**Human Insecurity Is the Real Challenge** By: Dr Moonis Ahmar

**Pakistan’s elites have demonstrated an indifferent attitude toward the economic and political issues of the country.**

The impending economic meltdown followed by climate catastrophes will augment the challenge of human insecurity in Pakistan. The year 2022 will witness unprecedented water, energy and food crises, which will jeopardise the livelihood of millions of people in the country. Since the inception of Pakistan, human security has never been prioritised by those at the helm of affairs. Instead, their focus is on maintaining their power, privileges and perks, and protecting their comfort zones. Resultantly, there is a risk of major environmental, economic and political crises in the country which is threatening the country’s very survival.

The whopping trade gap of $50 billion; mounting debt of $150 billion; meager foreign exchange reserves of around $10 billion held by the State Bank of Pakistan; surge in the prices of essential commodities along with severe water shortages mean that the country has already crossed the red lines of human insecurity. The growing challenge of human insecurity is also visible in terms of a surge in corruption, nepotism, bad governance, intolerance, extremism, violence and radicalisation of youth. Human security relates to a better quality of life by providing access to clean and safe drinking water, a pollution-free environment, access to better education, affordable and functional public transport, health, nutrition, hygienic food and employment opportunities based on merit. Pakistan’s poor ranking on the human development index — 144th — shows that in the 75 years of its existence, all the regimes have failed to ensure human security. Human insecurity deepens in an environment where there is no accountability and an absence of adherence to the rule of law.

Several post-colonial countries and emerging economies of Africa, Asia and Latin America present successful models of human security. Upon close examination of these models, it becomes clear that dynamic leadership, strong work ethic, mobilisation of youth in the process of human development, women empowerment and focus on good governance have helped transform impoverished and backward societies into modern, developed and peaceful ones. Despite being involved in a war with the US for nearly 10 years, Vietnam now has exports worth $336 billion and foreign exchange reserves of $110 billion with an economic growth rate of 7%. Bangladesh began from the scratch after separating from Pakistan in 1971 and is now excelling with $45 billion worth of exports and foreign exchange reserves of $44 billion. The UAE gained independence from Britain in 1971 and can now match any developed country with its exports of $306 billion and foreign exchange reserves of $129 billion. Most of these countries were way behind Pakistan in various economic indicators; however, over the years they have achieved significant development and improved human security.

If Pakistan fails to control problems related to the economy, environment and depletion of resources, it may plunge into a crisis like in Sri Lanka and other failing and failed states. There is no shortcut or a quick fix to deal with the predicament of human insecurity, but one can figure out three paths to save the 220 million people of Pakistan from endless torture, anguish and suffering.

First, a professional approach must be taken along with adequate funding to deal with an impending environmental catastrophe in the form of the melting of glaciers, rising temperatures and epidemic outbreaks. Controlling pollution by reducing gas emissions from factories, industries, vehicles and air conditioners along with reforestation can go a long way in saving Pakistan from an environmental disaster. The increase in human insecurity can also be linked to the absence of the rule of law and a lack of implementation of existing rules and regulations. Thus, there should be strict implementation of government laws and legislation. Pakistan’s institutions and people must adopt a zero-tolerance policy toward extremism, intolerance, violence and terrorism.

Second, human insecurity cannot be mitigated unless those who are at the helm of affairs leave their comfort zones and experience the plight of common people. Historically, Pakistan’s elites have demonstrated an indifferent attitude toward the economic and political issues of the country. Resultantly, the country has remained mired in socio-economic problems. Even though Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif rightly warned that if political polarisation is not curbed, Pakistan may face a similar fate as Syria and Libya, the government has failed to resolve political conflicts. Instead of strategising and presenting practical solutions to overcome the economic issues, the lawmakers were more interested in debating and passing a resolution against the former Prime Minister for one of his recent speeches. Perhaps, the government should shift focus on the falling foreign exchange reserves, the crash of the stock market, huge trade gap of around $50 billion, sharp depreciation of the rupee vis-à-vis the dollar and escalation in the prices of essential commodities including food, fuel and electricity. Unfortunately, however, Prime Minister Shehbaz led a delegation to London to meet PML-N patron at the expense of taxpayers’ money. This is a highly irresponsible act and demonstrates that the government is more concerned about maintaining its power and securing its image than ensuring the welfare of the people.

Third, difficult but bold steps need to be taken by state institutions to prevent political chaos, disorder, and violence by banning public meetings, protest marches, demonstrations and strikes as these acts have caused colossal loss to the Pakistani economy. It is imperative to shift focus on enforcing work ethics based on responsibility, time management and accountability. Otherwise, Pakistan will — God forbid — become a failed state.

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