**Do we need a new party?**

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Does Pakistan need a new political party? The answer is a resounding YES. In fact, Pakistan has seldom needed new politics, and a new party, more than it does now.

Politics is the art of seeking possibilities out of the impossible. Looking at the social and political landscape of the country, it is clear as day that despite ‘endless possibilities and opportunities’, everyone in Pakistan – politicians and the establishment included – are making ‘impossibles’ out of these possibilities. Entrenched positions have been taken, forgetting every social and political lesson of human history, even the teachings of our beloved Prophet (pbuh). No one is willing to contemplate the lessons of the Treaty of Hudaibiyah.

Meanwhile, the Pakistani awaam continue to languish in poverty, misery and hopelessness. The budget announced a few days back exposes the stark contrast and wide gulf between the two Ps: the ‘plight’ of the Pakistani awaam and the ‘plans’ of the Pakistani elite. ‘Elite plunder’ continues unabated. Human capital, the most precious resource of any nation, continues to languish at the bottom of priorities with education and health ignored literally a few days after a national educational emergency was declared.

Pakistan has become a ‘textbook’ in itself for learning how to destroy a country. We first launder money out of Pakistan to invest $15 billion in Dubai, and then proudly take a begging bowl to secure $10 billion in loans from the UAE. The nauseating manner in which the ‘triumphant return’ of rulers is celebrated after their foreign visits to secure loans beats the clownish shenanigans of Rangeela Shah.

With education destroyed and health left to rot, we are producing weak and incompetent human beings who lack the capacity, quality and will to achieve anything greater in life. Life has become a rat race to survive. Even those who migrate – and it is much beyond brain drain now – lack the appropriate qualifications and skills for employability. Hence the stories coming out of various countries where Pakistanis are being kicked out for begging, which seems to have become our most successful national characteristic.

The divided social fabric of a society riven by sects, baradaris, tribes, class, language, and provincialism has been further deepened and widened by the extractive exploitation by the Pakistani elite. In fact, many of these divisions among the ‘have-nots’ of Pakistan have been created and promoted by the Pakistani elite, to hide their extractive exploitation. Survival has been made so difficult that each man to his own has become a law. The treachery runs deeper. Superficial religiosity has been created, promoted and imposed to cover the deep cracks, and in the course of doing that we have witnessed the worst possible abuse of religion, with every teaching distorted to suit the elite. In this, two Ms have aided and abetted.

At the risk of sounding like a cliche, we live in disruptively epochal times. Humanity faces existential threats like climate change. Artificial intelligence (AI) has already made every technology into a potential monster. The post-Covid world is full of uncertainty. Predictions of civilization teetering at a collapse abound. The so-called ‘rules-based order’ post the Second World War lies exposed in its hypocrisy and is at a breaking point. Inequalities and populism abound in the developed world, resulting in soft populist revolts against ‘techno-feudalism’. These countries are becoming insular and protectionist.

The era of ‘hyperglobalization’ is over. New concepts of ‘friend shoring’, ‘asymmetric warfare’, ‘AI automation’, along with headwinds against trade and integration are taking hold in countries that run international institutions – which Pakistan is at the mercy of. FDI may soon seem a concept of the past. Self- reliance may be all that is left. Suddenly Pakistan’s critical geographical location may seem like a curse, given the international geopolitical struggles. With Modi being slapped down but a Trump presidency in the offing, the situation becomes more nuanced.

So here we are facing existential global challenges with a poor, deficient divided household. So does that provide a raison d’etre for a new political party? With 186 registered political parties, why is it that not one of them, including those in power, are actually unable to even ‘ see’ the stormy horizon, let alone grasp the gravity of the situation? The answer is plain and simple: none of them is an institution. Most are parties on paper and those which matter are personal and family fiefdoms.

The most popular party – the PTI – revolves around one person whose whims and desires are the party, its politics and its practice. The PTI today has become a cult. Its followers, while filled with hatred and whimsical devotion, are without any original ideas – the past disastrous rule between 2018 and 2022 notwithstanding. Regarding the other two parties – the PML-N and PPP – the less said the better. They are the major culprits of the current disastrous state of affairs. Smaller parties in Pakistan all represent the extractive narrow interests of various sorts but again survival remains the first order of their business. No one has the wherewithal to chart the stormy waters. Above all, there is no political will beyond a mere power grab.

The question staring us in the face however is: how can a new political party come to the rescue? After all, it will be the same Pakistanis, same sociopolitical struggles, same hidden and open enemies and worsening socio-economic scenario both at home and abroad. The answer is that in these dark times many Pakistanis have come to similar conclusions and are willing, ready and able to come together to tackle these challenges by building an institution of a new political party.

The shenanigans of our ruling elite over the last 12 months also seems to have triggered the national consciousness, providing an opportunity to fill the vacuum. What is needed is a political institution that is neither person-centric nor self-interested. A party rooted among ordinary Pakistanis and built bottom-up by them. A party which will reach out to both the Es – the establishment and the elite – to make them realize the gravity of the situation and their calamitous contribution to it as well as allow them space to self-correct and come back to the task of nation-building.

Pakistan needs a new political party that is built like an institution, unlike any political endeavour undertaken in Pakistan in the past. ‘Awaam Pakistan’ is being established as that institution. It has the will, ability and readiness to shoulder the responsibility of nation-building and national rehabilitation. It welcomes anyone with a sincere heart, selfless dedication and clean record to come on board.

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