Concepts such as meritocracy, free-world economics, or multi-party democracy, honed and tested in the West may generally have proven their worth. But valid though they may be, responsible leadership in the Islamic world must ask if they can be adapted to their cultures which may not have the traditions or infra-structure to assimilate them. There is a real risk that political pluralism could harden latent ethnic or religious divisions into existing or new political structures. There is a real risk that market place economics could lead to ruthless competition, and increased concentration of wealth, further marginalising the existing poor. There is a real risk that meritocracy could exacerbate, for example, the existing problem of equitable access to quality education and sophisticated health care. Although the modern page of human history was written in the West, you should not expect or desire for that page to be photocopied by the Muslim world. [1]

Democracy should be society’s way of protecting the rights and entitlements of all its members. Entitlement, for the weakest or neediest, to their basic rights. But also, entitlement for the most capable ...

A world in which the individual merit of men and women can exist, flourish, and grow. For merit is not an anti-democratic concept. On the contrary, I believe that creating opportunities for individual excellence is the very essence of democracy: its reason to be. [2]

In the final analysis, no nation, no race, no individual has a monopoly of intelligence or virtue. If we are to pursue the ideal of meritocracy in human endeavour, then its most perfect form will grow out of a respect for human pluralism, so that we can harness the very best contributions from whomever and wherever they may come. [5]

For much of human history, leaders have been born into their roles, or have fought their way in - or have bought their way in. But in this new century - a time of unusual danger and stirring promise, it is imperative that aristocracies of class give way to aristocracies of talent, ... to meritocracies. Is it not a fundamental concept of democracy itself, that leadership should be chosen on the basis of merit? [3]

If I may leave you with one thought this evening, I would like it to be that the limited sources of the Third World can only be made the most of by good management and the encouragement of merit, at all levels and in all walks of life. [4]

[1] Brown University Commencement Address (Providence, Rhode Island, USA) 26 May 1996
[5] University of Alberta Graduation Ceremony (Edmonton, Alberta) 9 June 2009