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A BREAKTHROUGH PATH

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One month in solitary confinement is a good time to reflect on one's life and the life of our nation. This is my fifth term as MNA from Narowal since 1993 when I was 35 years old. Today, I am 61 years of age and in this journey for democracy, I have seen many highs and lows; I got the opportunity to work on many transformational projects like Vision 2010, Vision 2025 and China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC); on the other hand, I have faced baton charges, suffered abduction in 2000 at the hands of our security agencies with face covered by a hood like a terrorist, currently sitting in jail as part of political victimization and cannot forget the bullet in my body.

I have given almost my entire youth, best part of my life, to public service, like many in the Parliament today. I have seen many colleagues also change from youth to elderly as their jet black hair turned white with a hope that in our life Pakistan will be the promise land of a stable democratic rule, which unfortunately still remains illusive. We all struggle in life to give our children a better future, better education and a better life. Likewise we also owe them a "Better Pakistan", where they are secure, free, happy, and prosperous, they don't have to fear suppression, they are protected by law, they can express their ideas freely, there is no discrimination, they can polish their talents to maximise ability, and there are no road blocks in their path to grow. This was actually the promise of Pakistan, the Quaid-i-Azam made with the Muslims of South Asia, when he demanded a separate country.

Pakistan wasn't supposed to be just a piece of geography; it was a powerful idea, dream and vision that inspired our ancestors to make a historic struggle. To me it was Jinnah's Doctrine for Pakistan which beat other competing visions at that time. Its key features were as follows:

- i. A country to be run through a constitution, which shall protect fundamental rights of all citizens and guarantee their socio- economic wellbeing
- ii. A country where rule of law shall make everyone answerable before law
- iii. A country run according to the wishes of its people in a democratic manner upholding principles of merit, accountability and transparency
- iv. A country which shall provide opportunity of economic advancement and prosperity to all citizens

A success model of an inclusive Islamic state, where Muslims and non-Muslims shall live as one family

Today, after 72 years, we continue to live in a state of growing uncertainty, crisis and confusion. We are still experimenting with how to run our country, what system is right for us, where is our North Star? Many countries which won freedom either with us or after us, after some teething decades have found their equilibrium but our pendulum continues to oscillate. With every passing day, we drift further from Jinnah's Doctrine. Compared with India where founding father Mr. Nehru ruled for over 16 years to set the foundations of a strong constitutional system. Pakistan unfortunately lost its senior leadership Quaid-i-Azam M. A. Jinnah, PM Liaquat Ali Khan and Sardar Nishtar in a span of five years. This vacuum of leadership was exploited by the trio of Ghulam Muhammad, Iskander Mirza and General Ayub Khan – a nexus of civil-military bureaucracy that hijacked the state apparatus, shadows of which have loomed on our history ever since.

When Deng Xiao Peng put China on the path of modernization, he promoted the phrase "learning truth from facts". Today a stage has come that we need to learn truth from facts of our history in a dispassionate manner and chart a different course for our future otherwise it doesn't require deep knowledge of history to foresee where institutional dysfunctionality will take us. History clearly shows that empires and states have thrived only on the strength of inclusive governance, rule of law, economy, social justice, and strong militaries. Strong military is indeed a necessary condition, but not sufficient condition for defence of any country, e.g. Soviet Union.

The concept of national power in recent times has changed dramatically from the previous century. Non-military domains such as political stability and inclusiveness, social solidarity, economic vitality and competitiveness, innovation and knowledge base, information and media dynamism, country brand and global alliances have assumed much greater importance.

Therefore, the challenge before any country today is to construct a strong, healthy and stable platform covering all the domains of national power. If for any nation, defence has a tractor sized wheel while other domains have bicycle wheels, the national power platform is surely doomed for some disaster because nations can't be run on one-wheeling.

Economy is the key feature in the equation of national power which provides resources for developing a holistic and balanced national capability. There are hundreds of examples in history when states ran short of funds, the finest armies couldn't maintain their edge and were eventually defeated in battlefields because war-preparedness and wars are expensive propositions. Let us look at our economy in a two decades and a two year framework. In 1999, Pakistan led South Asia with per capita income of \$640, India \$460 and Bangladesh \$390. In 2019, India leads with \$2,000, Bangladesh \$1,700, and Pakistan \$1,400. In 2018, Pakistan's GDP size was \$315b, India \$2,726b, and Bangladesh \$274b. In 2019, Pakistan reduced to \$284b, India and Bangladesh increased to \$2,935b and \$317b, respectively. In 2017, PWC had projected Pakistan with growth momentum under PMLN government, to be in the top 20 economies by 2030, today we are being projected, after PTI government induced crash in growth rate, to be downgraded to 52nd by 2034. Our growth is currently projected at 2 – 3.5% for the next two years while India, Bangladesh and others will grow at over 6%.

It must be kept in mind that a nuclear weapon state can't be subjected to traditional warfare. It is subjected to non-traditional, low intensity conflicts, hybrid wars in which target is to implode the enemy from within. Hence, the challenge of developing and maintaining a healthy mix of national power domain becomes most critical for a country like us. Pakistan is a nuclear power and faces a challenging security environment. The world watches us with great anxiousness because our stability matters for both regional and global peace. Both our friends and foes try to solve the puzzle why a country as gifted as Pakistan is not able to find a stable path.

In 1998, a US author Stephen Cohen wrote a book "Idea of Pakistan" and examined three scenarios for Pakistan. First scenario, will Pakistan fail? His conclusion was that Pakistan has a strong military, which will not let it fragment and break hence likelihood of its failure is remote. Second scenario, will Pakistan succeed? He concluded that Pakistan suffers from an inherent power conflict between centres of de jure (parliament) and de facto (establishment) power.

This bipolar nature of power and contradiction will keep it unstable and it will not be

successful either. Hence, his third scenario was that it will neither fail nor succeed, rather continue to crawl. Unfortunately, twenty years later we are proving him right. Business as usual is no longer an option. We need a proactive course reset before it is too late, because we can't afford another to wake us up.

If we look at our challenges, these are daunting and beyond the capacity of any single narcissist leader, party or institution. These require a collective national response with a very strong positive synergy. In 30 years, our population will double, we have 120m youth equivalent to our total population two decades ago, our water resources are depleting, we are among the worst affected countries from climate change, we are the fastest urbanizing country in South Asia, and our social indicators are the worst; where will 2m jobs for the youth come from annually? Further economic deterioration can unleash youth and poor on the streets in revolt against the system; and in wake of all this our administrative structure has become dysfunctional in the climate of fear created because of political victimization.

Our problems are structural and institutional, they have become deeper but so has mistrust among various stakeholders. We urgently need institutional reforms. Our enemy is not outside; we have inflicted much of the damage through our own chequered history and wrong decisions.

Our solution too will not come from outside, it is within us. Time has come for us as a nation to look beyond narrow group interests, break the silos and throw away our prejudices. Politicians, civil servants, military, judiciary, media, private sector need to sit together as "TEAM PAKISTAN" and chalk out a roadmap for national transformation and development.

Our Constitution is a socio-economic manifesto, whose principles, which relate to citizens, have been ignored. There is complete consensus in the country on one thing and that is our constitution, among all parties, whether conservative or secular, nationalist or national; and therefore, it has to be cornerstone of this effort.

I propose that Chairman, Senate and Speaker, National Assembly should co-host a National Dialogue of all national stakeholders, which has been proposed by Shahbaz Sharif, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Asif Ali Zardari and other politicians. participated by Leaders of House and Opposition in both Houses and Provinces along with heads of Parliamentary Parties,

Service Chiefs and DG ISI, Chief Justice of Supreme and High Courts, Pakistan Bar Council, FPCCI, PEC, PMDC, HEC representatives of civil servants and media. This Grand National Dialogue with frank and open discussion should formulate a ten year (2020 – 2030) National Charter for Implementation of Constitution (NCIC), in the same manner as both civil and military leadership agreed on National Action Plan to defeat terrorism. NCIC should comprise of five components focusing on a reforms agenda;

- i. National Charter on Economy & Innovation
- ii. National Charter on Democratic Governance
- iii. National Charter on Justice and Rule of Law
- iv. National Charter on Zero Poverty and achieving SDGs
- v. National Charter on National Security including foreign policy

In order to move forward, we need to make a new beginning with a fair and free election in 2020, as present experiment has failed miserably and produced worst polarization in the country, with complete transparency so that we start afresh with a credible government structure and a declaration should be made that next elections will be in 2025 and 2030 to provide long term confidence to investors.

A ten year policy framework agreed under the above charters should be locked and whoever comes in government should be held collectively accountable by the citizens for progress on the agreed reform goals. This I believe can be a breakthrough path for us as a nation. If we are able to implement it, history will never forget us; if we fail it shall never forgive us. This is the only way we can realize Jinnah's Doctrine, turn Pakistan into a success story of this decade and our generation can redeem its past mistakes.

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