**Lessons from Singapore**

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In my previous articles I provided the way forward for Pakistan by investing in education, science, technology and innovation with the focused objective of becoming a major exporter of high value-added high technology products.

I also described how countries like China and Korea have succeeded over the last five decades. Another Asian country that has undergone a near miraculous transformation after its independence in 1965 is ‘tiny’ Singapore.

With a population of about one-fourth of Karachi’s (about five million) and with hardly any natural resources, Singapore has exports of some $400 million annually today, while Pakistan’s exports stand at about $32 million.

Singapore has become a highly developed economy with a per capita income that is among the highest in the world. This transformation was made possible by a combination of factors, including a strong focus on education, science, technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship, as well as a pro-business environment that attracted foreign direct investment (FDI).

The Singapore government recognizes that a well-educated workforce is essential for economic growth and invests heavily in education – about 20 per cent of its annual budget. The country’s education system is highly centralized, with a rigorous curriculum that focuses on math, science, and technology. Education has therefore been a cornerstone of Singapore’s economic development strategy.

Singapore’s education system has been very successful in producing a highly skilled workforce needed for high-tech industry. According to the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Report, Singapore ranks first in the world for the quality of its education system.

One of the key measures Singapore has taken to improve the quality of education is investing heavily in teacher training. The government provides continuous professional development opportunities for teachers, including training on the use of technology in teaching and learning. The government also provides financial incentives to encourage teachers to upgrade their qualifications.

Another measure that Singapore has taken to improve the quality of education is developing a highly centralized education system. This system ensures that all students receive quality education regardless of their socio-economic background. The government has also invested in developing a rigorous curriculum that focuses on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Singapore’s STEM curriculum is designed to equip students with the skills they need to succeed in the 21st-century economy. The government has also introduced programmes to promote creativity and innovation in schools, such as the ‘Teach Less, Learn More’ initiative, which encourages teachers to focus on quality teaching rather than quantity.

To ensure that students are adequately prepared for the workforce, Singapore has invested heavily in vocational education and training (VET). This system provides students with practical skills and hands-on experience that prepare them for a range of jobs. The government has also established partnerships with businesses to ensure that the skills taught in VET programmes are aligned with the needs of the industry.

Higher education has been a key priority. Singapore has a number of high-ranking universities such as the National University of Singapore and the Nanyang Technological University. These universities attract top talent from around the world and provide students with access to world-class facilities and resources.

Singapore has also introduced policies to encourage students to pursue degrees in STEM fields, which are critical for the country’s industrial development. The government provides funding for research and development (R&D) to ensure that universities can conduct cutting-edge research that contributes to the country’s industrial development. Universities are encouraged to collaborate with businesses to develop innovative solutions to real-world problems.

Science and technology have also played a key role in Singapore’s economic success. Research institutes in the country focus on a range of emerging futuristic areas, including biotechnology, nanotechnology, and clean energy. One of the most notable examples is the Biopolis, a research and development hub for biomedical sciences.

The Biopolis was established in 2003 and is home to several research institutes, including the Singapore Bioimaging Consortium, the Genome Institute of Singapore, and the Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology. The Biopolis has been successful in attracting top talent from around the world and has helped establish Singapore as a centre for biotech innovation in Asia.

Innovation and entrepreneurship have also been important drivers of Singapore’s economic success. The government has established a number of initiatives including tax incentives for start-ups, grants for R&D, and incubators for new businesses. The government has also established a number of innovation clusters, such as Fusionopolis and the JTC LaunchPad, which bring together researchers, entrepreneurs, and investors to collaborate and develop new technologies.

Singapore’s pro-business environment has also been a key factor in attracting foreign direct investment. A number of free trade agreements have been concluded with other countries, making it easier for companies to do business in Singapore and access markets in other countries. The country has also established a number of economic zones and industrial parks, which offer incentives for companies to set up operations in Singapore.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has played a key role in Singapore’s development. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Singapore was the third-largest recipient of FDI in the world in 2020, after the US and China. FDI has helped create jobs, transfer technology and knowledge, and boost exports. It has also helped drive innovation and entrepreneurship in Singapore, as many foreign companies have established R&D centres and innovation hubs in the country.

Singapore has established a stable and predictable business environment with minimal corruption, efficient regulatory framework, and low tax rates. The World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business Index consistently ranks Singapore as one of the easiest countries in the world to do business in. The Economic Development Board’s Global Investor Program, for example, provides a one-stop solution for foreign investors to obtain work visas and set up their businesses in Singapore.

Pakistan needs a parliamentary but technocratic government to move forward and follow the examples set by Singapore, Korea and China. The constitution needs to be changed so that the prime minister can select the best minds in the country as ministers. The secretaries also need to be top experts in their relevant fields. The role of parliament should be limited to law making and oversight with no funds whatsoever going to members of the national and provincial assemblies.

All provincial funds need to be transferred directly (not through provincial assembly members) to the local bodies so that true democracy is implemented, and corruption eliminated. Death penalty needs to be introduced for mega corruption through summary military courts to root out the plague of corruption that has sunk this country into a dark hell. Pakistan needs a visionary, honest and technologically competent government. It is now or never.

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