

Convocation Address of President FAST

Honourable President of Pakistan,
Governors of the FAST Board,
Chancellor, Pro-Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor of the Punjab University,
Chief Minister of Punjab,
Distinguished Guests,

Assalam-o-Alaikum,

On behalf of the Board of Governors, let me welcome you all most warmly to the first Convocation of FAST's Institute of Computer Science at Lahore. This is both a solemn and a joyous occasion. For those students who are graduating today and receiving their B.C.S. degrees, this is the beginning of their future careers. Pakistan needs their skills. The nation will benefit from their excellent training. Let me offer them our sincere congratulations. And let me also congratulate their parents on this auspicious day.

We are most grateful to the President of Pakistan for taking the time to grace this Convocation. This is a reflection of his deep interest in the scientific and technological development of the country. The President has consistently spoken up on the need for promoting education and technology and his presence today in our midst is a source of great encouragement for all of us.

The Government of Pakistan has recently announced major initiatives for the promotion of computer software exports. I am glad that the Private Software Export Board is led by such an outstanding person as Shahid Mir. We certainly welcome him in this Convocation and proudly claim him as a distinguished product of our FAST institute at Karachi. It is very encouraging that, in a fairly short period of time, a very attractive

package of incentives has been announced for software exports. It is now for domestic and foreign investors to step forward to take Pakistan into the new computer age.

This would require computer programmers and analysts on a very vast scale. This is where we are, unfortunately, quite deficient. Our neighbour India has trained over 200,000 computer programmers and set up huge facilities for computer software exports in Bangalore. Within the last decade, India has started exporting around \$ 1 billion of software and their export target is \$ 5 billion for the year 2000. In Pakistan, we have less than 1% of the number of computer programmers that India possesses today and our software exports are not even 1% of India's.

Let me suggest that we enter into a friendly competition with India in the field of computer software exports. There is no reason why we cannot exploit the global markets for computer software - which incidentally are expanding by over 30% a year compared to the relatively stagnant world markets for our textiles, leather goods, carpets, rice and cotton.

What we must do is to multiply our facilities for training of computer scientists and programmers. We in FAST are prepared to play our role in meeting our national needs. Starting this year, we are doubling B.C.S. enrollment in our institutes at Lahore and Karachi. We are including a new programme for M.C.S. degrees in the Lahore institute. We are adding a new computer science institute in Islamabad. We shall also be prepared to set up many more computer science institutes in other parts of Pakistan, particularly in the rural areas which should also be fully integrated into the computer revolution we must usher in our country.

In addition, we are fully prepared to offer our facilities to train thousands of computer programmers, with 6 months to one year training in basic computer programming, so that sufficient number of trained personnel are available for computer software production and exports. I would suggest that the government should offer such training to all unemployed FScs, BScs and MScs as well as engineers who are willing to step forward. In addition to the B.C.S. and M.C.S. courses we are providing in our FAST institutes, we are prepared to undertake such short-term training which is a short-cut most nations have taken to produce a large number of computer programmers in the shortest possible time.

What we need in FAST, Mr. President, is the approval to set up a National University of Computer Science so that it can maintain standards of excellence and merit in all parts of Pakistan and help the country enter the new computer age. We have submitted the Charter for such a university to the government for its consideration and we sincerely hope that we shall have your support for this initiative. We shall manage such a university in the private sector through private contributions, without requiring any government funding.

Let me conclude by thanking all the distinguished guests for their presence here. This is an important moment for all of us, Mr. President, and your presence and the presence of so many dignitaries encourages us greatly in continuing the basic task we have assumed in the FAST Board - to launch a movement for the technological modernization of Pakistan.

Thank you very much.