

Pakistan: land of opportunity

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Nation

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The year is 2005. The land is Pakistan. The people are...us, Pakistanis. Where are we? What have we achieved? Do people know us? Where do we go from here? Do we have any hopes for the future? Is survival possible? Has there been any recovery? Our people are confused. Our youth is lost and feeling hopeless. Our senior citizens seem to have given up. We need to look at the answers to these questions. So let's look at all these issues pragmatically and logically.

We don't have to go back many years in history. A few years back our survival had become doubtful. The intelligentsia and the think tanks often questioned whether our existence as an independent sovereign nation would be possible. Now, we are here to stay. We are no longer dying. Some lifeblood has been injected to our economy and there is a possibility of stability in the long run if we take prudent measures.

Our current situation can safely be called a renaissance of Pakistan on the world map. Our foreign exchange reserves have gone up and are still growing. Our stock exchange is rated as one of the best performing in the world and has crossed the 7000 mark. In fact, it is rated as one of the top ten best performing stock exchanges in the world. Foreign relations with India, China, Afghanistan and United States of America are improving. There is a huge possibility that Pakistan becomes the hub of Central Asian trade. Regional tensions are reducing. President Bush is feeling rather magnanimous towards Pakistan.

Our growth targets are set as high as 8 percent during the next three years. Our economy appears buoyant and fast growing. Foreign investors are exploring Pakistan in search of new possibilities in manufacturing and production and foreign investment seems to be pouring in rather rapidly as compared to the last decade. Interest rates have gone down, businesses look better, investment in industry is increasing, real estate is booming. Music is flourishing. Our audiences have

accessibility to the best cable TV. This era also marks the commencement of mega projects like Gwadar, infrastructure and communication improvements and new dams and canals.

There are huge ripples in the formation in the field of education, banking, health and

the world is fast becoming a global village with immense acceptance for diversity. This has resulted in the emergence of the concepts of global business, global economy, global customer, global entrepreneur, global opportunity and global threats. Our manpower should be exposed to the latest requirements of employers and be willing to accept diversity.

Our young minds have limitless capability and creativity. Their talent needs to be fully exploited. Merit should be the only criteria considered in making recruitments in organisations. Our business leaders should carefully and patiently evaluate novel ideas and be willing to experiment. My request to our business leaders is to "groom" these young minds to cross the boundaries of conformity and tradition and to encourage change. To be dynamic, Pakistan needs a balanced mixture of rebels and conformists. We need people who question, challenge and find new answers. We need to open up and move away from the obsolete practices of yesterday. We can do this not only by getting hi-tech installations but also by accepting new ideas.

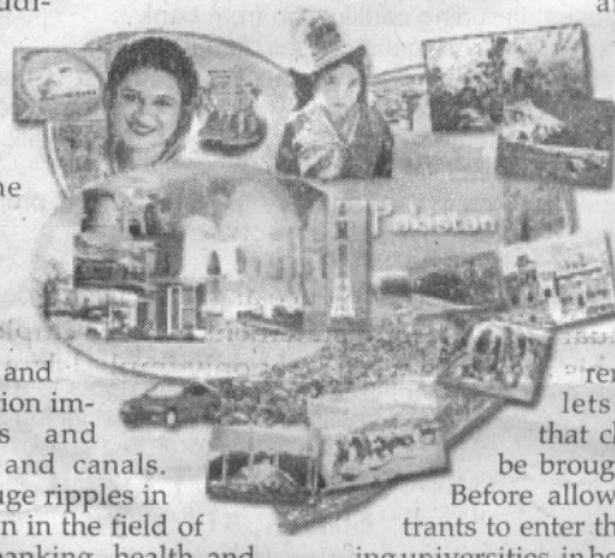
Education and health are important variables in demographics. To take advantage of the current opportunities, these two sectors demand maximum priority.

Though we still rank among the lowest in literacy but we are not the last. Even that is consolation. With proper strategies, we will make progress in these two sectors also. Let's not expect an overnight transformation. The governments at all levels, federal, provincial and local are trying to make serious efforts. Improvement in higher education is crucial for growth. We must stop producing huge crowds of educated unemployed.

Education must provide our young men and women with an opportunity to enhance their capability to augment the economy and add value to Pakistan. HEC (Higher Education Commission) is playing a very vital and positive role here.

Never has higher education sparked so much criticism and provoked so much thought as in the current regime, but let's remember that change cannot be brought overnight.

Before allowing new entrants to enter the field, existing universities in both public and



education, banking, health and arts. Expo Pakistan 2005 has drawn huge crowds and strong response from global investment and business community. What does all this signify?

These are signs of recovery.

What do these leading macro economic indicators convey to the common man? They signify hope, prosperity, employment opportunities, more personal disposable income, satisfaction and economic stability. So for once lets stop putting ourselves down. Lets stop finding faults with our government and what could have been. Let's take advantage of this situation. Lets join our hands together and make Pakistan a shining star on the world map. If we do not capitalise on this situation there may never be another.

How can we do it?

Forces that need to be taken into consideration and manipulated are economic, social, demographic, political, religious in nature. It is almost impossible to consider these factors separately because they closely overlap each other. There are actually no demarking boundaries where these forces are concerned in practical life and their impact is often jointly felt.

First and foremost, let's start loving Pakistan. Let's forget our individual interests and selfish desires and do some good for our motherland. If we plunder and destroy our assets we don't need enemies to attack us. We are our worst enemy. Has anyone ever heard citizens of a country blowing away its strategic installations, kidnapping foreigners, blasting phone and power systems, and killing in the name of religious sectarianism?

This may be a done thing in nations which are still in the realms of darkness, ignorance and illiteracy, otherwise it is condemned by all. We need to rise above all individual differences. These incidents are detrimental to our image as a nation and strongly shake the confidence of foreign investors and organisations that are planning to make our country their regional producer or supplier.

Demographically, Pakistan is one of the most thickly populated countries of the world. Our manpower is our largest and ever-growing resource. In the developed nations, shortage of manpower makes it a very expensive resource. Let's harness our manpower, that is, both men and women, and train them. We need to provide our workers with more marketable skills that are needed by the manufacturing sector. Lets take hold of the bull of opportunity by the horns and turn the situation of overpopulation to our advantage and become one of the universal leaders in the development and provision of skilled labour.

We need to be more competitive. With the World Trade Organisation (WTO) regime becoming supreme,

trants to enter the field, existing universities, in both public and private sector, need to be strengthened. Research departments should be set up with close cooperation of the corporate sector for successful education.

Technical and vocational training will lead to manpower that will become the backbone of the country. More vocational training institutions need to be set up on the most modern and advanced lines. Our crop is smart and intelligent but needs the right support and guidance to lead the world. Strong emphasis on population planning will lead to fewer mouths to feed. The quality of life will get better. This will lead to lower levels of deprivation. More haves and fewer have-nots may put us in a better place internationally where corruption is concerned.

Small and medium size enterprise sector requires more attention. We need more entrepreneurs, fearless, willing to take risks and conquer the obstacles. We need to train our youth in such a way that they get rid of the fear of failure. Failure and success both go hand in hand and are necessary for growth. With guidance, focus and channelised effort the chance of failure is minimised. Reckless risks are stupid but calculated risks give positive results.

Healthy minds belong to healthy bodies. Better health facilities that are accessible to all need to be provided. Let's make 100 percent of our population contribute to our economic growth. This can be accomplished if everyone is healthy and happy.

For prosperity and development the rule of law should firmly be in place. Cutting corners in quality must be strongly avoided. Our police reforms will provide the law enforcing agencies with the latest training, equipment, facilities and the citizens with more security of life and property.

We need to capitalise on the current opportunities as soon as possible. We need to open up our minds and tread in a dignified way on the path of "enlightened moderation". Abdicate our religious, sectarian, cultural and regional differences. We should start evaluating people on their achievement, capability and merit. We need to shed the disastrous cloaks of fundamentalism, religious pompousness and cultural superiority. Let's practice humility and make every decision in the best interest of Pakistan. We have a business friendly environment that needs to be supplemented with more political stability and a stronger enforcement of law and order.

Now nothing can stop us from growing except ourselves. Let's change our mindset. Let's stop looking back at history and look at future. History has given us the foundations. Let's join hands and build Pakistan into a strong skyscraper that we proudly own and the world cannot ignore.