

Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre

(Sponsored by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India)
Indira Gandhi National Open University

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ISLRTC news letter is published with a view to reach the people who are in the field of disability especially Deafness

Editorial Note

The first issue of the ISLRTC Newsletter makes all of us at ISLRTC excited about the new developments in our young and growing organization.

First, we are glad to be located at IGNOU, the world's largest University. We have access to many resources that the University offers. These will help ISLRTC, as it implements the Objectives established by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.

During the month of May and June, ISLRTC held meetings of its stakeholders—parents of Deaf children, teachers and principals of schools for the Deaf, interpreters, ISL teachers and national and regional leaders of Deaf organizations. These meetings were held in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Bangalore. These large cities have significant resources and organizations serving Deaf people and their needs. These meetings were a huge success. The inputs provided by representatives of all stakeholders were very valuable.

One thing is clear from their collective inputs: the establishment of ISLRTC has been long overdue. There was little or no information available on ISL as a communication option and as an educational tool. There were many myths floated about sign language. The presentations at each of these meetings helped clarify some of the misunderstandings prevalent in the public.

This shows the daunting task ISLRTC has ahead of it. We are currently working on developing some information literature and will be hiring qualified staff to start working on the demands from our stakeholders and to implement those Objectives mandated for ISLRTC.

Thank you very much for your cooperation. We look forward to working with all of you and also hearing from you and your inputs. Please feel free to contact us and send your feedback at islrtc@ignou.ac.in

Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre

The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India, has been playing a very proactive role in catalyzing the services for persons with disabilities through various programmes and schemes. In its endeavors, it was instrumental in bringing out of 3 legislations to meet the diverse needs of PWDs i.e. PWD Act 1995, RCI Act 1992 and National Trust Act 1999. The new feather in

the cap of the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment is the establishment of Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC). The foundation stone of ISLRTC was laid at IGNOU Campus on October 4, 2011 with proper plan, budgetary provision and 35 positions.

Over 5 million deaf people use Indian Sign Language (ISL). Although ISL has been used for centuries, it was not formally and systematically researched until 1977. The use of ISL in social, cultural, educational and vocational setting will help enrich the lives of deaf people in India.

The establishment of ISLRTC is a major historical initiative of Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment and will result in strengthening the identity of ISL as a bona fide language and its use in educational and social setting.

Indian Sign Language Research & Training Centre is established as an autonomous centre of Indira Gandhi National Open University on its campus in Maidan Garhi, New Delhi. It was inaugurated on 4th October, 2011 by Hon'ble Kapil Sibal, Minister of HRD, and Hon'ble Mukul Wasnik, Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment. The ISLRTC honors the natural language and culture of 8 million Deaf Indians and will focus on implementing the goals established by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. ISLRTC, IGNOU will work collaboratively with other organizations and the Deaf community to implement and realize the goals stated by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

The main objective of ISLRTC is to conduct research work in ISL, training interpreters, and preparing teachers to use bilingual approach in teaching Deaf children. The Centre has the following broad objectives:

The Objectives of ISLRTC are:

- To promote the use of Indian Sign Language (ISL)
- To carry out research in ISL and create linguistic record/ analysis of the language
- To carry out and promote research on bilingual approach in education of Deaf Children
- To train persons in Sign linguistics and other related areas at various levels
- To design, promote and offer programs in ISL interpreting and bilingual education, at various levels, through various modes including the distance mode

- To develop and offer courses aimed at training teachers to teach ISL
- To develop and create resources for use in teaching of ISL to children, parents, teacher and general public
- To facilitate educational use of ISL in special schools, as the first language and medium of instruction, and in mainstream schools, as second language or as interpreter mediated language of classroom communication
- To provide guidance in innovative education methodology for institutions providing education to the Deaf
- To collaborate with other institutions and organizations of the Deaf to promote and propagate ISL
- To collaborate with universities and other educational institutions in India and abroad in sign language research, deaf studies and related areas
- To produce and promote visual material in ISL story telling of both Indian and global literature and deafness related issues
- To create and promote literature in and about ISL
- To facilitate Print and Visual Media in promoting the use of ISL
- To foster the development of Deaf identity and culture
- To act as a clearing house of information on ISL, deafness, education of the hearing impaired and related areas

[Report of Various Activities of ISLRTC](#)

Orientation to Deafness



ISLRTC organized an orientation programme for IGNOU officers on 21st May, 2012 at IGNOU, Maidan Garhi. 60 participants including the Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, Directors of various schools, Unit Heads and others participated in the

programme. The objective of the programme was to increase the awareness of the target group about Deafness, problems of Deaf community and initiatives required at different level for facilitating persons with Deafness.

Regional Meetings with Interpreters

ISLRTC organized four Regional Meetings with Interpreters at Bangalore, Kolkata, Delhi and Mumbai. The objective of organizing the meetings of Interpreters was to improve the quality and number of Interpreters in India and take feedback from the them so that the training programmes incorporate the points suggested by Interpreters. The details of the meetings are as following:

Sl. No.	Place	Date	No. of participants
1.	Bangalore	23-24 May, 2012	25
2.	Delhi	30-31 May, 2012	20
3.	Kolkata	6-7 June, 2012	15
4.	Mumbai	14-15 June, 2012	30



Regional Meetings with Principals and Teachers of Schools for the Deaf

Four Regional meetings with principals and teachers working in the schools for the Deaf were organized at Bangalore, Kolkata, Delhi and Mumbai. The objectives of these meetings were to provide an opportunity to the participants to share their ideas, experiences and challenges that they faced while providing education to the Deaf. The details of the meetings are as following:

Sl. No.	Place	Date	No. of participants
1.	Bangalore	25 th May, 2012	36
2.	Delhi	1 st June, 2012	25
3.	Kolkata	8 th June, 2012	17
4.	Mumbai	16 th June, 2012	35

Regional Meetings with Parents of Deaf children

ISLRTC organized four regional meetings with the parents of Deaf children at Bangalore, Kolkata, Delhi and Mumbai. The objective of these meetings were to provide them a platform to share their problems and challenges faced while raising their children and providing them education.

Sl. No.	Place	Date	No. of participants
1.	Bangalore	26-27 May, 2012	25
2.	Delhi	2 nd June, 2012	15
3.	Kolkata	9-10 June, 2012	40
4.	Mumbai	17 th June, 2012	20

Round Table Meeting of Deaf Leaders

A round table meeting of Deaf leaders was organized by ISLRTC on 26th & 27th June, 2012 at IGNOU, Maidan Garhi. 25 Deaf leaders across the country participated in the meeting and shared the issues and challenges faced by them while working with the Deaf. They also suggested the ways and means for improvement in the field of Deafness.

Live Talk Shows on FM Gyan Vaani

ISLRTC organized a series of live talk shows on Deafness on FM Gyan Vaani from 31st July 2012-7th August 2012. The topics included - Deafness, Early Identification and Early Intervention; School education for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing; Preparing the teachers of the Deaf; Concessions & facilities for the Deaf in education and other services; Higher Education: Scenario: barriers, opportunities and future; Role of Government in expanding the use of ISL in education; Deaf and the employability: vocational training & job opportunities.

Article on Sign Language/Special Feature

What is Deafness?

Dr. Madan Vasishta

An American Deaf poet wrote, "You have to be Deaf to understand." This person describes how people misunderstand Deafness. The condition of not being able to hear is called Deafness. This is a simplistic description. There is a LOT more to being Deaf and about



Deafness. In this short article, I will try to explain some basic facts about Deafness. This article will not answer most questions about Deafness; it will not even scratch the surface. However, it will, hopefully, give you some basic information and also whet your appetite for learning more about Deafness.

Just like no two snowflakes are alike, no two Deaf people are alike. There are many factors that make all Deaf people unique. The first is degree of hearing loss. How much hearing has one lost? The loss can be minor, like in hard of hearing people, to profound, where a person cannot hear at all. A Hard of Hearing person with or without a hearing aid can carry out normal conversation with hearing people without their realizing that he has a hearing problem. A profoundly Deaf person cannot hear any sounds even with a hearing aid. In addition, all sounds are different. Some profoundly Deaf people might be able to hear a car horn or water running or a doorbell, but might not be able to hear speech at all.

The second important factor is age of onset of Deafness. If a person becomes Deaf after acquiring speech and written language, his Deafness will not impede learning as much as of a Deaf person who is born Deaf or becomes Deaf before acquiring a spoken/written language. Learning a language that a Deaf person has never heard is a very difficult task. Hearing children learn a language without even trying. Their brain processes what is heard and slowly they acquire the language spoken in their homes perfectly. Deaf people, on the other hand, cannot learn that language because, they cannot or have not heard it. Instead, they have to learn to read and write slowly word by word. This is a very tedious task and requires years and years of hard work to learn rudimentary language. The syntactic structure and grammar that hearing children master by age three or four without even trying requires years and years of drills to learn. Some time uninformed people attribute a Deaf person's limited linguistic skill to learning disability or mental ability. It is simply lack of linguistic input that delays language acquisition.

Some Deaf people are good lipreaders. However, we must keep in mind that only 40% of speech is visible on lips. The lipreader has to guess the

remaining words and try to understand them message with the help of contextual clues. Lipreading is more of an art than a skill. Some Deaf people become very good lipreaders even without trying and some, despite a lot of effort, do not succeed in lipreading even simple messages.

With effective communication support, a Deaf person can excel in any field. There are Deaf people working as medical doctors, scientists, dentists, lawyers and businessmen. Deaf people have been elected to national and regional parliaments in many countries. As the former president of Gallaudet University said, "Deaf people can do anything except hear."

Let us make sure Deaf people get the opportunity to do anything that they wish to do.

Upcoming Activities of ISLRTC

Directory of Resources

ISLRTC is in the process of preparing a directory of all available resources in Indian sign language in the country. All the stakeholders and concerned experts can send the details to Director for inclusion of their information in the directory

Crash Course on Indian Sign Language

A crash course for learning sign language will be offered to all interested employees of IGNOU from 5th September 2012. The participants will be able to learn functional Sign Language.

Interpreters training programme

A three week Advanced Interpreters Training Programme will be conducted in December, 2012. All the interpreters using Indian sign language can participate in the programme. ISLRTC will provide the training to the registered participants free of cost. Registration will be open from 1st October, 2012 onwards.

BPPDS and BAASLS Programme

The BPPDS and BAASLS programmes will be offered by ISLRTC as collaborative programmes. The new academic session of BAASLS will start from 3rd September 2012 and new batch of BPPDS will start from January 2013. The admission process will start in October 2012.

Bachelors Preparatory Programme for Deaf Students (BPPDS) (Foundation Entry) is taken prior to the degree programme in BA Applied Sign Language Studies. It provides Deaf students with

an introduction to the realities of study at Higher English (HE) level and aims at compensating for deficits in the areas of their literacy, and general study skills.

BA Applied Sign Language Studies (BAASLS) programme is designed to generate graduates with an excellent understanding of the different approaches and methodologies used in language acquisition, language teaching and learning so that the number of sign language teachers, teacher trainers, literacy support teachers and project workers in the specialized area of sign languages and Deaf communities can be enhanced.

Recent News from the Field

International Advocacy Programme at Gallaudet University Washington DC, USA

Twenty three Deaf and hard of hearing leaders from 10 developing countries were at Gallaudet from July 1 to 7, 2012 gaining essential skills that will help them improve their personal and professional lives and those of their peers at home. By participating in the Grassroots Advocacy International Leadership Training, these community-minded individuals were taught how to network with other potential leaders and advocate for their rights by a team of noted Deaf role models. Participation in this training programme required a commitment by the leaders to share their knowledge by training their peers at home. The intensive week-long programme ensured that participants leave with preparation for work in leadership positions, effective leadership skills to organize Deaf people at grassroots level into productive groups, a clear vision of strategic planning and goal setting, leadership styles, knowledge and skills application, human relations and emotional intelligence skills.

CNN, IBN telecast National Anthem in Indian Sign Language

CNN, IBN channel on its TV show of "The Greatest Indian" telecast National Anthem in Indian Sign Language" on August 15, 2012.

Inclusion of Indian Sign Language in "People's Linguistic Survey of India"

Bhasha Research and Publication Centre, a Vadodra based research organization, has undertaken a nation-wide survey of existing languages under the title "People's Linguistic Survey of India." The PLSI, being carried out nearly a century after George Grierson completed

his Linguistic Survey of India, will be different from the Grierson LSI in many ways. One important difference that will make all the deaf very happy is that the PLSI intends to include a comprehensive description of Sign Languages currently in use in India. The first workshop in this regard was held on August 17 & 18, 2012.

Success Stories

Indian Fastest Deaf bowler

Challenges in life do not mean that we should not dream big. This is a story of a Deaf boy named Fahimuddin from Delhi who not only dreamt big but also worked hard to achieve it. He is the best Deaf bowler in India. He represented India in the Deaf World Cup in 2005. Picked as a probable for the Delhi under-22 side, the left armer from the working class Jahangirpuri area knew that getting into the Indian team would be tough. But he was ready to take the challenge head on. His ability to bowl at a speed of 130-135 kmph and swing the ball both ways made him a first choice net bowler at his club. He has shared cricket fields with many famous cricketers such as Gautam Gambir and Virender Sehwag etc. "I know the road ahead is tough for me but I am determined, and one day you will see me partnering with Irfan Pathan," asserts Fahimuddin. Like many left-arm fast bowlers, Fahimuddin idolises the legendary Pakistani bowler, Wasim Akram. A Movie named 'Iqbal' (2005), starring Shreyas Talpade, was picturised based on his true life story. He is requesting the BCCI official to involve him in the cricket squad.

Myths and Facts about Sign Language and Deafness

- Is Sign Language Universal?

Sign Language is **not universal**.

Every country has its own sign language just like it has its own spoken / written language(s); and each sign language has its own set of vocabulary and grammar. In India, Deaf people use the Indian Sign Language [ISL]; Deaf Americans use American Sign Language [ASL]; Deaf Britons use the British Sign Language (BSL) so on and so forth.

- **Sign Language is not a complete language. It is more of gesturing and acting.**

Sign Languages are **complete languages**.

Sign Languages all over the world have complex and difficult grammatical structures that need to be

learnt. Incorrect use of the Sign Language grammar results in incomplete or distorted communication that fails in its essence of conveying a message.

Every concept in Sign Language can be interpreted in the spoken / written language of any country and vice versa.

If sign language consisted of gestures alone would it not be easy for every hearing person to communicate with Deaf people world over without the requirement of a Sign Language Interpreter?

Students Corner

My Experiences as a Deaf Person

Kakooza Muhammed (Uganda)

BAASLS Student Year III

IGNOU

I'm the fourth born in the family of 8 children and was not born Deaf. I lost my hearing when I was eight years due to meningitis. My parents' efforts to rescue me were in vain as they used to take me for treatment which made me miss classes. I was dejected and frustrated with education due to communication barriers both at home and school. My class-mates sometimes laughed at me hence affecting my social life. But I continued getting notes, reading past papers and also getting coaching at home through lip reading and use of speech from some experts hired by parents with the help of hearing aids but I refused to go to the rehabilitation as proposed by my parents because I was not comfortable with the carpentry course which they wanted me to do as it was an abuse to me because I wanted better education like my siblings.



I remember when I joined senior school I was the only Deaf person in the school with no sign language interpretation services and also I did not know sign language during that time but only managed to lip read my friends and tapping notes to understand each other's communication. I used to sit on the front seat and copied notes from a friend as teachers dictated.

It was in 2005, I joined the Deaf community hence learning sign language and also doing voluntary work by teaching Deaf students English. I was also elected as the chairperson of the District Deaf association, a branch of Uganda National Association of the Deaf for two terms until I got the scholarship to study in India.

I resigned from all my responsibilities in the Association to be focused with studies. I'm still dreaming what I wanted to achieve because I was the only one who would not have gone beyond university level in my family because of discrimination but thanks to Deaf Empowerment Foundation and Indira Gandhi National Open University I was able to come and pursue my degree in Applied Sign Language Studies which is still going on till date. I'm grateful to the BAASLS course as it has helped me to learn many things which I did not expect in first place because it was my first time to be integrated with Deaf students unlike inclusive education where I had a lot of communication barriers so I feel proud to be one of the pioneer students to study the course.

My Experiences as a Deaf Person

Vishwajit (Mumbai)

BAASLS Student Year III

IGNOU

Both my parents are Deaf and I have Deaf siblings, but you will be surprised to know that my parents wanted me to speak! Such was the influence of oralists! They wanted me to speak better than them! When I was young, with lots of practice in speech therapy I got good speech (I was told, I never heard it!). Then I was sent to a boarding school and in one year, all my voice was gone and my family and previous teachers were shocked but it did not bother me. Most Deaf children of hearing parents always follow what teachers instruct. It was tough for me and it is tough for all Deaf children. Hearing parents lack confidence and they want the important people to tell them what to do.

We must fight back against the traditional teachers and old system of teaching as most of the Deaf failed or did poor in academics and were jobless. You think parents responsible for their children?



Yes, but 80% wrong doing comes from the teachers in the school. Teachers must understand that education does not become accessible to Deaf students through their oral methods. However, so many of them still do not know the facts about sign language and think it is without grammar or is bad English. We must make teachers aware of the fact that sign languages are true languages with complex grammars but they must not compare them with spoken languages.

I am thankful to my teachers and people in IGNOU for my BAASLS course. I study about Bilingualism which is so critical for Deaf education. I read books with golden information. Now I not only know what is happening in India but also know what is happening all over the world.

“Signs are to eyes what words are to ears.”

- Ken Glickman

Book Review

Seeing Voices by Oliver Sacks

Oliver Sacks is a renowned physician and neurologist in America. He is also a prolific author. One of his books, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales*, published in 1985, was a bestseller. I read *Seeing Voices* in 1990 and was very impressed with the way Dr. Sacks describes Deafness, bilingualism and other issues related to Deafness and communication. More than that, he describes Deaf people as a linguistic group and as a people; not as someone suffering from a medical condition. Coming from a medical person that really counts.

Sacks has a way with words as well as ideas and concepts. He describes very complex issues and concepts in a way that a person who has little or no background in that subject can understand it clearly. That is the reason, I always recommend *Seeing Voices* to people new to Deafness and are earnestly interested in learning about it.

The book was published in 1989, almost a quarter of century ago, and a lot has changed since then, however, like most classic works, it is, in my opinion, still a great book on Deafness and related issues, especially for the new comers to the field.

As a neurologist, he describes the theory of critical age for learning very clearly. If people do not learn a language during early years, the part of the brain that helps learn languages slowly starts to atrophy. Thus, most Deaf people, despite normal

intelligence, are not fluent in written languages, if they missed the boat of critical age of learning.

Sacks also describes his visit to Gallaudet during the Deaf President Now demonstration that changed the outlook of American people toward Deafness. He includes some little known information about other famous Deaf people. These make this book more comprehensive.

I strongly recommend Seeing Voices to anyone who is interested in learning about Deafness and does not have the time to read ten books. Seeing Voices is a prime example of "gagar main sagar" kind of book that is choke full of information described in a clear and simple language.

- Madan Vasishtha

Miscellaneous

13th International Conference "TRANSED" in Delhi

SVAYAM is proud to announce the 13th International Conference on 'Mobility and Transport for Elderly and Disabled Persons' TRANSED 2012 to be held in New Delhi, India from September 17-21, 2012.

Annual Conference of NCED to be held from January 28-30, 2013 at Hyderabad

Annual conference of National Convention of Educators of the Deaf (NCED) will be held in Hyderabad from January 28-30, 2013. This conference is attended by hundreds of the teachers of the deaf. The theme for the next year conference is "**Moving forward: Bridging the gaps in education of deaf and Hard of Hearing**" with Subthemes- (i) Early Intervention towards School Readiness (ii) Good Practices emerging in teaching language and academic subjects, (iii) Transition from school to work and community living and (iv) Accountability in services provided to deaf and Hard of Hearing

1st CBR World Congress

1st Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) World Congress in India from 26th - 28th November 2012 will be held at Jaypee Palace Hotel and Convention Centre, Agra, organised by CBR India Network. The World Congress assures an excellent platform to network with CBR Practitioners, Representatives from Disabled People's Organizations, Parents Organizations, Rehabilitation Experts, Specialists,

Local/International NGOs, Policy makers, Government Officials, and other stakeholders for learning, sharing, replicating good and validated practices from all over the world.

The Congress would facilitate and develop/strengthen CBR as a key strategy to reduce poverty and enhance the quality of life of people with disabilities and their families, and ensure that the benefits of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reach majority of the world's people with disabilities. The congress would strengthen CBR National and Regional Networks and to promote the creation of CBR Global Network.

India Deaf Expo 2012 in Mumbai

The 3rd India Deaf Expo is scheduled from 29th to 30th Dec., 2012 by DEAF LEADERS. This is a conference on Innovative Technologies, Sign Language Awareness & Education of the Deaf. It will be a platform for special educators and thinkers in the field of hearing impairment to interact and exchange ideas. It will be open to parents, doctors, audiologists, sociologists, speech therapists, psychologists and Linguistics. It will cover areas such as computing technology in Deaf education, communicating with hearing impaired children, Deaf culture and socialization, higher education and early intervention, bilingual education for Deaf teachers, professionals and parent partnerships and networking among agencies.

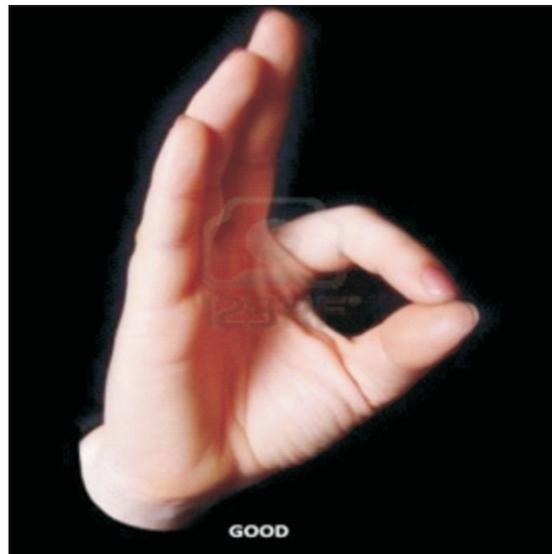
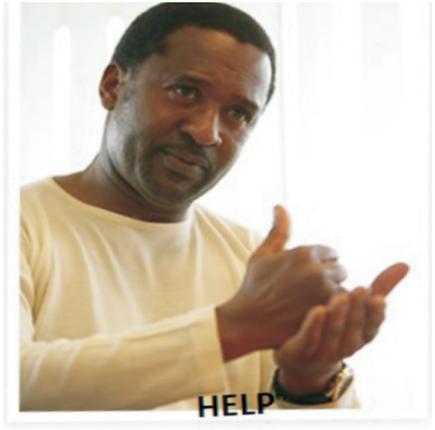
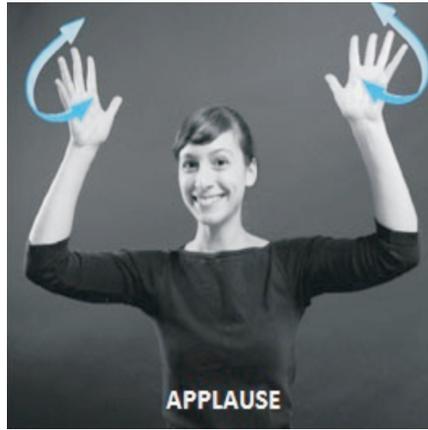
Sign 6 conference to be held on 6th & 7th Feb, 2013 in Goa.

Sign 6 conference organised by International Institute for Sign Languages and Deaf Studies, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK will be held at Goa on 6th & 7th February, 2013. ISLRTC, IGNOU is the Indian academic partner of Sign 6.

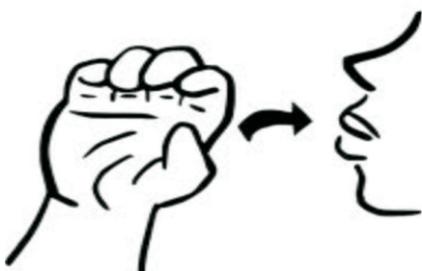
*As long as we have deaf people on earth,
we will have signs... It is my hope that we
all will love and guard our beautiful sign
language as the noblest gift god has
given to deaf people.*

Padden and Humphries

Signs of the month



drink



learn





Indira Gandhi National Open University



Indira Gandhi National Open University was established in 1985 by an Act of Parliament with a view to democratize higher education in the country. The aim was to provide cost-effective quality education to large sections of the society, particularly those groups of society who are deprived and remotely located. The University adopts learner centric approach in its programmes and

has successfully implemented Open and Distance Education. IGNOU has emerged as one of the largest universities of the world.

The University offers a wide range of programmes from Certificate to Doctoral level, catering to the needs of all sections of society. In its programme delivery mechanism, the University has extensively used the multi-media mode such as Self Instructional material, Radio, Television, Audio-Video, satellite channel, Gyan Darshan, Gyan Vani and Edusat. The University has also reached more than 8 million homes through DTH service. The University has 21 Schools, 3347 Study Centres, 10 Divisions, and offers 490 Programmes through its 67 Regional Centres and 81 overseas centres in 43 countries with a total enrollment of 2.7 million learners.





Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony of ISLRTC by Shri Mukul Wasnik, Minister of MSJ&E and Shri Kapil Sibal, Minister of MHRD, Govt. of India on Oct. 4, 2011

The foundation stone laying ceremony of Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC) was held on October 4, 2011 by Shri Kapil Sibal, Union Minister for Human Resource Development (HRD) and Shri Mukul Wasnik, Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment.

"This Centre is a first of its kind in India offering full-time teaching combined with distance learning for short-term and full-fledged programmes", said Wasnik while delivering his address at the Convention Centre.

"Indian Sign Language (ISL) is at a nascent stage. We need to think innovatively in order to increase awareness and sensitise people in this regard. We can also conduct sign language classes through video conferencing or other ICT enabled tools", he added.

Terming disability as a process of "growing up", Sibal addressed Wasnik on the occasion and said, "If we can utilize the information and technology tools to use Braille and Sign Language, then I am with you."

"Our ideas and language are derived from speech and its functions. The knowledge of sign language comes not by the study of deaf people, but it comes while studying with them. The ISLRTC has a great responsibility to promote continuous research and scholarship for the evolution of the deaf language by building bodies of language and literature", Sibal added on the occasion.

The inauguration was attended by various University officials, Deaf Community Leaders and Deaf students of IGNOU.