

# HR 2025 HARVEST

**Nourishing Talent  
4th Meet up and Dinner**



Vice Admiral (Retd) Asif Khaliq, Rector of Bahria University, was the chief guest and delivered a compelling keynote at HR HARVEST, urging stronger academia-industry ties to tackle HR challenges of the future.

## DEBATE REPORT

May 22, 2025  
At IFQ Hotel & Resort,  
Islamabad

ASK Development  
Private Limited

# INTRODUCTION

The HR HARVEST – "Nourishing Talent" Meet-up and Dinner was successfully hosted by ASK Development on May 22, 2025. The event was aimed at bringing together thought leaders, senior HR professionals, industry practitioners, academic experts, and public sector representatives to identify and prioritize the Human Resource (HR) challenges that will shape the landscape of Pakistan's workforce in 2025 and beyond.

This initiative by ASK Development is part of its broader commitment to nation-building through effective human capital development and fostering dialogue between academia, industry, and public sector institutions.



## OPENING SESSION



**Dr. Rana Khurram Ali**, Chief Operating Officer of ASK Development, inaugurated the event by introducing the organization's vision and mission. He highlighted ASK's longstanding work in HR consulting, capacity building, manpower outsourcing, and its unique role as a bridge between development and corporate sectors.

He emphasized the need for progressive HR practices in the context of technological advancement, demographic shifts, and economic transitions. Dr. Khurram set the tone for the evening by framing the event as a platform for collective reflection, knowledge exchange, and problem-solving.



**Mr. Arshad Akif**, Chief Executive Officer of ASK Development, welcomed the guests and elaborated on the session's purpose. He stated that the objective was to generate actionable insights through a multi-stakeholder dialogue that combines experience with innovation.



## DEBATE:

# HR CHALLENGES IN 2025 AND BEYOND



The session was chaired by Vice Admiral (Retd.) Asif Khaliq, HI(M)

The presentation provided an insightful overview of the current and emerging human resource challenges in Pakistan, while also aligning them with global trends. It emphasized that despite a growing labor force and rising participation rates, Pakistan continues to face serious issues such as talent shortages, skill mismatches, low female participation, and outdated HR practices, particularly in the public sector. The discussion also underscored the limited investment in employee development and the slow adoption of technology in HR functions, making the workforce less competitive in a rapidly digitizing world. These challenges are further intensified by compliance gaps and high employee turnover.

The presentation concluded with a call to action—urging stakeholders to modernize HR frameworks, bridge academia-industry skill gaps, promote gender inclusion, and integrate digital tools for effective workforce management.

It stressed the urgent need for strategic collaboration between government, academia, and industry to build a future-ready workforce. Without swift reforms, Pakistan risks falling behind in the global talent race, missing out on the full potential of its youthful population.



The presentation titled "HR Challenges in 2025 and Beyond" was delivered by Mr. Arshad Akif.

## KEY LABOR MARKET & HR STATISTICS (PAKISTAN – 2024)



→ **Labor Force Size:**  
83.6 million (7th largest globally)



→ **SMEs:**  
Represent 90% of businesses (approx. 5.2 million enterprises)



→ **Labor Force Participation Rate:**  
53% (up from 43.16% in 2023)



→ **Vulnerable Employment:**  
55% of total workforce



→ **Employment-to-Population Ratio:**  
47.6% (2% lower than 2019)



→ **Public Sector Employment:**  
7.3%



→ **Unemployment Rate:**  
6.3% (~4.51 million people unemployed)



→ **Formal Employment in Private Sector:** Only 40%



→ **Female Labor Force Participation:**  
22.85% (as low as 10% in provinces like Balochistan, KPK, Sindh)



→ **Jobs Forecast (2023–2027):**  
69 million new jobs created, 83 million eliminated globally

Participants were invited to collectively rank the most pressing HR challenges, listed below:

- ▶ Talent Shortages and Skill Gaps
- ▶ Limited Emphasis on Employee Development
- ▶ Compliance with Labor Laws
- ▶ High Employee Turnover
- ▶ Gender Disparities in the Workforce
- ▶ Outdated HR Practices in Public Sector Institutions
- ▶ Integration of Technology in HR Functions

Participants provided their rankings, which were further synthesized using AI-based prioritization. The consolidated priority ranking identified **Talent Shortage, Gender Disparity, and Employee Development** as top challenges.

Final Ranking of HR Challenges (By Participants & AI Input):

HR Challenge	Priority Rank	
	By Participants	By AI
Talent Shortages and Skill Gaps	1	1
Gender Disparities in the Workforce	2	6
Limited Emphasis on Employee Development	3	2
Compliance with Labor Laws	4	5
Integration of Technology in HR Functions	5	4
High Employee Turnover	6	7
Outdated HR Practices in Public Sector Institutions	1 (Tied)	3



# EXPERT REFLECTIONS AND DISCUSSIONS IN DEBATE

A dynamic debate and open forum followed the presentation. Key contributions included:

**Dr. Javed Malik** (Team Leader ILMpact - British Council) emphasized the resource efficiency of institutions like the Pakistan Air Force, urging similar strategic management in public HR systems. He cited Punjab's PKR 4 trillion budget, of which PKR 600-700 billion goes to education, to highlight that the issue lies in ineffective use, not absence, of resources.



**Ms. Afshan Tehseen**, (CEO of Human Capital of Pakistan), underlined Pakistan's alarmingly low female workforce participation (22%) and criticized the lack of accountability and reliable workforce data. She called for simultaneous reforms in:



Public Sector  
Governance



Academia-  
Industry Linkages



Industrial Policy  
Frameworks

**Dr. Arif Saleem** (IIUI) emphasized restructuring governance mechanisms and realigning public sector HR with contemporary demands.

**Mr. Najam Saeed** (Former CEO, RAILCOP) provided a structured ranking of HR challenges and emphasized that skill gaps and talent shortages are distinct issues. He stressed the need for developing leadership pipelines and reskilling.

**Mr. Tahir Chaudhry** (CEO, Falcon Engineering) lamented the absence of a teacher training setup and weak curriculum implementation despite multiple revisions.





**Mr. Amjad Iqbal** (CHRO, HBL Zarai Services) discussed the need to shift from employee engagement models to employee value propositions. He also highlighted the lack of gender diversity and leadership development.

**Mr. Syed Farhan Mahmood** (Head Consulting Division, ASKD) drew attention to the critical need for AI integration in HR and referenced the State Bank's annual report showing the accelerated success of digital banks. He noted the widespread fear and resistance to AI in Pakistani industries.

**Mr. Muhammad Ahsanullah** (PIA) declared that outdated HR practices are the root cause of systemic inefficiencies.

**Ms. Samia Qamar** (Country Head, Octus) advocated for AI-driven tools such as ChatGPT to streamline HR functions. She called for policy measures to address gender disparity and public resistance to technology.

**Ms. Ghazal Kanwal** (Head of HR, HMC) ranked employee turnover as a top concern, noting its contribution to brain drain and economic instability. She encouraged deeper analysis of the root causes behind turnover.



**Mr. Shahid Naeem** (Former Chief, International Trade Finance, Planning Commission) posed forward-looking questions on:

Managing demand and supply in skills



Encouraging self-driven employee development



Preparing the workforce for emerging tech trends




**Mr. Tahir Rafique** (Former Joint Secretary, Education Ministry) pointed out that in the education system, curriculum design, textbook development, and teaching are often handled by entirely different individuals. He emphasized that even if the curriculum is weak, a well-trained and capable teacher has the power to deliver it effectively and make a meaningful impact on students' learning.




**Mr. Zulfiqar Janjua** (Director, LPDC-BU) emphasizes,



  
Limited emphasis on employee development remains a core challenge across sectors.

**01**

**02**  
  
There is a noticeable gap in leadership with purpose, despite the presence of leaders.

  
Outdated HR practices are widespread, affecting not just the public sector but also private organizations.

**03**

**Mr. Bilal Kazmi** (HR Business Partner, Easypaisa Digital Bank) shared that their journey began with a focus on SMEs, considering it a core area of impact. He highlighted a key challenge in such settings: the prevalent "Sethiya Culture or mentality", where Return on Investment (ROI) is viewed narrowly, often sidelining employee-focused policies. While HR, admin, and finance may be aware of these policies, leadership often lacks the intent to implement and facilitate them. He stressed that the real issue isn't development capacity but the lack of leadership intent. As SMEs evolve, he cautioned against adopting the superficial structures of multinationals, instead advocating for more localized and meaningful approaches to organizational growth.



**Mr. Furqan Shamsi** (Head L&D, Askari Bank) emphasized the critical need for AI integration and technological adaptation in the workplace, noting that while these topics are now part of organizational agendas, the investment in employee experience and development remains limited. He pointed out the absence of structured training pipelines, contributing to persistent skill shortages. Highlighting workforce readiness, he stated that if analysis results reflect poor performance, it signals a failure in reskilling, not just upskilling, because as trends and technologies evolve, reskilling becomes essential to remain relevant and competitive.

**Mr. Ubaidullah** (InCharge Talent, Attock Refinery) emphasized that rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all HR model, there is a need to develop a universal yet localized HR framework. He referred to the existing model as a convergence approach—imported without fully considering the social, emotional, psychological, and economic contexts of the local environment. He stressed that each country operates at different technical and developmental levels, and applying externally developed models without adaptation may lead to misalignment. Therefore, he advocated for contextualizing HR practices to ensure they are relevant, practical, and effective for the local workforce.



**Mr. Ahmed Nauman Anees** (Group Director, HRD Services & Strategy, Riphah Group) emphasized that Pakistan is significantly trailing behind in the adoption of AI and digital technologies. He stressed the importance of employee well-being and mental health, noting that while many multinational organizations prioritize these aspects, they are often neglected in local contexts. On gender diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), he pointed out that its implementation largely depends on the industry—being more prominent in sectors like education and healthcare, and limited in manufacturing. He also highlighted the urgent need to address serious skill development challenges across the country.

**Prof. Shahid Haq** (Educationist & Practitioner) highlighted critical workplace challenges, noting that while employee development is often overlooked, individuals are eager to grow. He emphasized the need for synchronized labor laws to uphold work ethics, addressed issues like employee turnover and gender discrimination, and questioned our readiness for advancing technology. He also stressed the importance of instilling core values like ambition, focus, and honesty—starting from within our own institutions.





## CHIEF GUEST ADDRESS

**Vice Admiral (Retd) Asif Khaliq HI (M)**, Rector of Bahria University, delivered an insightful and action-oriented keynote at HR HARVEST – Nourishing Talent, underscoring the urgent need to strengthen academia-industry linkages to effectively address the evolving HR challenges of 2025 and beyond.

He pointed out that the disconnect between academia and industry remains a persistent challenge—both in Pakistan and globally—and emphasized the importance of transforming dialogue into tangible outcomes. Under his leadership, Bahria University has launched several strategic initiatives to bridge this gap. These include the formation of Advisory Committees and the induction of “Professionals of Practice”—seasoned HR and industry experts from Pakistan and abroad—who contribute through on-campus sessions, virtual engagements, and specialized summer programs, offering students direct exposure to practical knowledge and industry dynamics.

A landmark achievement during his tenure has been the establishment of the Maritime Science and Technology Park, a pioneering platform where academia and industry intersect. This initiative enables students and faculty to collaborate with industry stakeholders on research, innovation, and internships, promoting hands-on experience and applied learning. He stressed that such progress is the result of sustained commitment—often involving four to five strategic meetings a day—and reiterated that meaningful change comes through consistent action, not rhetoric.

Vice Admiral Asif Khaliq concluded his address with two powerful messages:



All is not lost



If things aren't right, we must put in the effort to make them right.



VICE ADMIRAL (RETD.)  
ASIF KHALIQ, HI(M)

Vice Admiral (RETD.) Asif Khaliq has had an impressive nearly four-decade naval career, demonstrating outstanding leadership in military and academia. As Commander of the Pakistan Fleet and later Commander Karachi, he strengthened Pakistan's maritime capabilities through critical operations and infrastructure projects. He served as Defence Attaché in France, Italy, and Spain, and led the multinational Combined Task Force-150 in Bahrain, contributing to regional maritime security. Currently, as Rector of Bahria University, he is advancing higher education in Pakistan with initiatives such as the country's first Maritime Science and Technology Park, a medical college, and a hospitality school. He holds a Master's degree in War Studies and Defence Management and has received several prestigious awards, including the Hilal-i-Imtiaz (Military) and Sitara-i-Imtiaz (Military).



He expressed his sincere appreciation for ASK Development's initiative in organizing such a timely and impactful dialogue. He urged participants to translate the recommendations and key takeaways from the discussion into actionable strategies that could inform university planning and national policy development. Concluding his remarks, he offered a strong endorsement for the continuation of such forums, describing them as vital platforms for bridging the divide between academia and industry, and for shaping the future of human resource development.

## CONCLUSION AND CLOSING REMARKS

Dr. Rana Khurram Ali concluded the session by thanking the Chief Guest, all speakers, and participants. He reiterated the importance of collaborative dialogue and encouraged participants to continue building networks and taking action.

The session was formally closed with a token of appreciation presented to Vice Admiral Asif Khaliq, followed by dinner and informal networking.

## OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 01 Priority Challenges Identified:

Talent shortage, gender disparity, outdated HR practices



### 02 Reform Areas Highlighted:

Governance, education, technology adoption



### 03 Tools Proposed:

AI integration, leadership development frameworks



### 04 Follow-up Needed:

Formation of a taskforce to continue deliberations and generate white papers or action agendas



## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

ASK Development extends heartfelt gratitude to all participants, panelists, and dignitaries for making HR HARVEST 2025 a productive and memorable gathering. Special thanks to Vice Admiral (R) Asif Khaliq for his inspiring presence and insights.





## EVENT GALLERY







# THANK YOU!

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