

## Khator's ceremonial pitch

**Amid tradition, the UH leader officially takes the reins and outlines her plans for the school's future**

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Cullen Performance Hall.

Renu Khator gained a new supporter Friday in her push to make the University of Houston a nationally ranked research university.

Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst said he will support the school as "a great selection for a Tier 1 university."

Khator began work in January as chancellor of the UH System and president of its central campus. Friday, she was presented with the symbols of the office during a tradition-filled ceremony at the campus's

Dewhurst was among a dozen speakers at the two-hour event, which drew more than 1,000 people, including faculty members and elected officials dressed in colorful academic regalia for the formal occasion.

The investiture was originally set for mid-September but was rescheduled after Hurricane Ike hit the Texas coast.

Khator has made elevating the university into the top ranks of research universities her top priority, saying that the Texas and Houston economies need the boost provided by strong research programs.

She has drawn support from local business leaders and politicians, but it ultimately will be up to the Legislature to provide additional money.

Dewhurst didn't talk about that, and state Comptroller Susan Combs won't release her estimate of how much money the state will have available until January, shortly before the Legislature convenes.

Dewhurst, like other speakers, talked instead about Khator's determination to see that UH gets the attention — and funding — she feels it needs.

"Dr. Khator never gives up," he said.

Texas has three Tier 1 universities: the University of Texas at Austin; Texas A&M University; and Rice University, which is private and small, with about 5,000 students.

UH, which has about 35,000 students at its central campus, is one of seven Texas public universities competing for top-tier designation, and money, from the state.

Students were the focus of most of Khator's short speech, in which she unveiled four initiatives designed to raise the school's stature and announced plans to raise \$100 million for several student success initiatives. That includes \$1 million already committed for scholarships, she said.

But first, she shared a personal moment.

Khator came to this country from her native India as a newlywed and earned her master's and doctoral degrees at Purdue University before taking a faculty position at the University of South Florida in Tampa. When she moved into administration there 10 years ago, she said, her father promised to come to the United States when she was named a university president.

He died three years ago.

"Dad, this moment is for you," she said, noting that her mother and other relatives were watching the ceremony on the Internet.

The four initiatives include:

- An energy initiative to pull together 70 faculty members from various fields to pursue research into conventional and alternative energy.
- A health initiative to push UH partnerships with institutions in the Texas Medical Center. She said she would announce within the next few weeks the hiring "of a mega cluster (of researchers) headed by a member of the National Academy of Sciences."
- An arts initiative to strengthen the school's arts programs. The faculty also will pursue establishing a Phi Beta Kappa honor society on campus, she said.
- The Star Initiative, to support the school's strongest programs, those that are nationally ranked and include entrepreneurship, health law, optometry, social work and creative writing. But she said that a great university requires more than great classroom teaching and great research.

She also promised to work for a stronger athletic program, better sports facilities and a more vibrant campus life.

Also, she said, to the approval of most people who have ever driven to the Third Ward campus, "more parking."

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