

Mr Jamali's vision and will

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"Unfortunately Pakistan is becoming increasingly irrelevant to its people in areas of justice security and equal opportunities to citizens."

Who said that? Not an opposition leader or some one writing in a newspaper in USA or UK. Well our own Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali when he spoke recently at the National Defence College. General Musharraf too delivered a speech at the said college the same day. He too focused on "vital national interests" but mostly on the external dimensions — relations with India and the ensuing peace talks as also the dangers besetting Pakistan. He reiterated his ideas about the need for "enlightened moderation" and for curbing and controlling the extremists.

There was little new in what the General said. It was Mr Jamali who departing from the beaten path, came out with some home truths which a prime minister seldom airs in public. He spelt out his own vision of Pakistan and his understanding of the vital national issues. He didn't mince words about his extreme unhappiness with the existing state of affairs. He envisioned a Pakistan where there was speedy justice, quality education, equitable development and little of corruption. He dreamt of a strong, stable and prosperous Pakistan. He wondered how it was that a nation of over 140 million people and being a nuclear state, its image abroad was so poor. He found it "disheartening" that Pakistan's achievements "do not demonstrate our real potential." How come, despite possessing vast resources "Pakistan was not self-sufficient in agricultural production"? Why are we not using our hydroelectric potential and how was it that we signed contracts for producing electricity at exorbitant costs? He used strong language about the rampant culture of corruption and how the "ruling elite" had amassed fortunes by abuse of authority. How corruption had permeated all parts of national life. He wanted an accountability system which will not exclude my section or segment of government or society from its purview obviously referring to the judiciary and the military. About governance he said that judiciary, police and revenue departments had made life of the common man miserable due to weak institutional control. Lack of public confidence in state institutions had eroded their legitimacy and directly contributed to deterioration of public security and law and order in the country. He observed that the "distance between the rulers and people remains vast".

What an indictment of the government of the day! From the horse's mouth. There is enough material in it for a prime minister to call it a day and resign. Perhaps Mr Jamali can say that his prime ministership is only a year or so old and that he needed more time to make up for the deficiencies and failures. But what about the performance during the previous three years. What message was he signalling about the previous regime?

If Mr Jamali honestly believes in what he has said addressing the military officers, he surely has to do something to start putting things right. When he finds that there is "lack of public confidence in the state institutions", is he willing to find out what the reasons are for this phenomenon? If he honestly believes in viable and workable institutions, is he willing to take steps to begin to restore validity and workability to them?

Does he honestly think that the elections were fair and free and there was no truth to persistent allegations and newspaper reports about massive pre poll rigging? Does he think that there was no political manipulation involving various ways of persuasion and coercion in the formation of his government? Does he believe that he can do some credible work to reduce corruption when he himself has been a party to the muddiness of the political process, in luring elected members of assemblies to defect from their parties and join his government as important federal ministers? Does he seriously think that he can make a dent in the unfortunate "lack of public confidence" in the governmental institutions when his own government is not free from contamination?

How can there be "good governance" if the public and public servants in their hearts feel that the way elections were held and governments formed, leaves so very much to be desired. The Constitution of Pakistan begins with the words that power shall be exercised by the chosen representatives of the People. Can Mr Jamali as the chosen representative of the country's chosen representatives say that he indeed is the chief executive of Pakistan. And if he is nominally so — as a super chief executive takes most of the vital national decisions, should he (Mr Jamali) seriously talk about making institutions and especially the elected institutions viable and functional?

For it be for me, to doubt the intentions and credentials of our genial prime minister. Does he honestly believe that under the present system he can bring the institutions to the level of credibility that he is keen to achieve? There is much talk about the new devolutionary district system, the

so-called Nazimates. Does he honestly believe that he for one, would have thrust such a system on the people without analysing in depth, its pros and cons, had it not been imposed by a military regime? And would it have been sustained if the heavy hand from the top had not weighed the provincial governments down all the time to obediently carry out orders from above, despite serious reservations about its workability? Why is it Mr prime minister that local system matters engage so much attention, interest and time of the constitutional head of the state and a specially contrived central bureau?

Can such a dragoned political process ensure a local devolved system to take root? Isn't it a valid proposition to say that local systems grow and evolve locally and that impositions from the top (bypassing provincial governments) would not endure by fiat? Another imposition is the new police order. It certainly has quite a few good points. Linked as its provisions are with the working of the district and provincial governments isn't it only fair that it is not thrust on the provinces and districts? Mr Jamali's hands stand strengthened by the recommendations of the provincial governments. If he is serious about reviving the vested power of the cabinet, he should take his own time to open up a debate as to how the new police dispensation will affect the rule of law and the law and order system in the provinces and districts. Let it be extensively debated in the national, provincial and district assemblies. Mr Jamali owes it to himself and his perceptive observations at the National Defence College to play an effective part as the prime minister of Pakistan, rising to the constitutional obligations that a "chief executive" of a country must discharge.

Mr Jamali also talked about education. Does he know that Pakistan lags behind in terms of the percentage of the GDP it spends on this vital sector, even amongst the SAARC countries? Does Mr Jamali know that because of international pressure we do now have a National Literacy Plan but that we sit at the lowest rungs of the international literacy ladder? Is he aware that instead of rushing to catch up with the rest of the world the implementation of the plan is foundering on the rocks of lack of political will, lack of funds and lack of resolve to build up the capacity at the ground level, to achieve the targeted results? (And this in spite of well-reported statements and activities of a well meaning federal education minister!) Will Mr Jamali bestir himself to do the needful?

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