

Zeti Akhtar Aziz: Developing skills for a constantly changing environment

Governor's Acceptance Speech by Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz, Governor of the Central Bank of Malaysia, for her Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws from the University of Nottingham, University of Nottingham, Malaysia Campus, Selangor, 21 January 2006.

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It is indeed my great honour to receive this honorary degree from the University of Nottingham, one of the premier universities in the United Kingdom . It is particularly special to receive this award at the University of Nottingham Malaysia campus, being amongst the first overseas campuses of world-class institutions of higher education that have established a presence in Malaysia.

Malaysia and the United Kingdom have a history of close bilateral relations, reinforced by strong economic and financial linkages that span over a period of 200 years. This relationship is particularly evident in the field of education. The British are also known for being pioneers of strong cross-border higher education strategic alliances and partnerships. In Malaysia , we have seen such joint programmes between local and British institutions of higher education since the 1980s. Malaysia values this synergy and partnership with Britain and continuously looks forward to opportunities to further deepen this relationship on a wider range of areas for the mutual benefit of both countries.

Significant new trends continue to shape both the global and our domestic economy. The modern world is experiencing continuous dramatic change. The significant dimensions of this change include the increased pace of globalisation, the emergence of new technologies and the increasing importance of knowledge as a defining factor in a country's performance. In particular, knowledge accumulation and its application lies at the core of a country's competitive advantage in the global economy. The traditional comparative advantage of abundant natural resources and low-cost labour are now becoming less relevant. It is for this reason that Malaysia has directed significant resources and attention to human capital development, and in particular, to strengthen the intellectual capacity of our nation.

As Malaysia transitions into the next stage of development, the vital factor will be having the right skills, knowledge and expertise. If we are to make the quantum leap forward to become a high performance economy, we need to invest in our capabilities. This will become increasingly important as Malaysia ventures into new, cutting edge industries and develops new areas of comparative advantage in this more competitive world economy. To compete effectively in the more challenging global market place that we face today, it will require significant investment in human capital. This is to enable the workforce to deliver superior high value-added products and services and adopt advanced business practices so as to ultimately realise the strategic goals. This trend has become important for all sectors in the economy.

Within the financial sector, for example, significant structural enhancements have been made to enable financial institutions and markets to respond to the rapidly changing demands. These include changes that have heightened competition and which have fostered the emergence of increasingly diverse market participants and organisations. The dramatically changing landscape calls for a new generation of highly-qualified professionals equipped with more comprehensive skills. To support and sustain these developments, the education system must evolve so as to meet these new demands.

Against this backdrop, our ability to sustain long-term growth clearly depends on our ability to build, maintain and continuously expand our knowledge base. The key to this process is thus to be able to adapt to the new environment. As Charles Darwin observed "It is not the strongest", "nor the most intelligent that survive" but it is those that are "the most responsive to change." It is this capability that needs to be cultivated to ensure a mobile and agile work force that can adjust and respond to the emerging developments in the changing environment.

As graduates today, you embody the hopes of the nation in making the transition towards a knowledge-based economy a reality. In graduating today, you would have achieved an important milestone in your life. This is indeed an important and distinct mark of success for all of you. Not so much because of the degree which you now hold in your hand, but more importantly its promise for your future. Your journey to reach this moment is a testimony of your own individual potential, determination and hard work.

The learning experience, however, needs to go on. In today's environment, cultivating a lifelong learning experience is essential to personal and economic success. Lifelong learning involves more than just formal education and training. It encompasses learning throughout the life cycle, at different stages of life and in different learning environments. As individuals, attention to lifelong learning is essential to remain relevant in a highly competitive environment and to enhance our ability to function effectively and in a meaningful way as members of our community. With new knowledge comes innovation, agility and increased productivity that contributes to the overall performance and economic growth process. While it also enables us to adapt to the constantly changing environment, it also increases our capacity to cope with natural emergencies.

The challenge then is to embrace the opportunities as they present themselves and to continuously develop new skills and competencies that will be needed to meet current and future demands. The opportunities for learning will be boundless. Technology has also significantly broadened the reach and means for learning, as well as increased learning efficiencies. As you step into this new and exciting world, these possibilities should be fully optimized.

In concluding, allow me to offer my congratulations once again to the graduates of the class of 2006. You represent the promise of our nation's future. Indeed, nation building no longer belongs exclusively to the realm of the Government. As professionals, your advancements should not just be confined to those of immediate interest or relevance to you. Instead, you have the opportunity to cast your energies beyond your own interests, beyond the immediate term and beyond your own boundaries. Be open to working together with people from different backgrounds, and persevere through the new challenges and above all, hold fast to the values that are good and important, in particular to that of basic honesty and integrity. Always remember that these will form the foundations and basis of the trust that society will have in you.

On this note, I wish you every success in your future endeavours.

Thank you.