**BOOK REVIEW**

“Looking Back: How Pakistan Became an Asian Tiger by 2050” is semi-fiction book written by the Deputy Chairman of Pakistan Institute of Development Economics. In this book, he covered the era of the reformation process in Pakistan. He starts off with highlighting the major discrepancies and flaws in Pakistan’s economic and social sector. Before the reform started, in 2020, there was a much lack of control on the economy on the government side. They were just begging for the loans from IMF (international monetary fund) and other international donor agencies and running economy on aids, without considering the fact that they have to return this loan along with interest that burdened along. These donors were mainly interested with their own interests and profit making rather than working for the betterment of the people of Pakistan. Most of the development projects which were started by these donations were left incomplete because donors, in most cases, stop giving donations in the middle of the project. Moreover, the foreign consulting agencies from which government takes recommendations were inexperienced. Also, the negligence and corruption of government and bureaucracy worsen the situation. They were solely depending on the donor companies and those donor companies were mostly exempted from monitoring. Government members became lazy and corrupt. They became the rent seekers and enjoy the perks of their high post salaries. As the result, the talented people of Pakistan were leaving the country. They preferred to work on the junior positions in foreign countries rather than working as the head of any governmental project for policy making and development because the government exploits their immense talent. Those donor agencies were acting as a monopoly. Even if the government wants to play in favour of Pakistan, they can’t because of the international donors’ biddings to restrict development process in Pakistan. Universities and colleges were not focusing on the breeding the generation which could lead the country and reform its policy. Educational institutes were not focused on R&D (research and development) area. Educational institutes were producing the servants, not the leaders those who can design the policy for Pakistan’s economic development.

The government was mostly investing on the roads and infrastructure programs, like metro and stadiums which had nothing to do with the public needs, without measuring the cost of those mega projects; rather investing development programs, like health and education, that would result producing in the future. There was a major problem of rent-seeking in the elite class. Elites don’t work themselves, they just give their lands to the poor for the work and enjoy the rents. And this was not a new thing in the sub-continent area, elite families were practising this for many generations. Also, the country was facing terrorism and social unrest, which destroys the economic growth a lot. Another big problem was the traditional Mullaism and the hold of religious people on the ordinary population of Pakistan, which was one the significant force behind the backwardness of the people.

Then in 2020, there started the TABDILI (reform) phase which is discussed in the second half of the book by Nadeem ul Haq, completed in 2050. The government didn’t participate in that shift of thoughts and the enlightenment of the people, the only driving force behind that reform was the incentive and action of people to change themselves, after suffering through decades of economic crisis. Research For Pakistan (RFP) department was created to carry this reform process. In this reform phase, several major changes were made regarding the development of Pakistan as a prosper and a strong economy, this reform phase developed one of the weakest and crippling economies of Asia into on the strongest economy of the world. Major changes were made in government ministries. Power was delegated to the lower ministries. Finance ministry and ministry of economy was separated. Ministry of strategy and reform development and ministry of institutional development were regularized. Ministry of strategy and reform development had to develop a long-term strategy for the state. And ministry for institutional development had to frame rules and regulations.

Rent seeking, the major economic problem at that time, was strictly demotivated. During the reform phase, heritance land was taxed 5% which provided the incentive to the rent seekers to work and contribute in the country’s development, rather than simply sitting idle and enjoying the perks of the hereditary land. But building industries and investing land and capital in those areas that can generate job employment opportunities was encouraged.

Expenditure and development policy focus was shifted from infrastructure building to human resource development. Much budget was given to education and health department. Private transport was heavily taxied to change people’s behaviour to use public transport. Universities started focusing on the research and policy-making area. As a result, the government started picking the talented individuals who can contribute to the development of the country coming out from those universities, rather than a corrupt bureaucracy and dumb, unqualified elites as the heads of development projects. Mullaism was much reduced by socializing the people and engaging them in the recreational activities by making parks so that they can think out of the box. Terrorism was replaced by Tourism. Women were encouraged to take part in the national economy. Entrepreneurship was motivated, and new ideas were brought up which bolster the economic growth. The judicial system went reorganization. In the reformed country, minorities were given importance and provided their rights. Poor people were given equal opportunities, based solely on merit and their abilities. After these all reformations, Pakistan rose as the seventh largest and strong economy of the world in 2050.

Critique

In this semi-fiction writing, covering the time periods from 1970-2020 (before reform) and from 2020-2050 (the reform period), Nadeem ul Haq drew the future of Pakistan’s economy. The book was mainly focused on the years from 2015-2020 (the period during which of change of thoughts was taken place and these are the years during which Nadeem ul Haq has written this book. “Looking Back: How Pakistan Became an Asian Tiger by 2050”, is unique in a sense that it is different from the typical economics books which are mainly focused on the need of government’s role to reform the people’s behaviour through taxes and other by enforcing other laws and regulations. It also emphasized on decreasing the role of donor agencies which the most economic book demands. In contrast, it enforced on changing behaviours of the public. In his book, Nadeem ul Haq depicted a positive image of Pakistan unlike the most books and articles published on Pakistan’s economic condition in these days with a pessimistic approach.

He discussed Mullas that their role will be eliminated by 2050 which is almost impossible. One could not neglect the importance of religious hold on the society in the actual situation. Also, the main backup support behind this lies in the constitution, and then in the history. He didn’t discuss changes in the constitution, while the religious history of this country can’t be denied. Also, he neglected the scarcity of resources, especially the basic needs while explaining the reform phase in Pakistan. What about the nation that has organized its demand of resources, but demand is exponentially rising, and resources are not enough to support the growing population.

Moreover, he ignored the population growth level of our country and environmental factors. Alone, the rapid climate changes are eating up the larger portion of our GDP than any of the other social or political factor. And our population growth ranked one of the fastest growth rates in the world with 2%+ birth ratio. Without controlling the birth rate, we cannot achieve economic stability, because an increase in birth rate means the greater demand of resources and requirement of more jobs and also population increases exponentially which is not feasible to control by just reforming the policy, not increasing the supply correspondingly.

He is also the part of the current government’s economic development department. While criticizing government’s economic policy he neglected the fact that he is also contributing in the same bad economic development policy which he discussed in his book. He mentioned that talented people are leaving the country and opting for lower position jobs in foreign rather than an upper-level job in Pakistan, while he, himself is sitting on the seat of Deputy Chairman of Pakistan Institute of Development Economics.

Overall this book debated quite interestingly on the economic future of Pakistan. It gives the reader a ray of hope about the economic future of Pakistan. Nadeem ul Haq nicely related the events till present condition of the disastrous economy of Pakistan to the optimistic future scenario which he sees for Pakistan till 2050 from 2020. But despite efforts, dreams don’t become the reality in most cases