



Speech for the President on the first convocation of the English and Foreign Languages University Hyderabad on 26.04.2017

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It is indeed a pleasure to be here today for the first convocation of the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU). It is a young university although with a rich history of teaching and teacher training since its inception as the Central Institute of English, which was established as part of the vision of our first Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru for new India in 1958 and later as Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages in 1972.

2 Regional campuses were established in Shillong and Lucknow to extend its reach; before it became a Central University in 2007. It is indeed a matter of satisfaction that it has been dedicated to finding solutions to big challenges in language education and preparing students for leadership in a complex world.

3 This University bears six decades of experience in envisioning and materializing an educational model for a new India from this renowned city of Hyderabad, a city that stands apart as a city of poets, painters, artists and creative minds. A smaller India in itself, it throbs with multiple languages & cultures, cuisine and crafts of its own. It is a multifaceted city with much cherished historical legacies and futuristic vision.

4 Out of the harmonious symphony of the old and modern in the city of Hyderabad, this University of international repute emerged due to hard work and collective energies of people with international reputation. Today EFLU stands out among the Universities of South Asia with specialized competencies in the areas of language, literary and cultural pedagogies, language sciences, teacher education and research.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5 I am happy to know that the University has built a significant research profile in language and literary studies, cultural and inter-disciplinary studies. The university's extensive and intensive explorations in research range from natural language processing, classical and bhasha literatures and cinema studies to philosophical studies on one hand and new experimental researches in cultural theory, performance studies and media analysis on the other. I am informed that in addition, upcoming domains of research at the University are -

forensic linguistics using speech recognition for forensic purposes;

digital humanities archiving and documenting digital databases for cultural memories and cultural creations of the country; and

cognitive science research with focus in acoustic phonetics, language disorders and language processing.

6 With its expanding research profile EFLU can play a significant role in reorienting higher education in the country as well as in other emerging nations. It should be possible to develop educational packages from school to University level for training and for collaborative teaching and research.

7 Recognizing the seminal role played by the University and assisting productive expansion of its founding vision, the Government of India has entrusted EFLU with several groundbreaking and important projects such as National University Students Skill Development, National Literacy Mission Authority and Massive Open Online Courses.

8 Acknowledging the eminent role that the University evinces in Teacher training and education, the Ministry of External Affairs entrusted the university with international responsibility for training diplomats and for designing trainer training programmes. I am told that in this regard centres for English Language training have been set up in ASEAN countries and five new centres are coming up in African countries.

9 I am happy to know that the University has initiated outreach programs such as university – industry interface and mutually beneficial dialogue with public sector undertakings, social welfare organizations, government agencies, media houses and private educational institutions.

10 On this august occasion, as we celebrate the impressive achievements of this University, let me share with you some enduring reflections that ought to guide us in advancing our vision of education. To my mind, knowledge must pave the path of life; and living must essentially encompass pursuit of the path of learning. From times immemorial the continent of Asia, and South East Asia in particular, opened up novel paths of learning. Wherever the Buddha traversed - seeds of knowledge sprouted and flourished. Nalanda, after Takshashila, held the beacon of light very high for over a millennium across lands and seas and welcomed drifting seekers of knowledge and provided them a lasting resting place.

11 Today sustaining and reinvigorating higher education, in India as well as in other parts of the world, has become a major challenge, especially so in public institutions. Challenges exist for such institutions, both from outside and inside. At least four distinct factors impinge from outside as well as inside on the administration of an institution of higher learning; According to me, these are a) escalation of costs of learning; b) narrow pragmatics, i.e. market-oriented fast-track skill acquisition, as the sole goal of learning; c) the allure of invasive dominant communication systems depleting attention span; and d) corrosion of trust.

12 Any attempt to build or re-orient higher education in such a situation requires administrative acumen. Administrative strength and sensitivity removes hurdles in the path of learning, and allows academics to thrive, as this University has displayed.

Friends,

13 Cynicism is an easy alibi to evade responsibility. Any institutional future is dependent upon enabling the faculty, students and the staff to overcome cynicism. One way of achieving this is making everyone a stakeholder in collaborative institution-building. Immersive teaching supplemented by intensive research alone can advance the vision of the University in generating new knowledge and sharing it with everyone.

14 It is important to recall that the singular feature of **vidya-dana** (gifting learning) that this country has extended on a planetary scale was aimed at attaining happiness for everyone. **Sarve Jana Sukhino Bhavantu** says the age old mantra from Upanishad. This shloka should be the driving impulse of any conception of education in any period or place. Kennedy inspired graduates to strive for the one of the biggest goal: that is world peace. He said; and I quote,

Too many of us think it is impossible. Too many of us think it is unreal. But that is a dangerous defeatist belief. It leads to the conclusion that war is inevitable – that mankind is doomed – that we are gripped by forces we cannot control.

While strongly advocating for peace he said and I quote, “Our job is not to accept that. Our problems are manmade – therefore they can be solved by man. And Man can be as big as he wants.” Unquote

15 On this celebratory occasion, I wish all those who leave the portals of this prestigious University and carry its legacy as they move on – to attain a happy prosperous and meaningful life. I wish them Godspeed and all success in their future endeavours.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.

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