

Comment

Open Letter

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As the state of Pakistan stumbles from one uncertainty to another in the power machination of its ruling elite, I deem it a historical necessity to go to the roots and call upon the farmers, peasants, laborers, workers, artisan, folk singers, shopkeepers, clerks, students, teachers, intellectuals, writer, journalists, political workers, youth, professionals, men and women to forge an alliance and wage a joint struggle, as you are the silent majority that in all national progressive democratic movements have been in the vanguard. Today the nation bacons you again because the twilight struggle of the people of Pakistan for the survival of the state, for an egalitarian society based on freedom and law, federal and parliamentary structures, a tolerant and moderate society against sectarianism and terrorism has entered a critical phase.

The masses of Pakistan haunted by history and apprehensive of the future are concerned about the threats to the existence of the federation. The state is at the edge of the precipice and the only turn around, and turn we must, lies in a federal democracy under the Constitution, 1973. The core principal of federal democracy is ‘unity through diversity’, while dictatorship imposes a unitary structure which does not recognize the multi-ethnic complexion of our society and leads to fragmentation. A democratic system encourages dialogue, debate, accommodation, tolerance and confines dissent and conflict by providing mechanisms and institutions that function under the law and the constitution.

Much is wrong in the country today. Much damage has been done to its constitution, institutions and laws. Corruption, terrorism, sectarianism, lawlessness, crime, drug abuse, economic disparity, crony capitalism, fiscal irresponsibility, economic mismanagement have made it difficult for the common man to earn his daily bread. His welfare and

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that of his children is being mortgaged at the hands of the international financial imperialist. Pakistan must surmount and move forward, surmount it will, *Insha Allah*.

The democratic system in Pakistan may not have come without flaws; it may be sluggish in deliverance and smack of bad governance. Yet, let there be no misconception, nor should we revisit historical wrongs, democracy is the only panacea that can save, unite and take forward the federation. The mere transfer of power under the constitution, 1973, is not sufficient, only when it becomes a habit will as Mao said, 'a thousand flowers will blossom'.

The federation of 2014 is different from the Pakistan of 1958, 1969, 1977, and 1999 or the other managed and orchestrated derailments of the democratic system. This is a post-18th Amendment federation, with all its flaws, after a bitter, bloody and arduous struggle the 'Charter' of the people's for devolution, provincial rights, ownership of resources, political economic and cultural rights has found expression in the will of Parliament - the 18th Constitutional Amendment. Pakistan's ruling elite be it political, civil or military must realise that one of the latent outcome of this Amendment is that it has stemmed the tide of extreme nationalist movements.

Dictatorship in all its forms and manifestations, externally managed or manipulated derailments or artificially created constitutional crises all are an anti-thesis to devolution of power, which is the life line from which the historical diversity of the federation now draws its unity.

With terror, sectarianism, religious extremism, nationalist insurgencies, collapse of systems and the withering of the writ of the state, any destabilization of the federal parliamentary structures of the constitution, 1973, is a recipe where not the constitution but the federation will be under threat. Let's learn from the example of the former USSR and how international imperialism seeks to redraw the map of the Middle East. Let us not provide an opportunity to the imperialist forces to fulfill their historical nefarious hidden agenda in the 21st century. The ingredients propounding chaos are there evident:

- a. Terrorist groups waging war against the state, seeking to end constitutional rule and impose their brand of *sharia* to pursue a political agenda;
- b. sectarian violence and politics to divide and sub-divide the people with the purpose of weakening society and the state;
- c. the existence of foreign funded nationalist insurgencies in various provinces;
- d. the widening of the economic disparity between the ruling elite and the common man;

- e. the near collapse of systems of governance;
- f. the continued tension and turf war in civil military relations, and
- g. elements within the state apparatus seeking to pursue a pan-Islamic policy.

The list is on-going, in short there is a moral, social, political and economic crises in Pakistani society. A state in crises, not a failed state. It can and must be pulled back before it gets sucked into the quick sand of history.

We must learn from the good part of our history and forge a grand national reconciliation; it was done in May 2006, by the Charter of Democracy and reinforced by the London All Parties Conference, at that time it was to struggle for a democratic, federal, parliamentary Pakistan, and now it is to preserve that Pakistan from internal and external threats.

Political reconciliation in struggle has been a part of our history and has been practiced and preached by many of our leaders. In recent history, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto practically practiced it. She was assassinated in the struggle to achieve the goals we so cherish, therefore, it would be appropriate to name the process after her, as in her death she has transcended beyond party lines. Let all democratic, progressive political forces discuss and ascribe their signatures to a minimum national political agenda, 'The Benazir Bhutto Model to Democratic Transition'.

A. Constitution - federalism

1. The Charter of Democracy needs to be revisited to bring a new covenant between the democratic forces, reaffirming the federal and parliamentary structures in the constitution, 1973.
2. To reaffirm the commitment to the process of federalism and devolution started under the constitution, 1973.
3. The supremacy of Parliament shall be ensured as envisaged in the Constitution, 1973. All issues of national security, national concerns, federalism, political and constitutional reforms and amendments fall within its larger parameters.

B. Civil-military relations – governance

4. To redefine the civil military relations at all levels, through a constant dialogue and development of systems at the executive and parliamentary levels.
5. To shun adhocism and develop systems for good governance including civil services reforms.
6. To ensure the independence of the judiciary as stipulated in the Constitution, 1973.

7. Develop a national consensus against intolerance, extremism and terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

C. Fundamental rights - society

8. To work for the protection of the rights of the minorities, women and children under the Constitution, 1973.
9. To protect the economic and political rights of the working and middle classes.
10. To ensure the implementation of clause (g) of Article 38 of the Constitution, 1973. To develop a harmonious blend between the quota system and merit in providing jobs.
11. To ensure the implementation of right to education- Article 25A of the Constitution, 1973. To ensure academic freedom, respect the autonomy of the universities and to allow the provinces to change the curriculum which teaches a distorted version of history to further the agenda of a fundamentalist garrison state, instead of a moderate, tolerant Muslim welfare state as envisaged by the Quaid in his August 1947 speech.
12. To promote regional cultures so that through their synthesis a national culture emerges.
13. To ensure the freedom of the press by safeguarding the rights of the working journalist and implementation of right to information- Article 19A of the Constitution, 1973.
14. To ensure the implementation of the joint and equal ownership of mineral oil and natural gas- clause (3) of Article 172 of the constitution, 1973.

Dear comrades, in the final analysis the choice is yours, to play your historic role in preserving the federal democratic structure of our society or to be silent spectators to the withering of the state. Should you deny your classical role and, become a victim of complacency and vested interests the pen of the historian and our younger generations will hold us all responsible. My shoulders are too weak to bear this burden of history – rise to the call of the time and accept the gauntlet – TURN PAKISTAN AROUND.