**Achieving national integration in Pakistan**

[Col (R) Muhammad Hanif](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/muhammad-hanif/%22%20%5Co%20%22More%20Articles%20by%20Col%20%28R%29%20Muhammad%20Hanif)

March 3, 2021

By definition, national integration is the awareness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country. It means that though we belong to different castes, religions and regions and speak different languages we recognize the fact that we are all one. This kind of integration is very important in the building of a strong and prosperous nation. Pakistan is a multiethnic, multicultural, multilingual and multi-religious society, where people of all ethnic, cultures, languages, religious groups and belonging to different provinces are living together. There are 97 percent Muslims of different sects and the remaining three percent belong to other religions, like Christians, Hindus, Sikhs and others.

Therefore, the common identity of the Pakistani citizens is that they are Pakistanis. This binding force can be strengthened if the common people are educated that being Muslims they are brothers to each other, and Islam says that the Muslims have to respect the rights of other religious minorities living in a country. Likewise, the people of minorities should think that they are Pakistanis, who are living with the Muslim majority, who firmly believe that the rights of other religious minorities have to be properly respected and guarded. In this context, the ethnic, cultural, language and provincial identities in Pakistan have to be kept next to their respective religions and their common identity of being Pakistanis.

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Still, Pakistan has been facing the issues of its national integration, as because of lack of proper education, knowledge and motivation, some sections of the Muslim majority population have continued to prefer their ethnicity, language, and provincial identities above their common identity as being Pakistanis and the Muslims. Also, some sections of the Muslim majority were ignorant that Islam wants them to respect and protect the rights of the minority belonging to other religions. Moreover, some provinces and some areas within the provinces had developed a perception that their provinces and areas were being ignored in the fields of education and socioeconomic development, although some of them had genuine grievances. Also there was a lack of communication among the people of various provinces, due to language and ethnic/cultural differences.

Due to various disparities in the economic development and opportunities of employment, there is dissatisfaction among some provinces and their people that the majority province Punjab is usurping their rights, especially the Sind and Balochistan provinces have such grievances. There are some nationalist movements to get their rights like the MQM and PTM. Also, citing governments’ failure to ignore the development of their areas some Baloch dissidents, misled and sponsored by India and other powers ask for independence of Balochistan.

The issues of national integration are also complicated by the lack of education and corrupt and inefficient governments, who failed in achieving economic development and providing equal employment opportunities. The neglected sections of the population are also dissatisfied because of corruption and nepotism in the government. These issues persist as the successive governments and societal leaders did not make serious efforts.

To address the above mentioned issues of national integration, following are suggested. Free and cheaper education facilities should be expanded in all areas of Pakistan by the governments and the private sector to maximize education in Pakistan. While this will help people to contribute more towards socioeconomic development of Pakistan, it will also enable them to shed away their biases on ethnic, cultural, lingual, religious or sectarian grounds, which will help in achieving better national cohesion. Also, our politicians, bureaucracy and educationists, especially the heads of all the government and private departments and institutions should work to end corruption and nepotism in the society.

The incoming governments in Pakistan should focus on CPEC based economic development of all areas, especially the backward areas, to address poverty and socioeconomic disparity and bring prosperity. This will bring out the Pakistani youth from bewilderment to hope and progress. Emphasis should also be laid on achieving interprovincial harmony among Baluchistan, Rural Sindh, South Punjab, and FATA. This should be done through promotion of education, exchange of students in each other’s educational institutions, enhancing mutual trade, promoting interprovincial sports, cultural events, tourism and interprovincial marriages.

Whereas we should take pride in our ethnicity, culture, language and provinces at local and provincial levels, we should take pride in being Muslims and Pakistanis, which should be kept above everything, as our survival lies in this thing. At the same time being the Muslims, we should respect the rights of our religious minorities and look after their economic welfare to make them happy members of our society. At the same time, dissident elements and non-violent actors like PTM, and activists in GB, AJK, Liberals and Leftists should be integrated by bringing them into mainstream politics and social life. It is expected that all these measures will greatly help in achieving national integration in a better way.

While working to achieve national integration, the successive Pakistani governments and Pakistan’s people must remember what Quaid-I-Azam had said in this context. On June 15, 1948, in a reply to Civic Address presented by Quetta Municipality, Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah said, “We are now all Pakistanis, not Balochis, Pathans, Sindhis, Bengalis, Punj­abis and so on, and as Pakistanis we must feel, behave and act, and we should be proud to be known as Pakistanis and nothing else”.

*The writer is the former Research Fellow of IPRI and Senior Research Fellow of SVI Islamabad*