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**Culture of curiosity**

It is disheartening that political protests fuelled by accusations of election fraud, threats of long marches (how original) and mundane mudslinging continue to dominate Pakistan’s narrative.

There seems to be little interest in nation-building, encouraging robust development, updating the education system, and most importantly improving the human condition. This may sound like deluded hyperbole, but it is crucial to address the fact that some of the most important issues that plague Pakistan are not in the public consciousness. Our culture does not foster self-improvement, critical thinking, or innovation. Instead, it is centered on well-worn political duels and sordid alliances such as the Pakistan Democratic Movement.

Bilawal Bhutto, the leader of the PPP is in his early thirties. He of all politicians should not fall into the outdated traps of the system. By forming a partnership with the JUI-F as a key participant to overthrow the sitting prime minister he has shown that he has been overtaken by the system. The PPP over the years has passionately proclaimed that it will never form an alliance with a party based on religious fundamentalism. JUI-F leader Fazlur Rehman has made appalling remarks in the past especially against women, something Bilawal Bhutto is surely aware of.

Rather than being trapped by the outdated values and tactics of the system, Bilawal Bhutto should make a concerted effort to change the narrative into something more dynamic and forward thinking. As a young man, Bilawal must understand that the world is moving rapidly and it is crucial that Pakistan finds a way to keep up. Unfortunately, Pakistan remains unaware of the realities of the present.

The fact that the PDM and their antics are the main discussion point is troubling. One understands that political battles make for entertaining viewing; however it is imperative that political leaders along with the media seek to alter the discourse by creating a culture that fosters intellectual curiosity and ingenuity.

Glance at the history of South Korea or Vietnam. They are prime examples of how countries actively created a culture based on learning and innovation. China is at the forefront of progress and innovation. It is clear that the cornerstone of their philosophy is the constant intellectual betterment of their people. This may not go down well, but even India takes pride in showcasing their strong work ethic and their accomplishments in the IT sector.

Prime Minister Imran Khan before coming into power talked of the need for an education emergency. It is time he walked the talk, as Pakistan’s education system is languishing at the very bottom. His intent is honourable with the Single National Curriculum, but perhaps misguided. Also, his ambition to boost the IT sector is encouraging, but needs equal focus and support at the school level. Furthermore, the media must make the education and IT sector a core feature of our discourse. If rectifying the education system is not Pakistan’s first, second, and third priority, there is little chance of keeping up with the fast-paced nature of the word and developing a culture of curiosity.

It is crucial that the mainstream media make it a priority to bring stories that matter to the fore. There needs to be sharp focus on industries that can make a fundamental difference in people’s lives. For example, agriculture is the backbone of Pakistan’s economy. It would be interesting if the media generated interest and engaged the public on how upgrading the agro-sector could kick-start the economy hence improving the human condition.

Campaigns, movements, and long-marches need to be launched on such issues rather than on overthrowing the prime minister. Perhaps it is not as entertaining as the PDM’s childish plans, but events like this can no longer be the central part of Pakistan’s discourse.

Creating a culture of curiosity and enquiry will not happen overnight. It will take time, effort, and constant intent for it to flourish. It is important that Pakistan adapts according to the times and redresses its mistakes. The solution lies not in the narrow and tired values of the past, but in contemporary ideas and a dynamic narrative that is in-step with the modern world.

The writer is the founder of Just Peace Initiatives.