**Change the system**

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Wednesday, Jan 26, 2022

In a note titled ‘Future Constitution of Pakistan’, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah wrote the following lines: “Dangers of a Parliamentary Form of Govt – “1. The parliamentary form of government: It has worked satisfactorily in England and nowhere else – and 2. Presidential form of government – (more suited to Pakistan).””

This note – available in File 42 of 1947 – was unsealed by Gen Ziaul Haq, and a copy of it was given to Sharifuddin Pirzada – the former foreign minister. The original note is available in the Jinnah Papers in Islamabad. It was later reproduced on Page 81 of the book titled ‘The Jinnah Anthology’, edited by Liaquat H Merchant and Shariful Mujahid, and published by Oxford University Press (the third edition was published in 2010).

A significant advantage of a presidential system is that it effectively ensures separation of powers between the three arms of the governance system: legislative (parliament), executive (government departments) and the judiciary. This is critically important for a genuine democracy to function. In the present parliamentary form of government, the prime minister controls parliament which may formulate laws suitable for the political interests of the party to which the PM belongs.

The PM also controls the executive and appoints ministers, secretaries and heads of organisations such as NAB, FIA, SECP, State Bank, etc which results in a serious overlap of functions between the legislative and the executive. Pakistan has never had ‘presidential democracy’ in Pakistan. The previous ‘presidential systems’ were actually military dictatorships and not presidential democracies. In presidential democracy, the president is elected in a free and fair election. That never happened in Pakistan.

People need to understand that there are three main forms of democracy: direct democracy, presidential democracy and parliamentary democracy. In direct democracy, such as that which exists in Switzerland, the president is appointed from among the federal ministers for a defined period. The federal ministers, in turn, are chosen directly from among the most competent professionals in society. In the second presidential form of democracy, the president has the status of both head of state and head of government. He is directly elected and selects the most competent persons in their respective fields as federal ministers.

In the third parliamentary system of democracy, as found in Pakistan, the prime minister is the head of government. The ministers can be appointed only from parliament, and one is limited in choice partly because of ‘electables’ – these are powerful people who can spend hundreds of millions of rupees to get elected. The questionable moral standards of those getting elected can be judged by the fact that when, some years ago, the degrees of provincial and federal parliamentarians were checked by the HEC on the orders of the Supreme Court, about 250 parliamentarians were suspected to have forged their degrees in order to become eligible for contesting the elections. And while these people should have been punished for their misrepresentation, our judicial system is so weak that no action was taken against them, and a massive cover-up was done.

So, what should be done now? First, the president should be elected directly by a general vote and should be the chief executive of the country. The president should then select top technocrats in the country as ministers, with each ministry backed by a powerful think tank composed of the best experts in their respective fields. Second, powers and finances should be transferred after local bodies elections to the grassroots so that a genuine democracy is installed.

Third, a proportionate representation system should be introduced so that representatives in parliament are proportional to the votes cast. The elections must be held by electronic voting as done in many countries around the world. Fourth, the role of parliament should be confined to law-making and supervision of national affairs. Parliamentarians would then not be eligible to be appointed as ministers. This will eliminate any corrupt person from entering politics.

Fifth, additional provinces should be created to ensure improved governance and greater national cohesion. Sixth, there need to be real electoral reforms. Members of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) should not be nominated by the political parties but by chief justices of the Supreme Court and high courts from persons of unquestionable integrity, and without any political affiliations.

Most importantly, a national education emergency should be declared, and education be allocated at least five percent of the GDP, gradually rising to eight percent over five years. Laws should be introduced whereby primary and secondary education are declared compulsory, and parents who intentionally don’t send their children to school are sent to jail. There should be mandatory national education services, requiring two years of service for all graduating students. Degrees should only be awarded after the completion of this service period.

Eighth, the justice system needs to be revamped so that all cases are decided within three to six months and all the backlog of cases are cleared within 12 months. Sting operations should be initiated to apprehend those judges who are involved in any kind of wrongdoing so that corruption could be controlled. The role of military courts should be extended to mega corruption as corruption and terrorism are interlinked. At present, the corrupt can get away through a plea bargain by surrendering some of their ill-gotten assets. This arrangement by NAB should, therefore, be banned and the strictest punishments awarded to the corrupt.

Ninth, genuine land reforms should be carried out and agriculture tax introduced to increase tax collection. Last, a vision, strategy and time-bound action plan should be created so that Pakistan can transition from its present weak agricultural economy to a strong knowledge-based economy, with the ability to manufacture and export high-tech (high-value-added) goods

It is only by giving the highest priority to education, science, technology, innovation and entrepreneurship that Pakistan can progress. Strengthening university-industry linkages and facilitating the establishment of high-tech industries by giving long-term tax breaks and soft loans will greatly help in the process of socio-economic development.

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