

What do the nationalists want

By Ameer Bhutto

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THE issues which the nationalists of the three smaller provinces seek to highlight and resolve, and for which they are labelled disruptive, retrogressive and even seditious, originate from the historic betrayal of the social contract embodied in the Pakistan Resolution.

Taking into account the multi-national nature of Pakistan, the founding fathers realized that a centralized system of government would not be suitable. They envisaged a decentralised system of government in which the federating nations would have maximum control over their indigenous affairs and their interests would be protected. They laid down guarantees in the Pakistan Resolution that each nation in Pakistan would be "autonomous and sovereign", that they would be referred to as states rather than provinces, they would be headed by a premier and would have control over all portfolios, with the exception of defence, foreign affairs, currency, customs and those aspects of communications that pertain to defence, which would rest with the centre. It was on the basis of these assurances that Sindh, Balochistan, Frontier, Punjab and Bengal acquiesced to be part of Pakistan.

Having been lured into this covenant by the allure of autonomy and sovereignty, they were presented with a very different reality after the creation of Pakistan. The social contract was not honoured for even one day as our rulers either found one super clever exegesis after another to bypass the social contract or simply silenced all conscientious objections of the federating units with guns.

There seems to prevail a continuous and comprehensive disregard for the wishes and interests of the three smaller nations in what remains of Pakistan. The voices raised in Sindh, Balochistan and the Frontier seem to fade long before they reach Islamabad, while the interests of Punjab take precedence. Any truly political and genuinely representative government with vision would realize the pitfalls of pursuing such a course.

But successive governments have closed their eyes to stark political realities and operate in a vacuum of a socio-political conscience. Even prime ministers elected from the smaller provinces, apart from serving their own personal interests, eagerly compromise the interests of the soil which produced and sustains them to appease Punjab and its power brokers, and become agents of the establishment. They deliberately distance and isolate themselves from the heartbeat of the nation to better serve the narrow interests of a specific clique.

Instead of listening to the complaints of the nationalists and trying to redress them, an effort is made to discredit them and their ideas. Nationalists are blamed for adopting a retrogressive approach and impeding progress. How does one define progress? Is it progress to allow the interests of one's nation to be stampeded to serve the interests of another? Is it progress to allow Islamabad to loot the God-given natural resources of a nation without any benefits accruing to that nation?

What benefits does Balochistan derive from the natural gas produced at Sui? People still burn wood in Balochistan to prepare their meals and are living prehistoric lives in the hills. Women have to walk all day in the blistering heat to fill their clay pots with water from distant springs and stagnant, infested ponds for their families. What benefits does Sindh derive from the port at Karachi? Warm water ports are a valuable natural national resource that nations have gone to war over in the past. Yet all revenue generat-

ed at the port is taken away by Islamabad.

Is it any wonder, therefore, that the Balochs are apprehensive about Gwadar? What benefits do the Pashtoons derive from the power generation projects operating in the Frontier? The figures regarding the number of electricity consumers in the Frontier as compared with the rest of the country are alarming. Pashtoons live in darkness while their natural resources are being exploited to provide electricity for the rest of the country.

Islamabad wishes to identify progress and development with the silent submission of all nations in Pakistan to its edicts, no matter how unjust they may be. This can never happen. The Sindhi, Baloch and Pashtoon peoples are the proud descendants of ancient civilizations and their heritage is rich with honour. They came into Pakistan in 1947 with the hope of living in peace and liberty as equals.

The evolution of political systems is one of the prerequisites of progress. This is precisely what the nationalists want. The present system binds us to the vestiges of a failed past. But the vested interests of a certain powerful clique demand that no meaningful changes be made. Yet they accuse the nationalists of impeding progress. Nationalists are merely trying to salvage something out of a bad situation by proposing options and alternatives. Nations that are afraid of change and mindlessly cling on to the remains of a painful and ruinous past are doomed.

They did not shake off the British imperialist yoke only to be adorned by another one in its place.

The water issue has become a serious obstacle in the restoration of confidence between the provinces and it perfectly symbolizes the imbalance created by the present centralized federal system that serves the interests of only one province. There was a time, back in the 1980s and early 1990s, when the federal government would go out of its way in an effort to convince the opponents of Kalabagh Dam that this project was intended mainly for the purpose of producing electricity.

Having failed to dupe the opponents of the project, the authorities were ultimately forced to concede that the main objective of Kalabagh Dam was to create a reservoir of water for irrigation and now hardly anyone even mentions the electricity production aspect of the dam. The same sort of deception was used to construct the Chashma-Jhelum Link Canal. Assurances were given that it would be operated only in instances of high flood to drain out access water. But it is now being operated all year long for irrigation purposes. This tangled web of deceit cannot work because you cannot fool all of the people all of time.

The Greater Thal Canal Project, which is already more than half completed, and the prospect of Kalabagh Dam that looms over our heads has given rise to serious concerns about where the extra water will come from to operate the Thal Canal and fill the 6.1 MAF reservoir at Kalabagh Dam when there has been a consistent acute shortage of water over the last decade and a half.

It is feared that the share of water of the three smaller provinces will be further reduced in order to meet this requirement, thereby further exacerbating the water shortage crisis and will bring us to the brink of famine and

ruin. Due to the water shortage over the water table has already dropped. Where water was once available at one now has to drill over a 150 feet over 200 feet, to find water.

If the water shortage becomes a shortage of water for irrigation there will be a serious and widespread water as well, as is already the case and Balochistan. Unless sanity prevails can pose a serious problem for the future.

If there is such an urgent need for water to satisfy the ever increasing population, then why must we upon controversial projects that do not have any possible alternatives? Why has it

so much time trying to bring a serious feasible large dam at Skardu Kalabagh Dam with MAF of water. The Dam will hold a lot of water. But 40 MAF entirely wasted at Kalabagh Dam due to stubborn insistence even in the face of Is it because a dam location might not be in Punjab as Kalabagh?

Our 57-year experience has not been a very clearly failed. Maybe change is long overdue and we want to break up Pakistan.

social contract in the Pakistan Resolution as the founding document of Pakistan implemented in letter and spirit. The centralization of power from the centre according to the formula contained in the Pakistan Resolution, not a mere cosmetic change, proceeds only in making the districts directly dependent upon Islamabad provinces and thereby creating semi-unit state.

If the demand for decentralization of the feudals to harness power, a forces claim, then history bears witness in form of highly centralized federalism, teething ring of military and civilian and shades over the last 57 years destroyed us. All the damage to the political fabric that Pakistan has suffered come under this highly centralized system. do we stand to lose by trying a different

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Nations that are afraid of change and mindlessly cling on to the remains of a painful and ruinous past are doomed. Only nations that are progressive and are unafraid to discard the shackles of the past and look to a new dawn are deserving of a bright future. ■

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the multi-national nature of the fathers realized that a centralized system of government in which the provinces could not be suitable. They envisioned a system of government in which the provinces would have maximum control over their own affairs and their interests would be protected. The guarantees in the Pakistan Constitution in Pakistan would be referred to as 'provinces', they would be headed by a governor and would have control over all aspects of defence, foreign relations and those aspects of the economy that pertain to defence, which were not. It was on the basis of this that Sindh, Balochistan, and Bengal acquiesced to be

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the complaints of the nationalists, an effort is made to discredit the nationalists are blamed for adopting a narrow and impeding progress. How is it progress to allow the interests of the provinces to be stamped to serve the interests of the provinces to allow Islamabad to loot the resources of a nation without any benefit?

Balochistan derive from the natural resources still burn wood in Balochistan and are living prehistoric lives in the past. What benefits the provinces for their families? What benefits the port at Karachi? Warm water is a national resource that nations have in the past. Yet all revenue generat-

ed at the port is taken away by Islamabad.

Is it any wonder, therefore, that the Balochs are apprehensive about Gwadar? What benefits do the Pashtoons derive from the power generation projects operating in the Frontier? The figures regarding the number of electricity consumers in the Frontier as compared with the rest of the country are alarming. Pashtoons live in darkness while their natural resources are being exploited to provide electricity for the rest of the country.

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The Greater Thal Canal Project, which is already more than half completed, and the prospect of Kalabagh Dam that looms over our heads has given rise to serious concerns about where the extra water will come from to operate the Thal Canal and fill the 6.1 MAF reservoir at Kalabagh Dam when there has been a consistent acute shortage of water over the last decade and a half.

It is feared that the share of water of the three smaller provinces will be further reduced in order to meet this requirement, thereby further exacerbating the water shortage crisis and will bring us to the brink of famine and

ruin. Due to the water shortage over the last several years, the water table has already dropped drastically in Sindh. Where water was once available at 80 feet underground, one now has to drill over a 150 feet, and in some places over 200 feet, to find water.

If the water shortage becomes worse, not only will the shortage of water for irrigation become more severe but there will be a serious and widespread scarcity of drinking water as well, as is already the case in some parts of Sindh and Balochistan. Unless sanity prevails, this delicate issue can pose a serious problem for the federation.

If there is such an urgent need to build reservoirs of water to satisfy the ever increasing demand of an ever increasing population, then why must all focus be placed upon controversial projects that divide us without looking at possible alternatives? Why has the government wasted

so much time trying to shove Kalabagh Dam down our throats instead of conducting a serious feasibility study of building a large dam at Skardu? The reservoir at Kalabagh Dam will hold a little over 6 MAF of water. The reservoir at Bhasha Dam will hold a little over 7.5 MAF of water. But 40 MAF of water is being entirely wasted at Skardu. Then why the stubborn insistence upon Kalabagh Dam even in the face of vociferous opposition? Is it because a dam at Skardu or another location might not be as beneficial to Punjab as Kalabagh Dam would be?

Our 57-year experiment with federation has not been a very happy one. It has clearly failed. Meaningful and radical change is long overdue. Nationalists do not want to break up Pakistan. They want the

social contract in the Pakistan Resolution, which is regarded as the founding document of Pakistan, to be fully implemented in letter and spirit. They desire a real decentralization of power from the centre to the provinces according to the formula contained in the Pakistan Resolution, not a mere cosmetic 'devolution' which succeeds only in making the districts and local governments directly dependent upon Islamabad, bypassing the provinces and thereby creating something akin to a one-unit state.

If the demand for decentralization is a ploy on the part of the feudals to harness power, as the anti-nationalist forces claim, then history bears witness that the present form of highly centralized federalism has proven to be the teething ring of military and civilian dictators of all hues and shades over the last 57 years who have all but destroyed us. All the damage to the socio-economic and political fabric that Pakistan has sustained thus far has come under this highly centralized federal system. What do we stand to lose by trying a different approach?

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Nations that are afraid of change and mindlessly cling on to the remains of a painful and ruinous past are doomed. Only nations that are progressive in their outlook and are unafraid to discard the shackles of a miserable past and look to a new dawn are destined to, and worthy of, a bright future. ■