

CONVOCATION ADDRESS AT NAMAL UNIVERSITY

ISHRAT HUSAIN

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Nr. Razak Dawood, Ms Aleema Khan, Honourable Members of the Board , Mr. Rector, Faculty members, parents, dear students, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first of all thank the Chairman and members of the Board of Governors and Rector of the University for conferring this honour and privilege upon me to address the first Convocation of the University. I would like to first of all congratulate the graduating students on successful completion of their degree programs. Your hard work and efforts of last four years have at least borne fruit. Next, let me pay my sincere tribute to the parents who have made a lot of sacrifices to see their loved ones see this day. Your support and inspiration were a great motivating factor behind their accomplishments. I would be remiss in my duty if I do not acknowledge the role of the faculty who have decided to choose a remote area of the country while they could have easily found jobs in bigger cities. My deep appreciation for their dedication and efforts without which this memorable occasion would not have been possible.

I am so thrilled to note that NAMAL in this far flung area of Pakistan is offering degree courses in subjects which are indeed relevant for the future development of the country and which I have been advocating publicly for quite some time through my writings and speeches. . What distinguishes this University from others is that most of the students come from marginalized families and communities and 97 percent of them receive scholarships and financial aid. This is the sure path of enabling the students from disadvantaged households who cannot

afford quality higher education for their children towards upward social mobility. I would urge the philanthropists from all over Pakistan to come forward and donate generously to the Scholarship Fund so the University is able to expand its facilities and start new disciplines for at least 500 more students hailing from similar background. The employment record of those who graduated during the last three years is impressive and testifies to the relevance and rigour of instruction imparted here. Therefore, you should draw satisfaction that your generous donations are indeed making positive contribution in uplifting that segment of the society that cannot do that on their own.

The establishment of Knowledge City with Schools of Science and Engineering , Medicine, Agribusiness etc reflects the vision of the Founder and Chairman, Mr. Imran Khan to lead Pakistan to be an active player in the knowledge economy. I wish he was physically present today to see the fruits of the seeds he had sown two decades ago. Mr. Imran Khan believed in merit and NAMAL University is a practical living example of his belief in merit.

May I now turn to say a few words to the graduating students. May I remind you that today is simply the beginning of an arduous journey ahead of you. The country and the world around you is going through uncertain and difficult transition and you have to prepare yourselves to meet these challenges. We are entering the age where natural resources such as oil,gas, minerals or financial resources are no longer going to make any difference in achieving sustained and inclusive economic and social development. What is going to make the difference is the quality of human resources and their ability to harness the technology for the good of the mankind.

The megatrends for the rest of the 21st century pose herculean challenges as well present opportunities. Climate change risks are going

to affect Water-Energy-Food availability. Technological advances such as AI, Machine Learning, Genomics, Internet of things, Block Chain, Quantum Computing, E vehicles, Renewable Energy are going to alter the way goods and services are produced and the way we live, work and spend our leisure time. Social media and Information explosion are going to make it difficult to sift truth from fake news, misinformation and disinformation. Global geopolitics where the hegemony of the only superpower since the end of the cold war i.e. the US is being challenged by a rising star China may force choices which may not be always in our best national interests. For example, Semi conductors and Chips are now becoming battleground among the two nations to outclass each other.

Our generation in developing countries has benefitted a lot from globalization during the last three decades as 1.2 billion poor people out of 2 billion were lifted out of poverty. But the recent tendency among the advanced countries of nationalism, protectionism and isolationism may cut the flows of finances , reduce trade flows , curtail migration and curb technology transfer and thus slow down the benefits that accrue from a dynamic and open global economy . This in turn would most likely affect your generation adversely unless the diffusion of new technologies offsets this .

On the positive note, the demographic changes taking place in the advanced countries may force them to rethink their immigration policies as they face ageing population and rising proportion of old people . Countries such as Pakistan, on the other hand, have bulging youthful population and can avail of this opportunity by equipping them with the skills required by these countries. This is indeed a Win -Win situation for both the home and host countries. However, there are strong anti immigration lobbies working in Europe and the US.

I have sketched the above scenario to alert you to the risks and vulnerabilities as well as the opportunities for the future. Some of you may decide to opt for higher education which I would encourage you to do. But please do not do that just for getting a degree but with a mindset and determination to acquire, assimilate, retain and apply knowledge to solve the real world problems facing the country. Chasing grades and marks by memorizing the material selectively and reproducing it at the examinations is not the way to acquire competency. Those who have obtained degrees, with some exceptions that include NAMAL, do not possess the subject matter know how and are unable to communicate clearly either in writing or orally. The other advice I would render is to go for the subjects for which there is a demand both within the country as well as outside. Unemployment rate of graduates in Pakistan is 31 percent while at the same time we are facing shortages of Science and Maths teachers in our schools, colleges, universities, research organizations etc particularly females. Faculty members have to adopt pedagogical tools which create interest and curiosity in these subjects by encouraging hands on touch and feel experience with objects and things to illustrate the basic concepts of Physics, Chemistry and Biology. China has made extraordinary economic and social progress not because they have vast natural resources but they produce more graduates and doctorates in STEM subjects compared to the US. Top American University science and Technology departments have the majority of PhD students from China, Korea, Japan, India while our representation is almost negligible. In the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s our Universities had more faculty members in these subjects from leading universities of the world. Today the situation has reversed and it is difficult to find PhDs from Harvard, Stanford, MIT, Caltech in our universities or research organizations..

Pakistan produces only 25000 IT graduates every year while the demand is 100,000. There is a growing demand from all over the world for Cyber Security, AI, Data Analytics, Machine Learning, etc. There are a number of Engineering graduates who are unable to find decent jobs. I suggest that the Universities such as NAMAL should expand their Department of Computer Sciences to make their course contents compatible with the demands of the industry but also hold short duration courses and bootcamps to train these Engineers so that they are able to get accreditation by qualifying for Google, Microsoft, Oracle, SAP, Amazon certification. . Along with that they should be trained in soft skills (particularly team work, communications and report writing), project management etc.

Global IT industry is likely to reach \$ 5 trillion in next two years but our share in it has remained miniscule. India's Software as Service (SaaS) industry is projected to reach \$ 1 trillion by 2030 creating half a million new jobs for the youth. There is no reason that our companies cannot position themselves to reach \$ 50 billion provided the academia provides them the right trained and skilled talent. Data is new gold. Big Data, Data Analytics are becoming normal operational tools. Data flows contributed \$ 2.8 trillion to annual trade—a larger share in the increase in global GDP compared to the trade of physical goods. Business Faculty and IT faculty have to collaborate and equip their students with these tools.

For those entering the job market my advice is that this degree is the foundation upon which you would build the super structure of continuous life long learning. In today's world the word "career" is fast disappearing and the relevant word is "employability". The jobs that existed ten years ago are rapidly vanishing while the jobs that are likely to appear on the scene in next ten years are not yet on horizon. What is clear at this juncture is that the demand for low tech, mass scale

produced labor intensive goods would gradually decline. Jobs with high order cognitive skills, socio emotional skills and digital learning would make a nation competitive. The trick therefore is to have those skills that would make you employable. First, your technical and functional skills count a lot. New developments in your field are taking place every day and you should keep abreast of them. This implies that critical thinking and analytical ability to upskill yourself or at time unlearn and reskill must be developed. The next set of skills are Digital skills.

Familiarity with word, Excel, Power point is not enough. You have to use technology to utilize it in your routine business processes to address the problems and arrive at timely, cost effective and efficient solutions. Keeping constant track of new technological advances should become part of your second nature. The other important set of skills that is now and would in future become quite critical for retaining or advancing in your job is social skills. These consist of emotional intelligence, teamwork and collaboration, adaptability, work ethic, time management, and oral and written communications and presentations.

In the new economy the employers would be looking for attitude, aptitude and aspirations among the prospective employees particularly those who excel in the above described skill sets.

Finally, I very much hope that you would embody and exhibit in your life the highest values of merit, honesty, integrity, sustained hard work, tolerance, commitment and social responsibility which NAMAL has inculcated in you during your stay here. You may not realize that a successful professional is one who protects and preserves his reputation throughout his working life as one silly mistake would ruin your entire career. Your reputation travels so fast that even before you appear for an interview your traits are known. No doubt there would be serious ethical dilemmas in your life but if you slip away from these cherished values even once and make compromises believe me you

have damaged yourself badly . Please stay strong and steadfast and do not yield to the temptations of instantaneous gratification. The lure of acquiring a car, house and other amenities by hook or crook may be very powerful but the cost you have to incur in the future would be enormous. This country is facing crisis after crisis because we have been indulging in nepotism, favoritism, dishonesty, self aggrandizement and enrichment , intolerance, lack of compassion for the poor . I close my remarks in the hope that you and your generation would learn from these mistakes and take this beloved country of ours to a path of stability, equity and fair play , progress and prosperity for the majority of the population irrespective of caste, creed, gender, region, sect and background. I am sanguine that your education at NAMAL University has equipped you to contribute towards this goal. I once again offer my sincere felicitations to you.

Thank you