting that we have him as our Chief Guest today.
10. Girishbhai also exemplifies what might be called a ‘public professional’. The term ‘public intellectual’ is commonly used. It is ascribed to gifted intellectuals and academics who are able to illuminate public discourse by bringing conceptual clarity to confusing issues. By doing this they are able to render great service to society. Girishbhai Patel, is a gifted and highly accomplished ‘public professional’, a professional who is able to and willing to use his professional skills to tackle important public tasks; a professional who does not wait to be engaged by a client who will pay for his services, but one who strives to somehow channel his professional skills and knowledge to where they are most needed. Girishbhai is just such a professional lawyer who has used his skills to further justice in our society.
11. Today, when so many new professionals graduate, it is important to remind ourselves that while we yearn for success, it is important to yearn for and work for respect. We hope that many of you will become, like Girishbhai, public professionals.
12. Girishbhai, we are highly honored that you accepted our invitation to be our guest and address us this morning.
13. 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.

14. 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. Long before the concept of 'corporate social responsibility' became a business buzz word, 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.
15. 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.
16. 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 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.
19. Now, I am going to spend a little time telling you about a few key developments from last year and some plans for the coming year aimed at strengthening CEPT's core values and mission.

BEING SELF FINANCED - GAINING AUTONOMY

20. 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 students from anywhere in India—thereby improving the diversity and cosmopolitan mix of our student body—which has been one of the core strengths of this institution.
21. I am very pleased to announce that just a couple of weeks back, we have sent our application to Government of Gujarat to become completely self-financed. Till last year, we were receiving approximately 12% of our total annual costs as grants from the government—primarily for the three undergraduate programs in Architecture, Building Construction and Interior Design. With this first step of sending in our

application, we believe that very soon, we will be considered at par with other self-financed institutes in the state. Eventually, we will be able to increase diversity in our incoming class and start re-establishing the cosmopolitan character of our University. I am very thankful to the Hon. Chief Minister of the Government of Gujarat, Smt. Anandiben Patel, the Minister, Dept. of Education, Shri Bhupendrasinh Chudasma and the Minister of State, Dept. of Education, Smt. Vasuben Trivedi. They have been extremely supportive of our efforts and continue to be so. I also want to thank the Secretary, Dept. of Education and the Director of Technical Education and their staff. They have all been sincerely supportive of our initiatives and are guiding us through this process. I would also like to thank all faculty members and staff who have worked tirelessly to bring us this far. Thanks for all you have done so far, and will do in the coming year to bring this goal to fruition.

INCREASING SCOPE AND REACH OF STUDENT FINANCIAL AID

22. As we move away from government grants, CEPT will need to gradually raise fees in programs that were grant funded. This can potentially make education at CEPT unaffordable for many deserving students. Hence, we have revised the policy for student financial support and increased the budget allocated to it significantly.
23. Last year, in 2014-15, Rs. 85 Lakhs were spent towards student financial aid through scholarships, teaching & student assistantships, travel grants, etc., which benefited a total of 520 students. This year, for 2015-16, the amount budgeted for student financial aid has been increased to Rs. 2.02 Crores to benefit 730 students. Along with this, new scholarships have also been introduced. A new President's Scholarship has been introduced for 15 meritorious students who will receive a 50% tuition waiver. New Research Assistantships have been announced to support faculty research. Amounts budgeted for existing scholarships and assistantships have been increased significantly or even doubled in many cases.
24. This increase in student financial aid highlights CEPT's commitment to ensuring that our education remains accessible and affordable. We will continue to make efforts to increase the amount of financial aid available to our students.
25. To increase these opportunities, we have also introduced endowments by batches of alumni—where alumni groups can get together and set up endowments. I am very glad to note that the first such endowment, by '82 & '65 batches of UG Architecture students, is well underway to be established and hopefully very soon we will have many more batch and individual alumni contributions to this initiative.

INCREASING DIVERSITY WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

26. In a bid to expand and sustain our international presence, CEPT University has launched a new International Outreach Mission this year. The mission aims to

expand the opportunities for international students, researchers and academics to engage with CEPT University.

27. Actually, we are already well underway to improving our global outreach. For the last two years, CEPT has been hosting its popular annual summer and winter schools, which are open to international students and professionals. These continue to remain popular and attract large number of faculty members and students. In March this year, CEPT's Centre for Urban Equity CUE will be organizing a major international conference. CEPT will welcome the Archi-Prix International 2017 awards, the most prestigious award program for architecture students in the world, for the first time in India.

EXPANDING PROGRAMS & STUDENT INTAKE

28. This year, we will be starting two new programs. First, we will be launching a new five year undergraduate program under the Faculty of Planning which, at present is, called the Bachelor of Urban Studies and Design Program. The course will be focused on design in the public-realm and will be ideal for students wanting to build a career in urban design – design aimed at improving the public realm of our cities.
29. Second new program will be a Master's Program in Habitat Design. This will be shorter than our usual master's programs and will be ideal for students with existing professional degrees who are interested in gaining a real-world understanding of design in the Indian context. This program will also be open to foreign students and we hope that at least half of the course intake will comprise students with foreign undergraduate degrees. The course will also emphasize practical training or internship with leading design practices in the country.
30. Apart from these two courses, hopefully, with permission from Government of Gujarat, we will be expanding intake in our three undergraduate programs, when the admission process begins in May 2016.

IMPROVING FACILITIES

31. Expanding programs and increasing intake requires additional space. Moreover, as we had not expanded and improved facilities for a long time, there is a constant need to improve existing facilities.
32. I am very happy that construction of the new Lilavati Lalbhai Library at CEPT, which is undertaken with support from Ben Lilavati Lalbhai Trust, is well underway. Designed by our own alumnus and renowned architect, Rahul Mehrotra, the library will help us significantly improve the quality of space available to our students for studies and research. Before the work on the library is finished, we will be undertaking improvements to the Shrenikbhai Plaza, the space where we are

seated just now. We also want to rebuild our canteen, book-store and other amenities towards the end of the plaza. We want to build one more canteen. Simultaneously, we will also be starting construction on the new CEPT Workshops building and soon thereafter on a new academic block. Together these new facilities will free up significant space in existing buildings for upgrading and modification of use.

33. While we expand our facilities, we are managing the demand for space by using classrooms and facilities in Ahmedabad University's buildings next door. We are thankful to Ahmedabad University for allowing us to use their facilities.
34. We are also very grateful to the Board of Management of CEPT University and the Ahmedabad Education Society for their continued support and their willingness to help us find resources and to fund such substantial improvements of our campus. We hope that with their continued support, in a few more years, the entire CEPT Campus will be upgraded with modern amenities which can robustly support our pedagogy and teaching methods for years to come.

SOME OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

35. CRDF, the CEPT Research and Development Foundation, which we set up 3 years back, is also doing well and thriving. Let me give you two recent examples: one, recently, we have been asked to support Kandla Port Trust in the capacity of program manager, guiding the Trust through their expansion and development process. Second, we have been requested by the Government of Maharashtra to conduct training and capacity building for their planning team. Both of these are significant development and they convey the value CEPT can provide in advisory capacity.
36. CEPT has launched CEPT Archives : one of the first initiatives in the country set up to archive information related to architecture, planning, design, and allied disciplines. Started since Dec 2013, the CEPT Archives was launched on 1st August 2015 with the inaugural exhibition of drawings from related study programs or RSPs which are a part of CEPT Repository.
37. CEPT has also established the Gender Parity Mission which not only looks at statutory compliance, but also proactively encourage gender parity in all aspect of academic life. As a part of this mission, a crèche has been set up with full time staff, gender sensitization workshops are being organized and many other activities are being undertaken.
38. 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 our faculty members. Thank you very much. I am sure that all of the students also want to. A round of applause is in order.

39. This morning a total of 420 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.
40. Thank you.