

**Speech of Minister for Human Resource Development at proposed formal launch of Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, on 22 January 2013**

Vice Chancellor Mr. Najeeb Jung, Pro-Vice Chancellor Prof. S.M. Rashid, Registrar Prof. S.M. Sajid, Prof. Sanjoy Hazarika, Director of the Centre for North East Studies, students, scholars, faculty and friends.

It gives me great pleasure to be present at this event today to formally launch the new premises of the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research today at Jamia Millia Islamia, **the first such Centre in a Central University.**

It is not out of place that such a Centre has been established at Jamia Millia Islamia rather than at any other place because of the very reason that Jamia is known as land of experimentation and innovation. The very creation of this university in response to Mahatma Gandhi's call to boycott British supported education and the subsequent efforts of its founders to come out with more appropriate strategies such as basic education and in subsequent years the establishment of Institute of Rural Services, AJK Mass Communication Research Centre and more recently the Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Centre for Dalit and Minorities Studies, Centre for Comparative Religions and Civilizations shows that Jamia Millia Islamia has been trying hard to academically mainstream the critical social and political issues.

It is interesting to notice that luminaries like Prof. Edward Said, Yasser Arafat, Noam Chomsky, Ho Chi Minh are remembered in the form of various halls and buildings and I believe it inspire the present generation of faculty and students. The recent visit of His Holiness Dalai Lama, Prof. Amartya Sen, His Excellency Ban Ki Moon, and the likes to the Jamia Millia Islamia proves the world wide attention that this great institution is getting. The establishment of the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research therefore is another recent example of addressing the social issues by academic and research endeavours.

Funds have been made available by the UGC for the Centre for North East Studies and we believe that in the next years, as it has already shown in its brief but energetic existence, the Centre will continue to be a trailblazer in the areas of research and connectivity – connecting scholarship and academe to field work and realities as well as to policy prescription and implementation.

It is often this disconnect between research, theory and reality that we miss, especially in Government. Applied theory is the key and I see from the work of the North East Centre that it is already deeply involved in this effort – and I take just one example here: it is in the process of completing a major study on the Challenges before Women from the North-east in Four Metros of the country – of how relevant, poignant and critical such issues are, to our understanding of the region and of each other, of the crisis before our country and the issues that compel and challenge all of us even as we seek answers. Prejudice is unacceptable, in any form, towards any group, in any place. And you are aware that any racist or abusive comments targeting any group face strong punishment under law. We are deeply committed to this.

The North East Centre here is also working on the role of North-eastern states and figures in the Independence Movement as well as in struggles against the colonial power. It will look at issues of energy, ecology, climate change and social stress as well as the questions of governance, traditional customs, conflicts and conflict understanding. These are critical matters of concern for the region and for all of India and perhaps from the study of these issues we can develop a better nuanced approach to the region and its neighbourhood. Indeed, the design of the Centre shows how culture and tradition can be elegantly and seamlessly integrated into contemporary life and I recommend the way you have tried to showcase the diversity of the region.

This is, in my view, especially more relevant given the recent traumatic incident in the capital and the spate of reports about the condition of women and the prejudice and violence they face across the country. I commend the path of research and discourse that you have

undertaken as critical to developing a way to the future, both in terms of scholarship and understanding the human condition as well as, as I have said earlier, bridging the gap between field and policy.

This is especially true of the North-east, a region that I have had the happy privilege of travelling extensively during my earlier avatar in the Defence Ministry. In these visits, to all states and areas of the NER, I also met with and interacted extensively with a wide range of people at the grassroots, in the services and government, scholars and professionals. These visits have shown much more the rest of the country needs to know about the region but conversely it is also important that the NER involves itself more and more in the life of India, for it is through this two-way process that we can gain mutually and develop a win-win situation that goes beyond the cliché.

Indeed, this process is taking place on an extensive scale and is a reflection of the democratic system at work in our country. As Prof. Hazarika, the director of this centre has remarked elsewhere, “people are voting with their feet”, turning their back on conflict, insecurity and tragically the lack of opportunity that comes with these. We see tens of thousands of students, scholars, professionals and sportspersons from the North-east in Goa and Hyderabad, in Mumbai and Bangaluru, in Kolkata and Delhi. They represent a new generation and rising hopes and I hope that some of the scholars who work here and elsewhere from the region will go back to their homelands to invest some of their learning, experiences and knowledge there where it is acutely required to develop, as I have said earlier, a better understanding of us and the ‘other’, of strengthening a two-way process of transition.

The North-east is strategically located, landlocked between China, Myanmar, Bhutan and Bangladesh. It is a place of magical beauty and a range of diverse, courageous and fiercely independently minded peoples. It must be the pivot of the Look East Policy of the Government of India, for this makes eminent sense, and I hope that the NE Centre here will help be the pivot of scholarship for the region around it as well as for within the region.

I understand that the Centre has already organized meetings and conferences on Myanmar as well as Bangladesh in addition to launching a series of young researcher's seminars where established scholars, authors and figures interact with upcoming teachers and researchers. Your first seminars were on the Naga peace process, a most relevant and complex issue which requires deep thought, reflection and research if peace is to be firmly established in the entire region. You seek to build a platform and offer a space where ideas can be freely exchanged in civility but with frankness. This is crucial to the future of this region for perhaps, through such exchanges, can some ideas emerge that will uniquely meet the needs of people, replacing confrontation with conciliation, ill-will with goodwill and a top-down approach with people-sensitive and inclusive policies.

We support your efforts and that of Prof. Hazarika, your energetic and innovative Director whose work and leadership in the area of reconciliation, disaster management, health, education and governance in Assam especially is well known and as one who speaks fearlessly on issues facing the region and is respected for his views.

We are acutely aware of the burdens of history and the hurdles of politics and ethnic pressures which lie in such a complex region. And we look forward to the creative research that engages with field and policy, challenges mindsets, and designs, develops and expands democratic spaces for dialogue, discussion, research and a better, shared knowledge which will benefit all, that embraces, yet goes beyond the classroom.