

PAKISTAN : LAND OF OPPORTUNITIES

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People of every country have an inherent right to participate in all its affairs and improve its societal and governmental structures so as to enable them to live a life of peace and plenty. And it is the bounden duty of all nations of the world to co-operate with one another to create an atmosphere of amity and accord conducive to the betterment of humanity, and in this process enter into healthy competition with the other nations for achieving the desired results.

The pre-requisite for such participation is honesty, sincerity, integrity and commitment of the individuals, and the society as a whole to the supreme objective. Without possessing these qualities it is impossible to achieve success in any undertaking. However, certain hurdles standing in our way will have to be determined.

Hurdles:

The first and foremost hindrance in our way is our casual attitude towards life itself as being something taken for granted and not deserving a serious thought about its ultimate goals. Importance is usually given to the material requirements of life and the spiritual and moral aspects of individual and corporate living are simply ignored. The basic truth, however, is that a human being is composed of flesh and bones as well as the spirit i.e., the mind and emotions – the real self, that propels him/her to learn, to assimilate and to act accordingly. In the absence of the realization of this truth, we tend to lend ourselves to greediness, selfishness, misplaced ambitiousness, egoism, yearning for wealth, ostentatious living, arrogance, and unjust behaviour to our fellow beings.

This wrongful demeanor is not formed of itself; it is the corollary of bad leadership that is unconscious of life-purpose and the supreme cause, ill-organized political parties, lack of political consciousness and acumen among political workers because of their ineffective

participation in consultations within the party and treatment of them by the leadership as their subordinates, not as equals.

This situation demands a serious and sincere effort on our part to rectify this situation, pave the way for a willful and enthusiastic participation in the reformation of our society, and avail of the opportunities that are available to us for positive action. It needs a frame of mind that is unprejudicial and broad enough to grasp the enormity of the task and be helpful for its completion. The following code of conduct could, I believe, contribute to the making of such a mental framework:

* We will look up to each other as fellow human beings having equal rights.

- We will promote pro-existence and will renounce discrimination on the basis of colour, nationality, race, language, religion, gender or any other kind of bias.
- We will seek and promote knowledge, truth and wisdom, and work for building a humane society.
- We will endeavour to raise the level of literacy, educational standards and moral values in order to promote genuine democratic polity and vibrant culture.
- We will strive to establish an efficient socio-economic system that would prevent exploitation of the masses, and improve their standard of living and state of happiness.
- We will reject fascism, and all kinds of conduct aimed at forcing people to think and act according to the whims and dictates of others, and will advocate rational dialogue for settling differences.
- We recognize the need to develop human fraternity, banish wars and secure peace at the global level. The inherent human faculties of creativity, love and pursuance of beauty, and the productive potential of the human race need to be employed in harmony with and for the protection of nature and environment.
- We consider consumerism (wasteful expenditure on luxurious living) as harmful for positive progression in human relationships. We seek to live frugally and spend our savings for the betterment of society.

Assets:

Now, having prepared ourselves mentally and spiritually to meet the challenge of utilizing the opportunities available to us fully, let us have a look at the great opportunities and enormous assets available to us for making Pakistan a great and outstanding country, worthy of recognition in the comity of nations. For that, of course, we shall have to enumerate and evaluate our national assets and exert to develop them to the best of our ability. These assets, to my mind, are the following:

Population

The economists usually consider a country's population as a liability and, by equating it with the bad economic situation in the country, propose its lessening. Presently the population is 132.4 million (at the last census of 1998). Pakistan has a relative young population with 41 percent being below the age of 15, and as much as 20 percent of the population in the age group of 15 to 24. Women constitute 52 percent of the population but due to gender discrimination against women in work roles as well as social restrictions on mobility, they have a relatively poor access over education, skill training and health facilities. Amongst the economically active persons in agricultural households, 42 percent are women. 82 percent of women participate in agricultural work and are responsible for 25 percent of the production of major crops. Some economists, progressive in their approach, have advised stabilizing the population to a level of 204 million with a replacement fertility rate of 2.1 percent of children per family by the year 2023. They fail to understand that if they make their immediate concern the raising of the economic level of the poor people, and give preference to their well-being in health, education and employment, and cater less to the inflated requirements of the rich (who can look after themselves very well), this very numerical strength of the people could be transformed from a dire liability to a superb asset.

But to make the population an asset, such measures should be adopted as could reduce the present infant mortality rate of 90 percent per 1000 live births and child mortality rate (under 5 years) of 51 per 1000. For this purpose the percentage of population with access to sanitation of 30 percent should be increased, the high levels of poverty (causing poor nutrition and unhygienic living conditions within the household) reduced substantially, preventive and curative health infrastructure, adequate reproductive health care facilities provided for women, and sanitation arrangements and provision of safe drinking water needs improved.

If, on the other hand, massive numbers of the people lack an awareness of their rights, and are unequipped with education to use the tools of power, if the majority of the population is mired in backwardness, ill-health, ignorance and poverty and its number keep growing rapidly, and possess all the ingredients of social and political conflict, crime and instability, this asset of population cannot be used to advantage.

Ethos of the People

The ethos of the people also needs improvement. The inherent capabilities granted to every individual by Nature should be developed to make the individual a useful entity, and, for this purpose, provided with a healthy and enabling environment. There has been an unprecedented increase in the number of people in poverty and employment. The impact of poverty is particularly acute on the most vulnerable sections of society, women and children. The suffering of women is intensified by social discrimination, gender inequality in the access over basic services, employment and income. A disturbing portion of poor children face mal nutrition and consequently increased susceptibility to disease. 62 percent of the poor are ill. The average medical cost on illness is as much as Rs.1,800 and that of cost of mediations in disputes is over 18,000 which is higher than the average annual household income of extremely poor. They are thus forced to take loans at great disadvantage to them. All this has deprived the poor of their income, assets and the fruits of their labour. Such poverty can be overcome

only by empowering the poor to acquire greater control over the use of productive resources including their own labour, and keeping their incomes and savings in their own hands. It means enabling the poor to get organized and have institutional access over local government, and participation in decisions regarding the allocation of government resources at the local level, and the designing and implementation of local government projects for the poor.

Natural Resources

Pakistan has enormous resources in the form of land, mountains, forests, water, gas, oil, coal, copper, emeralds, gold, fish, fruits, flowers etc. These resources, in principle, are the joint property of the people of Pakistan irrespective of caste, colour and creed. Every person has the right to benefit from it according to the efforts put in by each of them. But the vested interests consisting of the *jagirdars*, capitalists, civil and military bureaucrats and the bad elements have monopolized these resources.

If these resources are properly managed and, through transparent land reforms, excess and fallow lands are taken away from the big landlords and, along with government lands, is distributed to the landless tenants, one can imagine the tremendous increase in agricultural production that can, in fact, be achieved. These resources can also contribute greatly to the development of industry and commerce if the law and order situation is suitably improved and a spirit is created in the nation of co-operative development. We need far more industrial development to free ourselves from the feudal bondage. It will also have a special bearing for the removal of poverty and unemployment in the country. Enriching our country is, therefore, within our means. What we actually need are honest, sincere and dedicated workers and leaders and planning and efforts on scientific lines.

Strategic Location

Pakistan is strategically located in the world. It has a special position in its relationship with the South Asian region, which can contribute

to the economic and social development of the neighbouring countries, and in this process contribute usefully to its own development.

Foreign Policy

But this role can be played by Pakistan only when it pursues an independent and non-aligned foreign policy, subservient to the interests of people's sovereignty and country's integrity, and does not submit to the dictates or interests of any super power. Pakistan has something of its own, a better concept of human relationship and sharing of economic benefits equitably, to give to the world that is pitifully devoid of these. It is only thus that Pakistan can become a leader of the nations of the world, certainly not because of its nuclear capability.

A Perfect Ideology

Pakistan possesses a perfect ideology, in principle though not in practice, that can benefit all human beings and nations alike. The hallmark of this ideology is peace and plenty for all human beings and a relationship among the various nations and groups based on fraternity and friendship among all men irrespective of nationality, race, religion, caste or gender. Pakistan does not stand for splitting up and disuniting the human race but believes in developing natural resources and human societies to the extent that they can feed well all individuals and afford them enough leisure to fully enjoy life. With this ideology in hand, and by reorienting our priorities and availing of the immense opportunities and assets that we possess, we can certainly make Pakistan a great country of the future.

Conclusion: Equipped with such resources and intellectual excellence, we need only one thing: a cadre of ideologically charged, sincere, honest and earnest individuals forming themselves into a collective leadership, determined to bring into being a nation that they can be proud of.

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