

CEPT UNIVERSITY

Seventeenth Convocation, January 21st, 2023

Welcome Address by Dr. Bimal Patel, President

Friends: We are gathered this morning for the 17th convocation of CEPT University. The University will confer degrees on students who have completed their programs of study during the academic session 2021-22. It will also confer awards won during that period.

On this special occasion, I am very happy to welcome our Chief Guest, Dr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia.

Dr. Ahluwalia, as we all know, is an eminent economist. He graduated with a B.A. (Hons) from St. Stephan's College in Delhi. Then, armed with a Rhodes scholarship, he studied philosophy, politics and economics at Oxford University. After graduating from Oxford in 1968 he joined the World Bank. He worked there for a decade. During that period he met and married Isher Jaj, who was also an economist. We know her as Dr. Isher Judge Ahluwalia and, as many of you know, she was a good friend of CEPT University. Dr. Ahluwalia's work at the World Bank gave him a global perspective on development and an opportunity to think about why, in comparison to other developing countries, the India of that time was doing so poorly.

In 1979, Dr. Ahluwalia returned to India with his family. This was unusual at that time. Given the frustrating conditions here, most people in his position were opting to remain abroad. But both, Dr. Ahluwalia and his wife Isher were deeply committed to India and its development and, for this, they were willing to give up a comfortable life abroad.

After his return, Dr. Ahluwalia took up the position of Economic Advisor in the Ministry of Finance. Since then he has held several senior position in government, such as Commerce Secretary, Secretary Department of Economic Affairs, Finance Secretary and Special Secretary to the Prime Minister. He was Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission from 2004 to 2014. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 2011. Currently he is a Distinguished Fellow at the Center for Social and Economic Progress and Member of the Advisory Group of the IMF and the World Bank focused on the impacts of Covid 19 and Climate Change.

The bare facts of Dr. Ahluwalia's CV do not do justice to the immense contribution that he has made to the development of India and to our lives today. As many of you may know, in the early 1990s, he, along with a small group of people in government and allied institutions, played a key role in ushering in economic reforms. These reforms set India on a path of growth, the fruits of which we are all enjoying today. The significance of those reforms cannot be overstated.

India, before the reforms, was very different from what it is today. It was poor, cut off from the world and in the grip of severe scarcities. More importantly, the post-independence dream, that freed of colonial rule, India will pull itself out of poverty and one day become a well-developed modern nation had all but vanished.

At the root of this dismal state of affairs was a set of well-entrenched economic policies that India was in the grip of. These policies were inward looking, anti-market and anti-private sector. They relied heavily on the public sector to produce key goods and services, viewed the private sector with suspicion and severely restricted its scope. They restricted imports and blocked foreign investment. They hobbled the economy with regulations and vastly increased the scope and power of the bureaucracy. Perhaps the most pernicious effect of these policies was to breed a mean, backward looking and debilitating scarcity mindset that affected all spheres of life including the world of architecture, planning and construction.

The reforms of 1991 released the stranglehold of these policies. They unleashed growth and set India on a new trajectory of development. They revived hope and made it possible to once again dream that India could one day be a proud and well-developed nation worthy of the world's respect. I am sure many of you will agree that much of the history of the last three decades is just the gradual unfolding of this dream.

The Reforms of 1991 did not come about by themselves. They became possible because a remarkable set of people, which included Dr. Ahluwalia, worked behind the scenes for well over a decade to do the intellectual groundwork and persuade those in power that a change in direction is necessary. The story of how the reforms came about and what Dr. Ahluwalia's role was in it, has been wonderfully presented by him in his book 'Backstage' which was published two years ago.

Please read it. It is a story of what it takes to make a difference – humility, persistence, commitment, a willingness to take the difficult path and to engage with problems, an ability to collaborate, respect for people with differing views, a belief that problems, however difficult, can be surmounted if we have the right knowledge. The book is truly inspiring for anyone who wants to make a difference and contribute to the development of India.

Dr. Ahluwalia, thank you for your immense contribution to India's development. We are extremely honoured to have you as the Chief guest at our convocation.

It is also my pleasure to welcome 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.

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 'corporate social responsibility' became mandatory, 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.

Sanjaybhai is deeply interested in and involved with higher-level education and research. He is the President of Ahmedabad Education Society and is involved in many other institutions such as Ahmedabad University, Ahmedabad Textile Industry's Research Association and 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.

I am also very happy to welcome the other members of the Governing Body, members of the Board of Management, Provost, Deans, faculty members, alumni and students of CEPT University.

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.

Now, as is customary on this occasion, let me tell you something about CEPT's activities in the past one year.

After two years of disruption and challenges due to COVID-19, last year we started to emerge from its shadows. This has been a difficult time for everyone, and yet, we have continued to deliver on our mission of teaching and research, to the best of our ability. We have supported students who faced the greatest difficulties through additional financial and other forms of support.

I would like to commend the tremendous effort put in by our students, faculty members and staff, that has enabled us to tackle the challenges in these difficult times.

Now, I would like to list a few of the notable events of the past year....

1. People

CEPT is blessed to have a pool of highly motivated and committed teachers and staff members. Let me share a few new appointments.

Prof. Anand Belhe was appointed as Dean of FD in 2017 with the charge to improve the position of FD as a leading center of Design education in the country. In July 2022, after completing five years as Dean he handed over the baton to **Prof. Saleem Bhatri**.

In addition, **22 new full-time** and adjunct appointments have been made in the last one year. **18 new team members** have joined in non-academic roles in the University. I welcome everyone and wish them the very best

2. 50 YEARS OF THE FACULTY OF PLANNING

In 2022, the Faculty of Planning completed 50 years. Over the last one year, FP conducted a series of activities that marked the completion of this important milestone. It was heartening to see the participation of all the former Deans, many alumni of the early and recent batches and many of the teachers who had taught at the Faculty.

3. Academic Programs

In the last year, the **Master's in Interior Design (MID)** which was housed in the Faculty of Design has been moved to the Faculty of Architecture. This is in line with the long-term vision for the Faculty of Design to focus more on programs that align with industrial modes of mass production while faculty of Architecture continues to offer programs on context specific design. The intake for this program will be increased to 36 this year.

The Faculty of Architecture also started two new specialization programs: the **Master of Housing Design (MHD)** and the **Master of Architectural Tectonics (MAT)**.

This year, the **Bachelor of Interior Design program** will merge with **the B. Des program** and intake in the B Des program will be expanded to 80 seats. This will allow the Faculty of Design to strengthen its focus on Design.

4. Academic Accomplishments

The **Masters in Conservation & Regeneration (MCR)** Program was recognized as one of the programs with best practices in Conservation Pedagogy by World Heritage Education. (Foundation?)

5. Conferences and Symposium

CEPT University hosted the first Asia Partners' Meet of the **Global Sanitation Graduate School (GSGS)** organized from 07 to 09 Nov 2022. **21 institutions** across Asia and Europe, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) attended the meet. The **Faculty of Planning** is the only urban planning institute from South Asia to lead one of the fourteen global clusters.

In a few months, **the Faculty of Architecture** will host CAADRIA (Computer Aided Architectural Design Research in Asia) 2023 in March 2023. This is a highly sought after annual conference in the field of CAAD.

Later, in Dec 2023, the Faculty of Technology will host the **Comfort at the Extremes (CATE 2023)** conference with support from CARBSE, CRDF. This is a major international conference in the field of thermal comfort and building energy.

6. Scholarships

CEPT University's aim is to ensure that no student is denied opportunity to study at CEPT for want of financial resources.

In the year 2021-22, CEPT disbursed approximately **Rs. 5.91 crores** or roughly **13 %** of its total fees towards scholarships and assistantships, which benefited over **600** students in total. It is heartening to note that no student had to discontinue their education due to financial impact of COVID.

7. CEPT Mentorship Program

CEPT University started a formal mentorship program two years back to provide capacity building for faculty, and support for setting in place systems to achieve excellence. The program is now stable with **five** active engagements with institutes across the country for various types of mentorships.

8. CEPT Essay Prize

The theme of fourth cycle of the CEPT Essay Prize 2021-22 was "**Embellishment**". The jury comprised **Romi Khosla, Tridip Suhrud and Kazi Khaled Ashraf**. The top prize was awarded to an international participant at a ceremony on 29th November 2022 by filmmaker and writer, **Paromita Vohra**.

9. Library

The Lilavati Lalbhai Library forms a key resource of CEPT University. I am very happy to share that The Lilavati Lalbhai Library at CEPT University was selected by the **Aga**

Khan Award for Architecture (AKAA) amongst the 20 shortlisted projects for the 2022 Award cycle.

CEPT Library and ADINET had jointly organized a seminar on 'Redesigning Library Spaces and Services' on occasion of **National Librarians' Day** on 27 Aug. The Seminar was attended by more than **125** librarians and library professionals across the country.

10. **CEPT Archives**

CEPT Archives has been leading the effort to archive important information on architecture, planning and design in South Asia, since 2013. This year, CEPT received the works of CEPT alum and noted architect **Shirish Beri**.

CEPT Archives also supported and curated an Exhibition - '**One is to One**' - **Stories, Practice, and Collaboration of Kamal Mangaldas and Devendra Shah**.

11. **CEPT Press**

With a commitment to publish works that are meaningful and relevant to academia and profession, this year CEPT Press has published three books.

1) **Architecture & Independence: The Search for Identity** written by Miki Desai, Madhavi Desai and Jon Lang (2nd Edition).

2) **Making of a Place** by Abin Chaudhuri of Abin Design Studio.

3) **Sen Kapadia Architect: In Pursuance of Meanings** by Sen Kapadia.

12. **Exhibitions**

After two years, this was the first time that the **Summer and Winter Exhibition** was set up entirely on the campus. These exhibitions showcase the work of all students and studio units offered across the university each semester. This year, many primary and high school students visited the winter exhibition in person.

CEPT University supported the exhibition **Chale Chalo: Woven stories of Rajen, curated by Jaai Kakani and Malavi Chaudhari** as a tribute to Rajen Choudhry, an artist who wove us magic. The exhibition was held at the Millowners Association building with support from ATMA.

13. **Endowments**

CEPT University is thankful for the support it receives from individual and corporate donors as donations and CSR funds. I would like to thank **DLF and PSP Projects, Harsha Engineers and M & B Group** for their support and contributions.

I would also like to thank the **Gujral Foundation** and their continued support for the excellence awards and other activities.

INFRASTRUCTURE

14. **Conservation of the FA Building**

The conservation of the FA Building, which was initiated during the pandemic, was completed last February. It was a significant effort involving several professionals and agencies. I am very pleased that the building, a jewel of CEPT campus, has received a new lease of life and it is well used by students and faculty alike.

15. **A New building for CRDF**

This year we will be starting work on a new building to house CRDF and other university activities. This will be located across the north gate of CEPT University and will house all centers of the CRDF along with other supportive facilities. It will also augment our training and capacity building activities. We are very thankful to the **AES** for their support towards the capital expenditure for this and other facilities, including the conservation of the FA Building.

RESEARCH AND ADVISORY OPPORTUNITIES

16. **CRDF**

CRDF is the research and advisory arm of CEPT University that engages with both the public and private sectors for the improvement of human habitat.

This year CRDF is engaged with projects like the Endangered Wooden Architecture Program, a grant received by the Center for Heritage Conservation. The grant focuses on the study and digital documentation of the wooden Havelis across Gujarat.

Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA) has partnered with CRDF & CEPT University for knowledge-sharing and research studies to boost fact-finding and analysis for evidence-based decision-making.

Rail Land Development Authority (RLDA) has commissioned CRDF to undertake a high-level planning exercise for the rail corridor between Vatva and Sabarmati. This involves corridor upgrade studies, site-specific interventions for creating land monetisation possibilities and critical urban design interventions that integrate the 3 key stations, Sabarmati, Maninagar and Vatva, into the surrounding urban fabric.

RATINGS AND RANKINGS

- 17. GSIRF:** Since the last few of years, the Strategic Initiatives Office (SIO) has been supporting the university's participation in the ratings and rankings at the state and national level. In the Gujarat State Institutional Ranking Framework (GSIRF) 2022, CEPT University has been rated 5 Stars in the Overall University category.

ONE LAST POINT

- 18. Alumni Office:** Very soon, you are all going to be newly minted alums of the University. Our Alumni Office has put together a welcome package for you, with an alumni card and a token that will remind you of this day. As you go out, over the next few years, there may be many instances when you need support of the University, or you need some old document, or you would like to connect with someone in a new city. Please do not hesitate to reach out to the Alumni Office for any kind of help. Also, as and when time permits, please come back and share your experiences with other students.

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 sincerely thank all of our faculty members. I am sure that all of the students also want to. I request a round of applause for them.

Today a total of **608** 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 most of the opportunities it presents. 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.

Thank you.