**[Pakistan, Islam & education](https://www.dawn.com/news/1732624/pakistan-islam-education)**

[Ashraf Jehangir Qazi](https://www.dawn.com/authors/3400/ashraf-jehangir-qazi) Published January 20, 2023

The writer is a former ambassador to the US, India and China and head of UN missions in Iraq and Sudan.

Listen to article

WHEN a patient’s condition turns critical, doctors often say it is time for dua (prayer) more than dawa (medicine or treatment). Current Pakistani conversations across all classes about the state of the country suggest a similar condition.

Such a state in a patient is often the result of multi-organ failure. In Pakistan, the organs of the state, ie its political, social, economic and administrative institutions, are failing.

The military, as de facto principal political, economic and administrative decision-making institution, has brought about this state failure by exceeding its constitutional limits.

Civil institutions and the political process have also failed. But civilian and political culpability — on display every day — has been secondary. Hopefully, the [new military leadership](https://www.dawn.com/news/1723789) is following through on its [claim](https://www.dawn.com/news/1722761) of turning the page.

The country needs to emerge from its present condition to survive. Can it? The question is not legitimate because it allows a negative answer. The country has to do whatever it takes, whatever the odds may be against it being able to do so. So where do we go from here? What is to be done? These are legitimate questions because they implicitly rule out answers such as ‘Nowhere!’ and ‘Nothing!’

Existential questions must generate existential responses. When they emanate from the political condition of the country, the responses can only come from the people. But the people are an inchoate entity. They are more a concept than an immediate instrument of political change. To become that they need to be enabled by well-wishers, not manipulated by those who fear and wish to control them.

The country needs to emerge from its present condition to survive. Can it?

This is why Chomsky has little respect for media, academic, administrative, and moral ‘intellectuals’ who profess their identification with the people’s interests without seeking to catalyse and realise their potential to change their condition.

They make a decent living working for corporate owners and the government, or by entertaining elites and exploiting the sentiments of the people. Sartre accused them of “living in bad faith”. Gramsci counselled “pessimism of the intellect” (recognising realities) and “optimism of the will” (overcoming them).

Climate heating may be the primary global existential challenge for mankind. But there are more immediate challenges. The French Yellow Vest slogan “you are concerned about the middle of the century; we are concerned about the middle of the month” encapsulates the dilemma of the poor all over the world, especially in developing countries.

The corporate state capitalist system which prioritises class warfare and profit maximisation exploits this situation by “greening” its ultimately fatal carbon emissions-based economic strategies on the one hand, and by supporting delusory and ephemeral poverty alleviation over radical and structural poverty reduction reforms on the other.

Only working class-based people’s movements can reconcile essential short-term compromises with prevailing realities, and staying the course for longer-term systemic change towards eco-soc­ialist global and national Green New Deals. Such movements are the only hope for the survival of mankind. Political leaders and power brokers who oppose them are the problem. Mid­dle class intellectuals and ‘technocrats’ can no longer fake it. They are either with or against them.

Let us briefly look at Islam and education. Islam enjoins belief (iman) and action (amal). It is actively humanitarian and merciful. It provides the idiom in which social and political messages need to be couched for the people of Pakistan to accept and own them.

The doors of ijtihad which were closed 1,000 years ago need to be reopened to reclaim the original message of Islam, which through the Quran and the Sunnah spoke directly to the individual believer, not through the medium of a class for whom faith became a profession and a means of influence and power.

The Prophet (PBUH) said his ummah will never agree in error. It is this confidence, lost for 1,000 years since the Mongol destruction of Baghdad, which needs to be recovered for an Islamic civilisational renaissance to commence, in which faith, science and human intuition reinforce one another to comprise a transcendent unity and a transforming power for deliverance from catastrophe.

Our scientific and cultural heritage of Baghdad, Andalus, Iran and Central Asia needs to be repossessed and carried forward.

We are all aware of the hadith which says search for knowledge, even from China. The search for knowledge is the essence of science and education. Without an educated public opinion, no reform can be lasting and no national goal can be achieved.

Public education is not a priority in Pakistan. It can never be within current political and social structures. It is a human right, and human rights and education are not priorities, except rhetorically and in seminars, policy documents and manifestos. Resource constraints is another name for low priority.

In today’s world, the concept of education must change. The great German educator, William Humboldt, said education “should not be a matter of pouring water into a vessel but rather it should be conceived as laying out a string along which learners proceed in their own ways, exercising and improving their creative capacities and imaginations, and experiencing the joy of discovery”.

Chomsky recalls one of his teachers, when asked what will be “covered” in his semester, said the question should be what will be “discovered”.

Unfortunately, authority, orthodoxy and syllabuses insist on filling vessels. Parents rightly want their children to find remunerative jobs. Hence, education as a search for knowledge will have to be a longer-term endeavour which should, however, begin immediately.

Experts agree children should commence their primary education in their mother tongue. They can then switch to regional and national languages and, at a later stage, become familiar with an international language.

Pakistan is fortunate in this regard. Urdu is well understood throughout the country and is the lingua franca between people of different regions. Familiarity with English, if not always proficiency in it, especially among the middle and upper classes, has been around for generations. The building blocks for a nationally educated and internationally interacting society are available. Construc­ting one must become an insistent priority.

*The writer is a former ambassador to the US, India and China and head of UN missions in Iraq and Sudan.*

[**ashrafjqazi@gmail.com**](http://mailto:ashrafjqazi@gmail.com)

[**www.ashrafjqazi.com**](http://www.ashrafjqazi.com)

*Published in Dawn, January 20th, 2023*