

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND ON  
THE OCCASION OF XXVI CONVOCATION OF THE NORTH EASTERN  
HILL UNIVERSITY (NEHU)**

**Shillong, November 04, 2019**

1. I am very happy to be here in this beautiful campus of the North-Eastern Hill University to participate in its 26<sup>th</sup> Convocation.
2. My heartiest congratulations to the students and scholars who have received their degrees and medals, after successfully completing their academic programs. It is also an occasion to acknowledge the contribution of faculty and parents whose affection, guidance and help enabled all successful students to reach this milestone. I convey my appreciation for the entire NEHU fraternity whose efforts have strengthened the university.
3. I feel especially happy to note that out of all medal awardees in today's convocation, as many as 76 per cent are girls. In almost all the universities where I have attended convocations, I have observed that girls have been outshining boys. This reflects our society's progress and points towards our bright future as a developed nation.
4. I am glad to note that this university has drawn faculty and students from all parts of the country. I am also glad to know about growing international links of the university. It makes me happy that some of the departments of your university have started enrolling students from Thailand, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Africa and the Middle-East. This promotes cultural cohesion and cross-pollination of learning.
5. I take this opportunity to congratulate Shri Kanubhai Tailor, a 'Padmashri' awardee, who is a 'Divyang', for bringing hope to many physically challenged people by his compassionate service. I appreciate this university for conferring 'Honoris Causa' upon him and thus highlighting the value of humanitarian service for our society and nation.
6. This is my first visit to Meghalaya since assuming office as the President of India. Long ago, I had come to Meghalaya when I was a member of

Rajya Sabha. I had enjoyed my trip to Cherrapunji, which along with Mawsynram is among the two places receiving highest rainfall. The beauty of Meghalaya, the 'abode of clouds' is matchless. The natural splendour of this place and the warmth of its people attracted Swami Vivekanand and Gurudev Ravindranath Tagore who frequently visited this land.

7. This land has given birth to great freedom fighters like U Tirot Sing, U Kiang Nongbah and Pa Togan Sangma who have been immortalized at the martyr's column in Shillong.
8. I am sure that Meghalaya will continue to build upon its strengths under the guidance of the Governor Shri Tathagata Roy and the young Chief Minister, Shri Conrad Sangma.
9. While in Meghalaya, it is natural to remember the Late P.A. Sangma. Mr. Sangma's life-story is very inspiring. He showed extraordinary strength of character to scale great heights of achievement. As we all know, he rose to become Chief Minister of Meghalaya and later, Speaker of Lok Sabha. It was a coincidence that he happened to be the Speaker when I was member of Rajya Sabha. We had interacted on several occasions. I think that the young students sitting here can draw strength from his example.
10. Students of this university can also seek inspiration from illustrious alumni like Mr. K.J. Alphons, who joined the IAS, became Rajya Sabha Member and a Union Minister and Professor David Syiemlieh who became Chairman of Union Public Service Commission. NEHU has impressive alumni who have made their mark in several fields in India and in many developed countries.

Dear students,

11. There is a lot to learn from the traditional wisdom of the tribal brothers and sisters of Meghalaya. The progressive society of Meghalaya gives primacy to women. The people of Meghalaya also teach the value of cleanliness. For several years, Mawlynnong has been regarded as the

cleanest village in Asia. Speaking of cleanliness, it is worth mentioning that brooms made in Meghalaya from the local broom-grass are in great demand across the country. Pristine waters of Dawki and Umngot rivers reflect not only beauty of nature but also the wisdom of Meghalaya's people.

12. Tribes of Meghalaya had developed the unique art of building root-bridges. Roots and branches of fast-growing trees are shaped along both banks of rivers and valleys in such a way that they meet to form a bridge. Root-bridges take around 15 to 25 years to build but these bio-engineering wonders are estimated to last 500 years. This environment friendly inter-generational way of building a natural infrastructure is full of messages for entire humanity.
13. Passion for sports, specially football, among the youth of Meghalaya is well known. I am glad that Meghalaya is implementing 'Mission Football' to encourage talented youngsters, including girls. The energetic and talented youth of the North-East, including Meghalaya have earned goodwill as sound professionals in the fields of information technology, healthcare, hospitality and several other areas. I will appeal to the youth to maintain and further strengthen their image as excellent sports-persons, artists and professionals, and not become victims of habits or substances which are injurious to health.

Dear students,

14. NEHU has emerged as a premier centre of learning. It is heartening to note that, besides imparting higher education in all the major disciplines, the university is also giving special emphasis on the development of this region which has significant tribal population. Institutions of higher education like NEHU can also be instruments of social and economic transformation. The university can help Meghalaya in achieving better ranking on Human Development Indices.
15. More than 80 per cent population of Meghalaya is dependent on agriculture. By helping improve agricultural productivity, NEHU can play a catalytic role in promoting socio-economic development of Meghalaya

and the North-East. Students and teachers of NEHU's departments of 'Rural Development and Agricultural Production', 'Agri Business and Food Technology', and 'Horticulture' can help enhance farmers' income. The 'Department of Forestry' being set up here will also have major opportunity to contribute to growth and development of the people of Meghalaya and other states in the region.

16. I have been told that the university community has completed several research projects related to development of the people in this region. I expect NEHU to continuously explore areas of relevant learning covering local to global issues.
17. Efforts of the University for promoting employability and self-employment need utmost encouragement. I am happy to note that 'Deen Dayal Upadhyay Community College' has been established by the university to impart skill-based education. NEHU has set up an incubation centre in collaboration with the Government of Meghalaya to strengthen the start-up ecosystem and thereby encourage the culture of commercial and social entrepreneurship.

Dear students,

18. Now you are entering a world full of opportunities and challenges. Higher education is a privilege not available to a lot of people in our country. I appeal to all of you to help improve the condition of such underprivileged fellow citizens. I also urge upon you to give back to the society in whatever way you can.
19. In the Conference of Governors held in June, 2018 I had called upon the stakeholders to focus on 'University Social Responsibility' or USR. In order to fulfil USR obligations, students of this university may spend time at some villages and also stay the night, if it is workable. They should help the villagers deal with their problems. They may make the villagers aware about the importance of sanitation, literacy, vaccination and nutrition of children. This exposure will not only help the villagers but also make the students more aware and sensitive to ground realities.

20. I like the motto of the university: 'Rise up and build'. Its message is simple and clear. Every student should internalise this motto and translate it into action. You must rise up as a person with commitment, compassion, courage and competence. You must build your career, your character, your community and your country.
21. I once again congratulate all the students for their success in academic pursuits. I give you my best wishes for a very happy and successful life. May you bring glory to your parents and your nation.

Thank you  
Jai Hind!