**Hunting for an Olympic Champion in a Cricket-frenzied Country**

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Amid the hustle and bustle of ICC World cup 2021, let me revert to the recent Olympics, where the Pakistani contingent had been booted out, literally. Though I wouldn’t want to leave a bad taste in here while the people are celebrating, I feel pretty inclined to throw some awkward questions at my Government that has been busy looking for an Olympic Champion for all these days.

Dear govt., ever since you’ve stopped allocating sports quotas to youngsters at educational institutions, let us know kindly, what blessings have you fetched as a payback since (in terms of nurturing a “diaspora” of world-class researchers, educationists, applied scientists or thinkers)? I’m afraid you’ve bitten the filthiest dust of shame into every walk of life. Your researchers are rated as insignificant among the global fraternity of intelligentsia, your confusing HEC policies laid down with dubious “education specialists” at the helm have led the whole bandwagon to a black hole of shame and ignominy. Sub-standard institutions are handing out degrees like freebees. Millions study just in the pursuit of a govt job. Tens of thousands of CSS aspirants dig deep in a bid to “take hold of their countrymen” by being at the helm of power corridors. Thousands of skill-less grads come off universities’ gates like zombies as they say hello to the “vicious pool of world’s poorest educational model” with no research aptitude, talent or skill. Is this the grace we have mustered up by not making sports an integral part of our already substance-less educational process?

Unfortunately, the perils seem far from being over. No sports culture have brought forth a whole generation of “aliens” let alone “Olympic champions,” and you are to be blamed. With growing bodies yet narrow brains biologically, our children are the victims of serious malnutrition. They can’t move an inch. They’re being fed chemical-laden milk, formalin, heavy metals and chemical agents. They’re being programmed to cram certain curriculum in the name of education whereupon their otherwise good biological lives are shifting bit by bit into the nightmares of agony and excruciating pain. What would they do with their degrees when they won’t live any longer, God forbid, and if they somehow exist to live, wouldn’t they just be surviving like sloths? Why are we even spending hard-earned money on elite schools if these innocent souls ain’t bound to see their good forties and even fifties, let alone sixties and seventies? Why for? Where are the grooming hubs, sports facilities, the provision of clean and healthy food, a whole compact culture of physical exertion that is needed right now as never before?

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The fact of the matter is that we don’t want to spend a penny on anything other than “cricket.” Sports facilities have been confined to cricket clubs mostly as open grounds are either taken up by construction mafias or paved for routes. Besides some exceptions, Pakistan Sports Board and other “ill-functioning” federations are littering with crooks who claim hefty paychecks, damage the institutional integrity and flee away after heavy-duty marauding and plundering—the story of our institutions’ lives. The snob officers comprising of a bunch of exhausted “Baba jees” from the power matrix have been put at the helm of federations, which only escalate the illegal practices of influence peddling. Ironically, Cricket has been made the sole option for this generation. Technically speaking, it isn’t a holistic activity for common people while other sports are. Owing to ill-targeted framing, it has become the automatic choice as a go-to-sport while every other physically challenging game has been stamped down for good. Regrettably, kids can’t move an inch owing to deteriorated bodies, so much so they disperse miles away from sports calling for strength, agility & endurance. The nation, tout ensemble, is weak, fragile and sick: both mentally and physically. The narrative of ‘new Pakistan’ is falling apart. Where are the plans, Govt?

The recent Olympics is probably the biggest wake-up call ever. You need to revise your priorities, inclinations and modes of action. You need to realise that sports are the indirect reflection of nations’ minds and character, as someone rightly said: “Gold medals aren’t really made of gold. They’re made of sweat, determination, and a hard-to-find alloy called guts.”

Don’t lambast people, Government this is your responsibility. This is you who’d set the precedent. Start from rectifying PSB and federations. Resurrect the lost culture of sports on the grass-root level, that, though, I didn’t see with my eyes but know through my elder it once existed. A penny for your thoughts, Government?

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