**The way forward**

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The failure of the present parliamentary system of governance in Pakistan is reflected in the fact that power and funds are not transferred to the grassroots, as corrupt parliamentarians want to keep the funds to themselves and not pass them on to the elected representatives from local bodies. Without this essential requirement being met, a democracy is nothing but a huge sham, which is what we have been witnessing in Pakistan.

It has been argued by proponents of a technocratic government that the rate of GDP growth (and the consequent socio-economic development) that has occurred during the last 75 years under martial law regimes in Pakistan has been significantly better than that under successive democratic regimes. This has been attributed to the massive corruption that has prevailed among the civilian rulers.

The second powerful argument in support of a technocrat government is the fact that in a technology-driven knowledge economy, socio-economic development is only possible through the manufacture and export of high value-added high-tech products. These include engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, vaccines, biotechnology-based industrial products, IT products such as Artificial Intelligence and robotics, new materials including nanotechnology-based materials, energy storage systems, defence equipment etc. For this to happen, one must have a highly competent technocratic government in which the ministers, secretaries and other top government officials are top scientists, engineers and development economists.

That Pakistan should implement a presidential system of democracy that allows direct appointment of ministers from outside parliament was originally proposed by Quaid-e-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah in a note in his own handwriting in a personal diary.

A parliamentary system of democracy can have a ‘fused system’, as in Pakistan, in which ministers are exclusively appointed from parliament. This, however, does not provide an opportunity for leading experts to enter parliament as it costs Rs15 to Rs20 crores to contest elections. This huge expenditure places the membership of parliament beyond the resources available to most qualified experts, thereby blocking access to technocrats. Alternatively, there may be a ‘separated system’ of parliamentary democracy in which technocrats can be directly appointed by the prime minister from outside parliament. Thus, in Ghana a significant percentage of ministers must, by law, be appointed directly from outside parliament. Similarly in Bangladesh, a certain percentage of ministers can be appointed directly by the prime minister from outside parliament.

In Pakistan, a hybrid parliamentary system of democracy can therefore be developed on these lines by necessary changes in our constitution through which 70 per cent of the federal ministers could be appointed from among top experts present in the country while the remaining 30 per cent could be appointed from parliament if they possessed certain minimum professional qualifications in fields of medicine, engineering, law or other disciplines.

So, the way forward is clear: the prime minister should be able to directly appoint the best experts available in the country as federal ministers responsible for various ministries and limit the role of parliamentarians to law-making and oversight. This will, in one shot, eliminate the induction of corrupt but powerful people into parliament as they would not have the opportunity to first ‘invest’ by spending crores of rupees to get elected to parliament followed by mass loot and plunder of national wealth after coming into power.

The directions of the socio-economic development process need to be changed from the present weak natural resource-driven economy to a strong technology-driven knowledge economy. This would require the formulation and approval of a time-bound National Technology and Innovation Industrial Policy along with a strategy for its implementation and an action plan.

The highest national priority needs to be given to education, science, technology, and innovation and all ministries to support the manufacture and export of high technology goods under the direct supervision of the prime minister and a commission of elders comprising the top experts in the country.

There is a need to carry out urgent judicial reforms to create the necessary ecosystem so that all cases are decided within 12 weeks of filing so that Foreign Direct Investment and Ease of Doing Business are supported by the modified legal infrastructure.

New laws need to be introduced to punish mega corruption. This is what was done in China, Indonesia, and many other countries and that is what we too must do. Pakistan cannot progress unless corruption is ruthlessly eliminated from our system of governance.

The planning ministry should be renamed the ‘Ministry of Technology Driven Knowledge Economy’ and all the other ministries should be mobilized so that Pakistan can migrate to a strong knowledge economy. For example, the railways ministry should be tasked to enable the manufacture and export of bullet trains to the world. The energy ministry should be tasked to support the manufacture and export of solar panels, windmills and solid-state batteries for electric vehicles. The IT ministry should be tasked to support the training of 100,000 IT professionals each year in carefully targeted fields to enhance our IT exports to $30 billion annually. At present, these are $3 billion while those of India are $150 billion. The health ministry should be tasked to manufacture and export vaccines and pharmaceuticals.

A similar strategic role should be given to each of the other ministries so that they can contribute to the enhancement of exports of Pakistan in a very focused manner. Corresponding to this primary role, key performance indicators should be formulated and issued to each minister, secretary and heads of various organizations and they should be ruthlessly replaced if they are unable to deliver.

The above six-point agenda lays down a framework for Pakistan to establish a democratically elected visionary, honest parliamentary technocrat government for the future.

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