**A way through the maze**

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It is reasonably evident that the PTI government is attempting to do all it can to help people out of the desperate situation they face, and perhaps also has its eyes already on the next general election. But the problem is that the vision is somewhat confused and at times becomes simply a hazy picture of what should be happening and how this can be achieved.

The Single National Curriculum is one example of that. Introducing certain curricula to schools, especially when they cater essentially to the middle class and not to rural populations in any way, will not help matters very much. Yes, education is important. A good equitable education is even more important in a situation where the rich have created for themselves an enclave within which they are safe and protected from the issues which confront the rest of society. But the attempt should surely be to pull the lowest schools, the public schools, the municipal schools, the madrassahs and others to the level of middle-tier private schools and then to move on to the next step of moving them higher so that in some years, we can have greater equality of education for all children. But we also need to think of other areas. The Prime Minister's Health Card package and offer of loans for houses, again meets needs – at least on paper. Whether it will work effectively is something that is very hard to say.

Certainly, what we do not need are comments such as those made by the defence minister following the Sialkot incident during which a national from Sri Lanka was killed in the most horrendous fashion, with Minister Pervaiz Khattak saying that this was the result of zealous youth who sometimes engaged in such activities. The point is that they should not be engaging in such activities and should have the sensitivity and knowledge not to do so. This is a goal we should be aiming for. If we do not, we can expect even greater isolation from a world that does not hold us in great respect at any rate, and as such a further loss of a funding we desperately need to create a better environment for all and to put money into the social welfare people need given our inflation rate of 11.5 percent for November, the highest in many months, and the rapid rise in inflation that is visible each time any individual visits a grocery store.

The economic situation needs to be addressed as well as the social one – which according to Khattak is simply the result of youth and a lack of control over emotions. In place of this 'zeal', we need to create a desire to build tolerance and to understand that killing of people is never acceptable, no matter how zealous a group of young men may be.

In this context, we also wonder whether setting up bodies such as the new Rehmatul-lil-Alameen Authority is truly necessary. In a country where over 98 percent of the population is Muslim, most children acquire a knowledge about the life of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) from within their homes. They also acquire it at school, with many lessons in their textbooks revolving around this subject. A new Authority to promote this valuable idea in a society where knowledge about it is already widespread seems a bit unnecessary.

Instead, we need to spend our resources on steps that the people of the country are in need of. These include not only greater economic empowerment, but also ensuring a situation where women are less likely to face the kind of violence and harassment that they are now subjected to. The curious belief we have created within society that women are held in respect in our country needs to be dissected and far better understood. The reality is that they are not, and keeping them within homes or disallowing them from working in no way demonstrates respect for their abilities.

We should also be open to studying examples from other countries. How did Bangladesh, a country left in a stricken economic situation after the 1971 war, reach a point where it is performing economically better than Pakistan and beats it in most social indicators on health, education, gender parity, and other issues. We could learn from these examples and indeed seek help from experts in that country, who have used their resources masterfully to gain a greater hold on the textile market internationally compared to Pakistan and to work towards uplifting their own people, including women, in a society that now offers more than our own. It was not the Single National Curriculum or any authority which helped achieve this. Microcredit schemes, mass family planning, attempts now underway to moderate how religion is used in society and other factors all played a bigger role as did more solid economic policies.

If Prime Minister Imran Khan truly wants to create change, he should be thinking about factors like land reforms and measures that can revive labour and student unions so that these groups are able to fight for their rights. As a nation, we need also to understand that most times the media is not giving us most news. Most citizens would for example be unaware of the protests taking place in Gwadar over the lack of change and amenities available to people who have been awaiting them since 2015 – and their other concerns, including access to fish from which to earn their livelihood and fears that there are attempts to cut them off from the rest of Balochistan.

A recent report by former Finance Minister Dr Hafeez Pasha also points out the complete lack of economic growth in Balochistan, a province that is resource rich and provides us with most of our needs. The failure to adhere to the basic contents of our constitution makes things worse. Nowhere in the constitution is allowance given for 'disappearing' people. Yet this takes place as do many other atrocities directed against people from various walks of life. The stifling of journalism means that fewer and fewer people hear about these outrages and must depend on unreliable social media. We need change, we need a drastic change – and, most of all, we need to find a map which will help us find a way out of the maze in which we are locked and from which there appears to be very little escape.

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