

The Indo American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston's 2008 Distinguished Lecture Series is sponsored by the Shell Oil Company. This year's lecture series continues to bring together leaders of local Indian, Chinese, British, German, pan-Asian, French, African-American, and academic communities. Over a dozen Chambers and Economic Development Agency leaders also come, ready to share best practices, network and learn.

**“The quarterly Lecture series is a very important way to share this inclusive vision with Houston’s many wonderful communities, and the organizations that support them,”** said IACCGH Executive Director Jagdip Ahluwalia.

At the January 2008 season’s inaugural lecture, the Keynote speaker was none other than the University of Houston’s brand-new President and Chancellor UH System Dr. Renu Khator. Paul Hamilton, President Shell Global Solutions introduced Dr Khator. Her fact-filled talk was entitled “American Higher Education in the Global Economy,” but might have been called “A New Era at UH,” considering Dr. Khator’s ambitious agenda (see [Hyperlink http://www.uh.edu/about/offices/president/100-days](http://www.uh.edu/about/offices/president/100-days)).

The India-born UH President, who spent over 20 years at the University of South Florida, can boast a very impressive resume with a long list of publications and academic achievements. Yet she modestly praised her new employer, and the new city that has made her feel so comfortable.

“It’s almost like I’m back home,” she said with a warm smile, looking around the sea of very diverse faces. But she quickly changed the subject to discuss how America’s students are steadily losing ground to young people in countries like China and India.

“Two-thirds of our college students need six years to graduate from a four-year program,” she pointed out. “Over forty percent require remedial courses--at a cost of over \$1 billion a year.”

Twenty years ago American, Japanese and Chinese universities all graduated about the same number of science and engineering students, she added. Now America produces a lot fewer--about the same number as the much smaller South Korea.

She ascribes the problem in part to Americans’ changing perception of who really benefits from a superior post-secondary education system.

**“Society used to invest more in education, because they believed that having college graduates is a benefit to the country as a whole,”** she said. **“That has changed and now a degree is merely an individual’s means to a higher personal income, so a graduate is expected to bear the cost. Other**

**countries haven't forgotten that every graduate helps them grow."**

But Dr. Khator is confident that America can acknowledge major problems, and then tackle them.

**"America has done this many times, in many fields," she said. "Having such a distinguished public university means Houstonians can come together to create a great future. But it's up to all of us to make it happen."**

**With the right planning, public involvement and people, she concluded, Texas can soon have more than one top-tier Research University.**

**"But we can't teach today's students with yesterday's tools and expect to still be in business tomorrow."**

IACCGH President Dr Atul Varadhachary, Chief Guests Harris County Judge Ed Emmett and India's Consul General S M Gavai were beaming as Dr. Khator accepted her audience's enthusiastic applause.

The Chamber uses the distinguished lecture series to help empower the wider community. The knowledge shared by speakers helps community members prepare to make critical changes needed to meet the challenges of today's evolving global economy.

Talking about Dr Khator's faith in the people's ability to make the difference **"If any group of people can do it,"** Ahluwalia said, **"it's the great people who came here today."**

Future lectures in the series will feature Texas Secretary of State Phil Wilson and Dan Wolterman, President & CEO of Memorial Hermann.

For details on IACCGH visit their website [www.iaccgh.com](http://www.iaccgh.com) or contact [almamach@aol.com](mailto:almamach@aol.com)

Article submitted by: Carey Giudici , Betterwords