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Nation

To be or not to be

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Most nations have a characteristic sense of self-aggrandisement very often misplaced but indicative of their spirit of national pride, self-esteem, loyalty to their nationhood and a determination to stand by and fight if necessary, to preserve this heritage. On the contrary, we Pakistanis have fallen victim to an irresistible urge of self-criticism. We tend to derive a sadistic pleasure in highlighting our weaknesses and failures and lamenting over them indefinitely turning a blind eye to the many achievements in a number of fields and considerable progress made generally over the years. This has caused an erosion of confidence and a general sense of despondency at all levels.

A glance at the print media, a major contributor to the formation of public opinion, gives a terrible impression that all is lost, doom is at our doorstep, and nothing good ever happens in Pakistan.

The papers are full of alarming news under bold headings and sensational captions of the faltering economy, the failure of the government to negotiate favourable terms for the massive loan repayments and further financial aid from the international donor agencies, missing the projected growth targets in all sectors, the ever deteriorating law and order situation, murders, sectarian killings, dacoities and other heinous crimes.

There is also talk of moral and financial corruption in all nooks and corners of the society, the underhand deals and clandestine games played over the heads of unsuspecting public by those in power or the political vacuum with self-serving leaders in competition with each other to amass wealth from the national exchequer. All politicians, civil servants, administrators, technocrats and businessmen are discredited leading to a conclusion that there is no sincere honest or competent person in sight amongst the 140 million people of Pakistan who can be trusted to lead the country out of its enormous difficulties. This negativity has become the primary cause of the restive nature of our people.

We as a nation are extremely intelligent with centuries old history, traditions and values both by virtue of geography and religion yet we have developed a trademark of arrogance and intolerance of dissent or divergent views. Successive governments are toppled as we lack patience to reserve our judgement until the completion of their designated period of

difference being that the judiciary and the systems are so firmly in place in developed societies that once caught, the irregularity is confronted and taken to its logical end, whereas in Pakistan the trusting public is forgiving and has short memories.

Despite the constant turmoil and unfavourable odds on the political front, the part of Pakistan we are left with has made consistent progress over the years due to the sheer dynamism of its people. We have developed a better living standard as compared to most of our neighbours, a fact not recognised or admitted by most people. We are fortunate to have a wide agricultural base with five rivers, three of them still grand, an excellent irrigation system and a large number of farmers constituting about 65% of the total population of Pakistan to till this fertile land of 800,000 sq. kms. which has sustained Pakistan's population growing at over 2.5 percent per annum. The land grows enough grain, vegetables and fruits to feed the entire nation and yet have an exportable surplus.

It has a long coastline to facilitate overseas trade and fisheries, is geographically well placed, has developed an excellent communication system, a good infrastructure, advanced banking and insurance, highly trained professionals in all fields and has an abundance of manpower which is extremely intelligent and industrious. It has a comprehensive legal system, strong disciplined and trained armed forces and a well organised bureaucracy (although in dire need of major reforms) to assist in the governance at the centre, provincial and local levels.

Our cities are well-developed connected by a functional network of roads, railways and air transports. Our country is blessed with mountains, deserts and plains. It has developed a cultural identity fairly distinct from its bigger neighbour and its breakaway part reflecting the traditions of the four provinces and within limits permitted by our religious and social values.

Our sportsmen have excelled internationally in a number of competitive events despite the modest resources and training facilities, exhibiting the abundance of talent available in the country. Universities, research institutes, professional colleges, vocational training centres and academies have been established which have turned out highly educated and skilled people in many disciplines greatly in demand the world over.

Governments may not have measured to our expectations and may have failed us but God has bestowed us with a wonderful country with a tremendous potential

governance. All newly formed governments tend to formulate policies in a hurry without much debate or careful deliberations in order to gain instant popularity with the electorate, sacrificing long term objectives which may take time to accomplish but would be more likely to yield lasting and positive improvements.

This has not allowed effective public participation in the governance nor has it allowed the systems to establish effectively. Both the most recent two term governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif undertook major useful projects of national importance like power plants and the motorway but fell in their glory mainly because of their inability to obtain a consensus within their own parties and with the general public.

Politics has become a hazardous, expensive and short term occupation full of uncertainties raising the stakes higher for being in public service and discouraging many suitable and dedicated people to be in the forefront of political activity. Considerable monetary resources are required to solicit support of clans, feudals and muscle power in order to win an office turning politics into a financial investment.

Once in power, disproportionate returns are wrangled by awarding government contracts and framing government policies favouring a select few plundering the state funds. Systems of accountability are also exercised with a view to targeting opponents or to gain publicity while the real culprits are busy exploiting the opportunities created to enrich them.

However, this systematic method of high and low level corruption is neither a recent phenomenon nor has it cropped up overnight but has evolved some by default and some by design over the years. It is also not unique for Pakistan or the third world countries alone but such corruption is a universal phenomenon except that in the higher echelons of the developed nations it is exercised more discreetly and with greater finesse. A former President of the United States was publicly found guilty of the highest order of moral corruption and is still being investigated for tax fraud pardons and illegally receiving and removing expensive state gifts from the White House after leaving the office.

A Home Secretary of the United Kingdom was charged twice for misusing his authority once to obtain a personal loan and then to grant British citizenship to an Indian national from whom a contribution of one million pounds was received. Several Prime Ministers of Japan had to resign under grave accusations of financial corruption just as in many other European nations. The only

Our engineers have built large earth dams, roads, buildings and other structures, telecommunication networks, industrial complexes, light and medium armament and nuclear devices. Our doctors have excelled domestically and are no less than their American or European counterparts. Our bankers are second to none and hold important positions in banks and financial institutions all over the world. We have a major international airline. Our textile products are sold in all the markets of the world. We are manufacturing motor vehicles, cement, sugar, fertilizer, steel, food products, light engineering goods and many other items in a network of industrial complexes spread all over the country.

At the time of independence we inherited less than a dozen factories in West Pakistan with a negligible commercial activity. There was no State Bank, no currency and no government machinery. There were no offices, furniture to sit or stationary to write on but its people had the zeal, enthusiasm and dedication to build the new state of Pakistan practically from scratch with Islam the only binding force amongst five different languages, cultures, ways of thinking, traditions and a number of hostile elements working against its interests and its very inception. To have survived against these odds and inexperience is nothing short of a miracle. It must be considered an achievement that today Pakistan stands as a developed nation among the over one hundred under-developed ones.

We have reason to be proud of these achievements while deliberating and correcting our many faults and shortcomings. Governments may not have measured to our expectations and may have failed us but God has bestowed us with a wonderful country with a tremendous potential, where we have equal opportunities and we can practise our faith and pursue our culture without fear. It is entirely up to us what we make of our country and how we avoid exploitation keeping our national interest supreme.

We must develop enough confidence to live within our means and not mortgage our children's future to the international donors and the superpowers. Above all, we must develop simplicity in our living, humility and hard work in our character and a preparedness to offer any sacrifice for the good of the country. The leaders we choose are from amongst us and we have to share the responsibility for their performance. We just have to learn to do our bit, be positive and while analysing our faults and misfortunes expand our horizon to find the solutions and work towards getting them. It is just so very simple and is the only road to success.