

Speech by Hon'ble Sherig Lyonpo at the National Conference on Higher-Education Teaching-Learning in Bhutan- Innovation, Adaptations, Opportunities, and Challenges, July 4, 2022

Hon'ble Sherig Lyonpo (Minister of Education), Jai Bir Rai

Dear Friends of the Academia,

A very good morning to all of you! I must say, what a wonderful way to start my Monday morning, reflecting on a very sublime, yet burning issue of Higher Education Teaching and Learning. I think that this conference is very timely given the fact that the world is coming back to normalcy after the COVID-19 pandemic, and many emerging issues that were never thought of before can now be topics of discussion in this conference.

The COVID-19 Pandemic taught us many lessons, but the one that I find the most significant is the vulnerability of the human race. We are aware of the fact that the stability and confidence of years of innovation and investment in Health and Medicine, Governance and Education, and Business and Economics throughout the world became feeble and insignificant in front of a virus, and countries and governments around the world watched helplessly as millions died due to a virus. Is this not a distinct demonstration of our vulnerability?

We learnt in our history lessons that wars do not provide solutions and are barbaric but isn't it shocking to witness a war even in the 21st century? Were we not proud of diplomatic capabilities and international relationships?

What lessons do these major shifts teach us and how can we design a better future? The most important function of the university is that it plays the roles of a seer, a guru, a prophet. We know for the fact that whenever there have been major changes in any society, it was on the advice and direction of the guru, the vision of the prophet, and the direction of the teacher.

Today, not only in Bhutan, but universities around the world face this challenge of being a true prophet who will provide trailblazing solutions to these emerging world issues. Some of the issues I would like to highlight are: political and geo-political issues, environmental and cultural sustainability, human capital movement and brain drain, family and social disintegration, economic equation and business skills of the 21st century, STEM and STEAM implementation challenges and opportunities, the nature and future of jobs, and educational innovation and human empowerment.

I am sure these will be some of the topics of debates, discussions, and deliberations of this very important conference.

Last but not the least, the University must be intelligent enough to balance economic sustainability with its values and principles unlike some of the universities we see elsewhere. I am talking about the currency of your knowledge, the quality of your wisdom, and the responsibility of your vision.

I wish you very pragmatic, futuristic, and altruistic discussions and deliberations as outcomes of this conference.

Tashi Delek.