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Pakistan a land of institutionalized anarchy

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1/22/2014

Pakistan has become a country whose people have lost all empathy. They see suppression as a tool to gain unfair advantages over underprivileged sections of society. Last year, Pakistan recorded 83 polio cases compared to 57 in 2012, and 1.5 million children are at risk. Since the polio vaccination ban by militants in tribal areas, at least 30 people, including polio workers, have been killed in Taliban-led attacks for administrating the polio vaccine.

Polio cases constitute only a segment of society's misery. There are many other serious issues; for example, 42% of the world's underage married girls live in Pakistan. In rural areas, courting is prohibited, and marriage based on love is against tradition.

Ours is a society where the supreme rule is "might is right", injustice is a social norm and the provision of fundamental rights is a distant dream. Women suffer at the hands of their male relatives at home and sometimes even at the hands of the state, given parliament's failure to pass the Domestic Violence Bill to protect women. Being female is a dangerous thing in Pakistan.

Children do not go to schools; they must work to feed their families. Hapless peasants are abused, beaten and sometimes killed in the fields by landowners. They are too afraid and oppressed to demand self-determination and freedom. In major cities, the population lives under the constant threat of militant attacks and disappearances carried out by the intelligence agencies.

Who is responsible for this state of affairs? Our educational system? The judicial system? Culture? Or parliament?

In fact all, individually or collectively, are responsible for the present state of affairs in one way or other. Pakistan is one of the world's lowest-spending countries on education, allocating to it below 2.5% of its gross domestic product. The inadequate and flawed educational system is unable to equip the young with the skills to meet present-day needs and demand. The country is home to 25 million children who aren't going to school.

The corrupt judicial system, especially the criminal justice system, is failing to put perpetrators of crime and terrorists behind bars. People turn to the tribal justice system to get cheap and speedy justice. Around 1.4 million cases are pending in moribund courts. Our demoralized culture is being kept hostage by a handful of religious fanatics. Honor killings and torture have become part of that culture. Our moral and social values continue to degenerate to an all time low.

Our incompetent, corrupt elected representatives are incapable of developing an effective "checks and balances system" to monitor the state organs. They believe that ensuring a proper provision of basic social services to citizens is not their obligation. Ironically, many are part of the criminal system. The politicization of every issue has deteriorated the capability of already fragile and dysfunctional institutions.

The state's utter failure is largely attributed to the failure of three main state organs - the judiciary, executive and the legislature - to root out deeply entrenched socio-political conservatism and traditionalism. Since independence in 1947, the ill-defined powers and functions of these institutions caused them to interfere in the affairs of one another. This clash of institutions did not allow them to operate within their constitutional limits, resulting in military coups, bad governance and mismanagement. Consequently, the state could not evolve an efficient and well integrated mechanism to meet the multifaceted challenges.

Moreover, these institutions, due to various inefficiencies and deficiencies, could not produce a vibrant state that can fit new ideas and innovations in itself. Military interventionism, tribalism, feudalism, the incompetent bureaucracy and weak civilian governments have been the factors retarding the growth of these institutions.

"The labyrinth of a centrist mindset, elitism and autocracy led Pakistan to the negation of democratic pluralism on the one hand and a monopoly over foreign policy by un-elected power centers on the other", Khadim Hussain rightly pointed out in Dawn, Pakistan's largest English-language newspaper. "Religious zeal and super-patriotism came in handy in legitimizing this monopoly by powerful centers of power."

This led to the creation of "ideology vacuum" exploited by narrow minded people, especially mullahs at the mass level, to pursue their vested interests. While mullahs corrupted the minds of citizens in the name of religion, weak and intellectual-deficit civilians did not invest the state resources in the masses.

The outcome of this situation is the creation of a static state that is as contaminated as stagnant water, one that is lacking almost all the necessary tools that a dynamic society requires to fulfill its duties and responsibilities.

Consequently, the state has been slouching from one crisis to another for more than six-and-a-half decades. It is suffering from myriad problems, ranging from extremism to poverty to illiteracy and social insecurity. One third of the population lives below the poverty line, around 50 million people do not have access to clean drinking water, terrorism, targeted killings and violence have become part of the daily routine, and a severe energy crisis has paralyzed the economy.

Islamabad needs to review and revamp thoroughly the legislative, social, judicial and administrative systems, and ensure proper provision of fundamental rights. This is the only way by which our leaders can make Pakistan a tolerant, democratic, modern and egalitarian state.