**Preparing the nation**

Muhammad Waqar Rana January 23, 2020

On a recent visit to rural Punjab, it was a painful to see village after village falling to greed by the vandalizing acts of urbanization, particularly in the colony districts.

It is tragic that an area once considered as the food basket of the country is depleting rapidly due to the criminal negligence of people and governments. The world’s best canal system with millions of acres of rich and fertile land is under tremendous threat. The revenue administration and colony departments are mercilessly granting permissions to housing societies by receiving huge amounts in kind and cash.

Panoramic scenes of lush green paddy fields, mango orchards and golden wheat can be seen no more, and a burgeoning jungle of concrete is found everywhere. All governments have shamelessly capitulated to land mafias. Agriculture is our strength. We are cutting the branch over which we live.

The recipe for progress and prosperity is simple. Change the mindset of people, be honest and truthful in dealings and lead life by example. This works both for the ruler and the ruled. For the past seven decades this nation has literally lived on foreign aid and debts hoping it will bring change in its lot. How to break this vicious circle? By learning how to manage resources: water, land and people.

Our life depends on water. Pakistan is blessed with this great resource. The saga of dams and disputes over water resources has created bad blood among the provinces. The constitutional institution of the Council of Common Interests was primarily created to sort out differences over resources like water. It has failed due to lack of political will and absence of a culture of debate and arguments. The whole issue has been politicized.

After all, these rivers have run and people have lived for centuries together. A problem has its causes. Address the causes and find the solution. Other federations have had similar issues. They find solutions to their problems because their politicians are statespersons. There are misgivings over the issue.

Parliament can seek independent advice from renowned water experts and come up with a solution. Water worth billions of rupees goes to the sea. This wastage is providing an excuse to India to build dams and divert Pakistan’s water to itself. Differences amongst the provinces provide room for argument that Pakistan does not need this water. It is better that this water goes to any of the provinces than to India.

The solution to this problem can be found by parliament because it is the only institution that represents the people. Live debate on this issue should be held. People must judge for themselves as to who stands for the people. There is no bigger court than the court of the people. It needs to be realized that you cannot change your neighbours – be it inside your country or another country.

According to the land utilization statistics survey available with the Statistics Division (2020), our total geographical area is 79.41 million hectares out of which only 21.25 million hectares is cultivable. In 2013, the cultivable area was 22.7 million hectares. Figures regarding forests are shocking. The total cropped area is 23.76 million hectares out of 33.58 million hectares agriculture land, which is almost 1/3 of the total area.

India has 159.7 million hectares of land out of which 82.6 million hectares is irrigated crop area. It is almost more than the half of the total arable land. It had $38 billion exports of agricultural products in 2013 after feeding over a billion people.

Land falls within the legislative power of the provinces. It is imperative that land is managed properly and more areas are brought under cultivation with an absolute ban on the sale of agricultural land for housing schemes. Land acquisition laws should be interpreted in a way that potential agricultural land should be excluded from acquisition. A ban must be placed over sale of agricultural land for housing. Our governments must awake from slumber.

Pakistan’s population is growing at two percent. At present it is 218 million out of which 43.47 percent is less than 15 years of age, meaning thereby that if our young people are properly fed and educated, they can be a great asset which can do wonders. Unfortunately, despite promises, the federal and provincial governments are doing nothing in this respect.

It is a pity that education and health services are an industry in this country. Parents are finding it hard to pay for education. There is not a single world-class library in this country. It is hard to find a book in time to prepare for court cases. People are forced by poverty to send their children to religious seminaries. Even in the top religious schools not a single research magazine is published anywhere.

Pakistan is a security state under constant threat from its bully neighbour, which is seven times bigger in resources. The only way to challenge bullies like Modi is to prepare and equip the nation with financial power by educating its youth and managing its resources like water and land. The begging bowl cannot be broken by empty slogans and false promises.

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