

Your Role and Responsibilities in Creating the Next Generations of Aligarians

Speech by Frank Islam at 2011 Federations of Aligarh Alumni Associations

Fellow Aligarians and Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would like to sincerely thank all of you for coming and thank you for your hospitality. I appreciate your warm welcome. It is great to be here today with fellow Aligarians. I am thrilled and honored to be with you today. I am proud to be an Alumnus of Aligarh Muslim University. I am proud to be standing here, and looking at you today, I have never felt so blessed.

Before starting my speech, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Fazal Khan and Abdullah Bhai for inviting me to speak to you today. I want to thank both of them for their leadership and our firm friendship. Both of them have been instrumental in creating conditions and culture for Aligarians to excel.

I congratulate the Federation of Aligarh Alumni Associations for its continued success in honoring the legacy of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and remembering our commitment to the principles upon which Aligarh Muslim University was founded – service to humanity

I commend the Federation for serving the educational and social and cultural needs of the community. I want to express my deep gratitude for your generosity and your efforts and your commitments.

I am here to speak “Our roles and responsibilities in shaping the next generations of Aligarians “. Remember it is our responsibilities to secure the future we all share. Let me briefly outline what I want to talk to you today:

_ I will start with few words about AMU and a few words about education and its importance. I will describe my personal story and journey

- Then I will share some ideas regarding our role and responsibilities to create next generations of successful Aligarians.
- Then I will conclude my remarks

Let me say a few words about AMU. I have always held AMU in high esteem. Aligarh is beacon of hope. Its leaders shaped our history and destiny. Its principles have guided us. It has stood the test of time. AMU has been and continues to be one of the foremost academic institutions in the world. All of you should be thankful for the opportunity to attend AMU and graduate. All of us owe a sense of gratitude to AMU. All of us are deeply indebted to AMU.

A lot of things bring us together because all of us are linked by common goals and common interests and common cause. We are part of Aligarh family. Aligarh tells the story of our past and it defines our future. Aligarh remains an inseparable and an indispensable part of our life and our journey and our story. I still cherish the fond memories of Aligarh. Aligarh stands as a shining symbol of quality, equality, dignity,

decency, inclusiveness, openness, tolerance, and respect. These are the strengths and the values of Aligarh that all of us can proudly embrace.

Let me tell you about my personal experience and my personal Journey.

I want to share my personal journey from humble beginnings to success. I crossed the ocean to come to America. My story from Azamgarh to Aligarh to America should resonate well with millions of immigrants across the globe. It reaffirms the notion that if you aim high and if you work hard you should be able to pursue your dream. The American Dream brought me from India to America. . I believe that in America there are no barriers to success. I am a living example of an American Dream. Through hard work and initiative, I was able to build an Information Technology business from less than \$100k to over \$300M in 12 years and sold the business to Ross Perot in 2007 for several hundreds millions of dollars. Let me tell you starting business are all about taking risks, being focused, passionate, and committed. It is about confronting uncertainty with optimism, ingenuity and creativity. It is about getting out of comfort zone, and venturing into new horizons and experiencing new environments. I inspired my employees by setting examples. I learned from my failures. I had clear vision and goals. Success taught me how to move forward, but failure taught me to never go backwards. I want to tell my story to others because It is my sincere hope that you find inspiration in my story so that you can achieve greater success in your life.

Why Education Matters

Before I say few words about Education, let me give you findings of Indian Muslims in Education. It is reported that among Indian Muslims, the literacy rate is about 59 percent; less than four percent of Indian Muslims graduate from school; and less than two percents of the students in the elite Indian Institute of Technology are Muslims. About 55 percent of Muslims in villages have never been to school. These numbers tell us the seriousness of the situation. It reminds us how entrenched poverty in the Indian Muslim Community has become.

I am sure there is a deep reservoir of anger in Indian Muslims because they have to confront deep-seated discrimination and prejudices in addition to lack of education. They are also facing a new challenge due to the rise of extremism and terrorism. These challenges are surmounting and overbearing.

Unfortunately Extremism forces take away strengths of our faith and they have become an impediment to stability, security, development, peace, and prosperity. All of us have to do our part to close the door of despair and darkness and disappointment and open the door of prosperity and upward mobility.

Education is a powerful equalizer opening doors to all to lift themselves out of poverty. We should develop a culture that reinforces the values and importance of education. Lack of access to education creates a vicious cycle that crushes a person's hope for improvement. The greatest gift we can give is the gift of education .Education is the key ingredient of success. Education empowers people and enhances the dignity and self- respect of a human being. It plays a pivotal role in creating jobs and building prosperity, and it is a powerful engine of innovation and entrepreneurship. Education is the best investment we can make to build our future.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN CREATING NEXT GENERATIONS OF ALIGARIANS

It is our responsibility to work towards the development of Aligaians. We have to build a bold vision and clear commitment to create today's student for tomorrow's job.

I would like to share with you some thoughts and some ideas for the path forward. Following can provide a framework in building successful career trajectory for the next generations:

- a. We should continue to fund scholarship programs to students at AMU. I know all of us have funded scholarships for students. We want to thank you for your effort.
- b. We need to develop and fund scholarship programs at the primary and secondary level.
- c. We need to develop training and skills centers for students. This will create a new generation of students with skills to excel. It will also prepare them with various competitive exams. I know Razi has been very instrumental in creating coaching guidance center. He should be commended for his efforts and initiatives. I would like to see training center for teachers as well.
- d. We need to develop youth mentoring programs
- e. We need to put emphasis on education of girls and we should encourage women to be part of job market.
- f. We need to forge relationship and collaboration between AMU and various U.S. Universities.

I would like to focus on the last item. I had some successes and some real achievements and some challenges. I am deeply committed to this initiative. When I say forging relationship I mean the following:

- a. Bringing students from AMU to U.S. Universities.
- b. Exchange programs for students and faculty.
- c. Lecture series
- d. Students Scholarship programs
- e. Other areas of common interest
- f.

In 2010 with my help and support a MOU between AMU and GWU Law School was signed. My Foundation funded scholarship program for some students in 2010 and 2011. We were successful in getting some students from AMU to GWU. I see an exciting future built on the strengths and success of two universities. I would like to expand this relationship in other areas such as Business and Art and Science. It is my deep desire to expand this initiative to several other U.S. Universities such as

University of Colorado and University of Maryland and Marymount University as I sit on these boards. I believe I can help I need your help to help us figure out the best ways to take this initiative to the next level. In particular I need your help in guiding us in the following areas:

- a. Identify the best and brightest students to come to U.S.
- b. Support students in providing scholarships
- c. I would like to see the AMU elite, especially the Vice Chancellor and Deans of various faculties, become more responsive and proactive. In addition they need to be engaged and involved and informed.

In closing

Let us strengthen and deepen our ties and engagement with AMU so that we can create future for next generations of Aligarians. Every Aligarian has a right to pursue their dreams, but the dream must belong to all Aligarians who are willing to get educated, work hard and pursue their life goals. I must stress that key word here is “opportunity” not guarantee. As long as we protect opportunities, we will prevail.

All of us will do well to remember all things are possible when we work together, when we learn from one another, when we listen to each other and when we set aside our differences to work for shared goals. Remember any thing and everything is possible, when we sacrifice together and when we struggle together. What is so unique and distinctive and important about Aligarh are the Aligarian people. They believe in their ability and the ability of their children to get ahead. They are strong, vibrant, responsible and resilient, and we are a community of dreamers and doers. Therefore I am confident that if all of us work together to provide hope and opportunities, I can say Aligarh’s best days will be ahead of us and not behind us.

Thank you for giving me opportunity to speak with you today. Thank you for your time and your friendship. I wish all of you continued success in the future. All of us have a role and responsibility to shape Aligarh’s fate and future. Future is not an accident but future is built on planning. I believe it is imperative for all of us to take a more proactive and prominent role in the quest for Aligarh’s future. We have to recognize that this is a continuous journey. That journey began, and is sustained by the contributions of you as an individual. Remember as long as we believe in ourselves the future will always be ours. Remember we all are in this together. If we come together we will endure and thrive. Let us never forget the values that our community shares; the belief that with education and hard work and with sacrifice we can give our children a better life.

Let us remember the words of Franklin Roosevelt:

“We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future”.

I would like to end my speech with Sir Syed’s remarks:

“ You have reached a particular stage and remember one thing that when I undertook this task, there were criticism all around against me, life has become so difficult for me that I aged before my age, I lost my hair, my eyesight, but not my

vision. My vision never dimmed, and my determination never failed, I built this institution for you and I am sure, you will carry the light of this institution far and wide, darkness will disappear from all around.”

Let us fulfill Sir Syed’s vision and his mission. Let us carry the torch handed to us by Sir Syed Khan. Let us work together to ensure that his dream shall never die.

If you need a copy of my speech please visit my website www.frankislam.com

Thank you and God bless you.