

PAKISTAN-FIRST: A WAKE-UP CALL

- A time comes when a nation must wake up from its slumber and take control of its own destiny. In order to chart their own future, the people of Pakistan will now have to determine what they want for themselves and to delineate their own vision for a better Pakistan. History is witness to Pakistan's traumatic experiences under long spells of military rule, debilitating political process and leadership miscarriages. We have paid a heavy price during these spells in the form of costly wars, tragic loss of half the country, territorial setbacks and institutional paralysis. Things will not change unless the people step out of their inertia to make their call heard loud and clear.
- Pakistan's foremost challenge today is not what we are required to do for others' interests; it is what we ought to do to serve our own national interests. We must convert our unique geopolitical location into an asset rather than letting it remain a liability. We must not compromise on our sovereign independence and national dignity. As a country and as a nation, at this critical juncture in our history, we cannot leave ourselves to the vagaries of time or at the mercy of others. We can't even continue to believe that everything will be all right, magically or providentially. We must understand that our crisis is too deep to be redressed through cosmetic measures.
- To be treated with respect and dignity by others, Pakistan has to be stable politically and strong economically so that it can be self-reliant and immune to external constraints and exploitation. We must change world's perception of our country, which surely has many reasons and assets other than all sorts of negativities being attributed to us only because of our domestic failures and corrupt rulership. The nation has desperately been looking for an alternative, someone with integrity and credibility and a plan with an able team to remake the State of Pakistan like Malaysia's Mahathir and Singapore's Lee Kwan Yew.
- To avert the vicious cycle of known tragedies, we must fix the fundamentals of our state and governance. A country remains vulnerable externally as long as it is weak domestically. We are already on the brink of an economic disaster and social disarray. Bringing the country out from its abysmal governance crisis is going to be a protracted process. For self-serving reasons, our rulers have traditionally run after illusory shadows and knocked on the wrong doors for remedies to their country's ailments. The remedies are at home, not abroad. They should focus on removing the country's systemic weaknesses and reinforcing the unifying elements of our nationhood.
- This remedy requires hard decisions and a paradigm change in patterns of governance. Papering the cracks will not do. Going beneath the surface and taking out the disease through a surgical process is what is needed. Recovery of looted money and plundered resources and tightening of belts is necessary. The system that breeds corruption, tax evasion, kleptocracy, abuse of power, excessive governmental spending in VIP culture, and lawlessness will have to be rooted out from our body politic. The problem is that they are the ruling privileged elite controlling the country's power structure which is too deeply entrenched in the status quo to let any change take place.
- There is something fundamentally wrong with our patterns of state and governance. Corruption is endemic to all segments of our society. Justice is inaccessible, slow and selective, encouraging contempt for the rule of law. National integrity system inspires no confidence among the people.

Accountability process is always viewed with suspicion as governmental tool for “political blackmail and victimization. Political institutions and civil society are weak and ineffective. All these perversities need to be taken out sooner rather than later. In no other country today are the plunderers and profiteers, looters, murderers and killers, so brazenly treated above the law.

- Ironically, while the common man is suffering the worst hardship, the criminals could not have a safer haven anywhere else in the world. No other country is familiar with the practice of forgiving the criminals by law. Only a drastic change in our anachronistic system will free us of the same old usurpers of the country’s politics and wealth. Papering the cracks will not do. Going beneath the surface and taking out the disease is what is needed. Elections alone are no remedy. In our country they only brought national debacles. Parliamentary form of government is our bete noire. Changing faces will not do. The system itself must change.
- Our weakness is economic discipline. We need an iron-hand to curb this weakness. Loot and plunder of national exchequer and resources must stop. The culture of perks and privileges must go. Recovery of looted money and plundered resources and tightening of belts is necessary. Given the gravity of our crises, we surely need deeper structural reform agenda and home-grown solutions to our economic problems. No begging. Loans are not capital; they are a liability. Foreign aid is never unconditioned. Let’s come out of the dependency mode and focus more on optimum utilization of our own material wealth and human resources.
- Pakistan’s dilemma was best spelt out by America’s first president George Washington in his farewell address in 1796. Alluding to the fate of smaller nations that leave themselves at the mercy of larger powers or tag their destiny to that of another state are not worthy of sovereign independence. According to him, they are doomed to be the satellites of those powers. He also said: “It was a folly in one nation to look for disinterested favours from another” because “it must then pay with its independence and sovereignty for whatever it may accept under that arrangement.”
- And one of Pakistan’s eminent Urdu poets Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi also gave the same message to his nation in his own words:

کیا اپنا سُر اُغ خود نہیں پاؤ گے ؟
کیا پھر کوئی اجنبی بلا لاؤ گے ؟
یہ راہ تو اس موڑ پہ مُڑ جائے گی
اے اہل وطن ! کہو، کہاں جاؤ گے
احمد ندیم قاسمی

