Dual benefits

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| APPROXIMATELY 75 per cent of the world`s nations currently allow their citizens to maintain dual citizenship, ie to voluntarily be a citizen of more than one country. Pakistan is one of them. The remaining either do not allow any form of dual citizenship, India being the most well-known in our region, or allow it only under certain circumstances.In an earlier piece on statelessness, I discussed one extreme of citizenship having none at all. Here, I discuss the other extreme having not just one, but more than one.In a world starkly divided by religion, politics, economics and culture, being divided by citizenship adds yet another complex layer to the concept of identity. Yet, another passport is one of the most in-demand commodities today, spurred by the economics of incentivisation and self-interest both for those who seek dual citizenship and for those who market it by virtue of their immigration and naturalisation policies.But is dual citizenship bringing the world closer, or is it moving it further apart? Dual citizenship, as argued by many scholars, is the key to more fluid and open borders. It encourages a cross-pollination of sorts between countries through its people, something that would otherwise not be possible. It is also of economic value, as it encourages the transfer of knancial and human resources with relative ease between two countries. It has given rise to new theories, such as the concept of transnationalism; an increased interconnectivity between people and a reduced significance of boundaries among nation states, ie belonging is no longer defined by physical presence.Many nations also `sell` their nationalities on the open market. For instance, Malta and Cyprus (the most expensive at almost three million euros) in Europe, Dominica in the Caribbean and Vanuatuin the Pacific (which has no residency requirements, just outright cash), allow instant citizenship to all who can afford it a global market of almost $25 billion a year. Such duality is nowhere associated with belonging and identity, but is simply an economic tr ansaction.But gif ted to some by birth via their parents, earned by those who immigrate, and even purchased by a select few, dual citizenship is now raising many hard questions, from defining national sovereignty to the monetary benefits it can bring to countries.In the former, it raises the question; how can an individual be expected to be loyal to two constitutional entities simultaneously, particularly if they ascribe to two different notions of sovereignty, such as a secular vs religious identity, or democracy vs autocracy? This is one of the reasons why manycountries do not allow dual nationals to run for or hold political office, for instance.It also raises questions of legal identity, brought starkly into view by the recent downing of the Ukrainian Airlines passenger jet in Iran. Iran initially refused to hand over the bodies to the Canadian families of those who identified as Iranian-Canadians.Iran technically does not recognise dual citizenship and therefore those who perished were simply seen as Iranians.In the latter, it raises questions of whether there exists a mutually beneficial economic relationship between citizen and state, based on an attachment to the homeland, or whether one is benefiting more than the other. At one end, rules for dual nationals are gradually becoming tighter, as the world caves in to the threat of terrorism and loss of tax revenue. Hiding behind a second passport is seen as the ultimate escape.At the other end, dual citizens are actively being pursued by their countries of origin to exercise their legal right to duality and choose them as an economic investment.Financial incentives to attract the `diaspora` or allowing Pakistanis who hold dual citizenship to contest elections and run for of fice, as Pakistan has only just announced, are ways in which disadvantaged states are trying to leverage theeconomic value of its dual citizens.More advantaged nations are equally trying to leverage the economic worth of individuals by attracting them with the lure of dual citizenship, but nevertheless keeping the power to pick and choose as they too meet the demand for `workers`.These opposing trends show that where dual citizenship was once the prerogative of the individual, it is now being appropriated by the state as a way of gaining economic control over borders. The ability to be able to freely associate with more than one nation is not just testing the boundaries of citizenship, but also the economic and social reach ofindividuals.Dual citizenship is an invaluable asset in bringing countries closer together. Yet, it is quickly becoming a pawn in a tug-of-war for greater economic and political control between nation states. Greater study of this needs to be done in order to prevent it from happening and, perhaps, open new avenues of cross-border cooperation through citizens themselves. The writer is a lecturer in international development and global migration.  |