**Pakistan needs a new political party**

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For the first time ever, many of us are not just apprehensive but frightened about the future of Pakistan. Daily survival is getting harder and harder for our people, our already ineffective governance is getting even worse, and our nation is drifting backward as the rest of the world is marching forward.

Not surprisingly, our youth see no hope for the future. When a ship going from Libya to Greece sank two years ago, more than half of those who perished were Pakistanis. This shows the desperation of our youth to find opportunities abroad, leaving behind their families and childhoods.

We are fast reaching the point of no return – and it is imperative we take a hard look at our ineffective governance that has failed our people. We need to radically restructure our governance so that we can finally give hope and opportunity to all our people.

For that to happen, we need leaders with vision. Unfortunately, our existing political leaders are outdated, out-of-touch, and devoid of any vision for the nation’s future. I am sorry to say they lack both the courage and the competence to change the course of this country.

All countries have problems and we do too. What is unique about us, however, is that our problems have been lingering for decades and our leaders, engaged in palace intrigues, have only added to our woes and not been able to solve a single significant problem in decades.

Since our long-unsolved policy mistakes are now all coming to a head, concerned Pakistanis are alarmed about the future of this country. This is why we are starting a new political party.

Four out of ten Pakistani men, women and children, live below the poverty line and millions of hungry children cry themselves to sleep every night. And things are getting worse, not better.

The enlightened among us realize that we are privileged primarily because of an accident of birth, and that – but for the grace of God – our own children could have been malnourished, stunted and roaming amid garbage in katchi abadis rather than taking swimming or music lessons.

If living in a sea of worsening poverty, lawlessness and despair bothers you, and our leaders’ failure to do anything about it frustrates you, then you understand the need for a new party.

When there are men and women, who have gone to school and college, who have completed Matric, Inter or BA, who leave home for work at 8am and come back home after dark – in short they did and continue to do what society asks of them – but they are not able to pay their electricity and gas bills, we think a change is needed in the governing priorities of this country that the current political leadership has been unable to provide.

When India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka have all gotten far ahead of us, when their children are studying IT and computer programming and have new employment opportunities and our working classes are forced to send their children to work in bicycle repair shops, then we need some fresh ideas and policy expertise to increase opportunities in the country. Do our existing parties have that?

When only a few families and individuals have been engineered to rule over us for decades, when we go full circle from dharna to RTS to Form 47, when parties are run as dictatorships and fiefdoms, when everyone talks against corruption but it remains the grease that makes government works for the privileged, when Farah Gogis and Gullu Butts are an integral part of our politics, when politics is polarized but politicians fly in the same private planes of the few uber-rich – then this corrupt, crony political system needs to change and new political voices need to emerge.

When after 30 years and with 80,000 lives sacrificed, we still can’t decide whether the Taliban are good or bad, when after 75 years and three wars we still don’t know whether or not to trade with India, when the fulcrum of our foreign policy is just getting the next foreign loan, when we find it expedient to refer to a genocide as a ‘conflict’ – then we think Pakistan needs a change in direction that only a clear-headed and educated leadership can provide.

Pakistan needs a government run by men and women of proven integrity and competence, who are not looking for shortcuts to power like leaders in other parties have done, and who have a demonstrated ability to deliver. Pakistan needs a better party.

We are forming a different kind of party with women and young people as part of the leadership team, a party based on ideas and not personalities, a party that has professionals of integrity, competence and intellectual honesty, a party that belongs not to a province or a city but to the whole nation, a party that will constitutionally mandate term limits for its leaders, be internally democratic, and would never consider any individual or family to be indispensable. Most importantly, a party that speaks for the hopes and aspirations of all Pakistanis.

We want to present to our people a new vision of Pakistan, a nation focused on its people – especially the young. A country where population growth is under control and all our children go to quality schools that teach them how to read, write and think, where childhood mental and physical stunting ends, where infant and maternal mortality is brought under control, where schools and colleges give admissions on merit and not ‘sifarish’, where jobs are given to those with degrees and not with ‘parchis’, where our youth and women have business opportunities, where people in public service exhibit competence and integrity and where the disease of VIP mentality ends.

We want to raise the living standards of our labour, give fair prices to farmers but not starve the urban poor, make Pakistani manufacturing and information technology industries competitive, get rid of terrorism and religious and ethnic strife across our land, and have horizontal and vertical equity in our tax systems.

We want to have constitutional local governments, entrusted with responsibilities for health, education, water and sanitation, and roads and transportation. We want directly elected mayors who run local jurisdictions and who cannot be replaced until a successor is elected. This one move will improve health, education and other services provided to our people and allow newer, younger faces to emerge as political leaders.

Societies can only advance if the rights and obligations of citizens are clearly demarcated and enforced. We have a dilapidated legal system that is unable to provide justice. We must have an effective legal system and an independent judiciary. This is the best guarantee of a Pakistan where we are free to elect our leaders, speak our minds, and pray in our own ways.

We are optimistic that if deep-seated reforms are undertaken and the government’s footprint is reduced we will see rapid improvement in our lives. Economic growth of eight per cent over 18 years can quadruple our national income. This is the central idea of our party: economic opportunity for all.

A promise before I end: if we ever come to power, it will be only through your votes and not through any backroom deals.

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