

Pakistan shining

*Management
Nation
21-3-05*

BY KHURSHID AKHTAR KHAN

The ruling BJP fought the 2004 Indian general elections on its macro economic achievements and its emerging image as a potential economic world power competing with China in the Asian continent. However, the catchy slogan of 'India Shining' failed to win their coalition a majority required to form the government. Former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee gracefully submitted his resignation to the President of India even before the election results were officially declared, making way for the Congress party to put together a coalition government for the next term.

While this is a good example of a transparent election and smooth transfer of power in a democratic system of government, there is a very important lesson that our leaders in Pakistan seem to consistently disregard. The general public, who can make or break a government at the election time by their votes, assesses the performance of its rulers by the benefits that trickle down to their level and that is what determines the popularity of a government in their eyes.

Our present leaders do not appear to have a hand on the pulse of the masses. The floundering of figures of exports, reserves, indexes are incomprehensible to 95 percent of our population and the announcements of mega projects that do not directly influence their lives do not impress them. 33% of our people exist below the food poverty line, nearly half below the human poverty index and the wealth is concentrated in the hands of no more than 5 percent of the people.

Agriculture accounts for a third of our economy and nearly 64 percent of our population lives in rural areas that have concentration of poor people. Every big city has slums, katchi abadis and poorer localities where majority of the population lives. Yet these areas are the most neglected and do not have even the basic civic amenities like metalled roads, drainage and clean drinking water. 49 percent have no access to latrines. Sewage disposal is normally by open drains discharging into open areas that is the cause of high rate of hepatitis and many disabilities where drinking water has interacted with waste.

The devolution plan introduced with great fanfare by NRB was meant to take the administration and development of basic infrastructure at the lowest local levels on need basis, minimising wasteful expenditure on unworkable grand schemes that some high-powered consultants think these people should have. Unfortunately, actual devolution and accountability that

regions.

Unless the lower stratum is made to feel important they cannot be freed from psychological, economic, technical and sociological barriers.

They have to be provided with social and technical guidance, perhaps by non-governmental organisations monitored by government agencies, to undertake smaller projects of local interest, some of which can also be on self-help basis.

Motivated community awareness and participation approach should be exercised by giving the resources to the people under the watchful eyes of the local community, eliminating intermediaries and the contractor mafia that consumes a bulk of the allocated funds. This will give a challenge with responsibility to the locals and bring visible changes in behaviour and understanding.

The non-conducive living conditions and lack of amenities prevent professionals from accepting jobs in rural areas despite the obvious advantages of unpolluted atmosphere and more relaxed life at less expense.

The rural population that is the backbone of our economy can progress only if each village is equipped with the basic amenities on modern lines, run and controlled by them directly, free from bureaucratic remote controls or the influence of the feuds.

The local people have to be mobilised and empowered as a community to analyse the effects and take responsibility of the results and not the inputs or outputs. This will create jobs locally and discourage migration to urban areas. There is no reason why our countryside that is blessed with abundant natural beauty cannot become a delight to live in, as is the case in the developed countries.

The Congress party in India abolished large land holdings soon after partition. The dilemma in Pakistan has been that the land reforms in Ayub and Bhutto periods were insufficient to dilute the power of the feudal and tribal chiefs who have dominated our assemblies since the inception of Pakistan.

These absentee landlords have had the good fortune neither to face any real challenges in their lives nor having to put any hard work for a living. They have used politics to protect their own interests while their farm worker has remained oppressed with few rights and the agricultural output in Pakistan has remained among the lowest in the region due to their gross neglect and inefficiency.

Yet, our system has allowed these non-performers to be the masters of our destiny and to stifle the voice of

with great fanfare by INCD was meant to take the administration and development of basic infrastructure at the lowest local levels on need basis, minimising wasteful expenditure on unworkable grand schemes that some high-powered consultants think these people should have. Unfortunately, actual devolution and accountability that was the spirit of the new system has not been implemented due to lack of social responsibility and internal power struggle between district and provincial governments, causing inaction or improper use of funds.

The traditional focus has stayed on the more affluent showpiece localities in big cities. This needs to be diverted to smaller towns and villages taking the macro economic index and governance down to all levels. Instead of preparing incomprehensible reports that collect dust on shelves, only implementable recommendations and policies should be made tailored to meet the social requirements and gradual uplift of the common man in the respective

protect their own interests while their farm worker has remained oppressed with few rights and the agricultural output in Pakistan has remained among the lowest in the region due to their gross neglect and inefficiency.

Yet, our system has allowed these non-performers to be the masters of our destiny and to stifle the voice of the poor peasant.

The progress of Pakistan lies in the progress of its people, grant of fundamental rights, equal opportunity to all and a say in policies of national importance.

A conscious and concerted effort has to be made towards upgrading the poor, providing them shelter, health and education facilities and freeing them from the age-old cruel social customs. Any system shall gain favour of the people that brings prosperity and freedom to them at the micro level. Announcements of Pakistan shining when the poor do not see the light will end in the same result as the Indians have brought to their previous government.