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Pakistan at a Crossroads: Politics, Economy, and the Crisis of Public Trust

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Pakistan is currently passing through a period in which each passing day brings new challenges for its people. On one hand, there is political uncertainty; on the other, deepening economic hardship. Inflation has risen to such an extent that life has become increasingly difficult for the average citizen. A person who could somehow provide for their family just a few years ago now struggles to pay electricity bills. A trip to the market often ends with empty hands, while quality education and healthcare are gradually becoming unaffordable dreams.

The progress of any nation is not measured solely by skyscrapers or large-scale development projects. True development is achieved when citizens are satisfied, justice is accessible, employment opportunities are available, businesses flourish, and young people remain hopeful about their future. Unfortunately, Pakistan today is facing not only an economic crisis but, more importantly, a crisis of public trust.

Following the 2024 general elections, Pakistan entered a new phase of political controversy. Several political parties raised serious objections regarding the election results and the alleged use of Form 47, while the government and the Election Commission rejected these allegations and maintained that the electoral process was transparent. Rather than easing political tensions, these disagreements intensified them. Although a government was formed, political stability remained elusive.

Political instability almost always inflicts the greatest damage on the economy. Investors adopt a wait-and-see approach, businesses hesitate to invest, industrialists reduce production, and the burden ultimately falls on workers and the middle class.

If Pakistan's current situation can be summarized in a single word, that word is "inflation." Flour, sugar, cooking oil, pulses, vegetables, meat, milk, and medicines are steadily moving beyond the reach of ordinary people. Salaries increase only marginally, while living expenses rise dramatically. As a result, the middle class is rapidly being pushed toward poverty.

Electricity bills have become one of the most pressing concerns for households across the country. Consumers are burdened not only by the cost of electricity itself but also by numerous taxes and surcharges. In many families, electricity bills consume a significant portion of monthly income. Small businesses are closing because operating under such high energy costs has become increasingly unsustainable.

Rising petroleum prices affect every sector of the economy. Higher transportation costs increase food prices, raise industrial production costs, add to farmers' expenses, and further intensify the financial burden on ordinary citizens. Many people question why reductions in global oil prices are not fully reflected in domestic fuel prices.

The government's position is that difficult economic decisions are unavoidable due to IMF conditions and fiscal pressures. However, the public continues to ask why, despite new loans and higher taxes introduced almost every year, the standard of living has not improved. If borrowing merely serves to repay previous debts, sustainable economic progress remains difficult to achieve.

The agricultural sector is also experiencing severe challenges. The recent wheat crisis caused significant losses for farmers, many of whom argued that they did not receive fair prices for their crops. Questions were also raised regarding wheat import decisions. If farmers continue to suffer financial losses, their ability to increase future production will inevitably decline. Similar concerns exist regarding cotton, sugarcane, and other major crops. Fertilizers, seeds, agricultural chemicals, and diesel have all become considerably more expensive, placing additional pressure on agricultural production.

The industrial sector is likewise under immense strain. Numerous factories have reduced production, while others have been forced to shut down entirely. As industries weaken, employment opportunities diminish, unemployment rises, and the consequences extend throughout society.

Large numbers of educated young Pakistanis are leaving the country. Doctors, engineers, IT professionals, and skilled workers increasingly seek opportunities abroad rather than building their futures at home. This is not merely an individual migration but a significant loss of national talent and human capital.

The health and education sectors have also failed to receive the attention they require. Public hospitals continue to suffer from inadequate facilities, while educational institutions struggle with limited resources. When a state cannot adequately provide basic healthcare and education to its citizens, claims of national development naturally lose credibility.

The issues of freedom of expression and political liberties also remain subjects of ongoing debate. Various journalism and human rights organizations have periodically expressed concerns, while the government maintains that all measures are implemented within the framework of the law. In a strong democratic society, tolerance of differing opinions and adherence to the rule of law are essential responsibilities of the state.

In Punjab, major development projects are frequently highlighted. However, many citizens question their effectiveness when roads deteriorate after the first heavy rainfall and drainage systems fail despite billions of rupees being spent. Sindh continues to struggle with persistent urban challenges. Balochistan still awaits broader development and basic public services. Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa faces the dual pressures of terrorism and economic hardship. Azad Jammu and Kashmir, along with Gilgit-Baltistan, also confront inflation and limited economic opportunities. Although the provinces differ geographically, many of their fundamental challenges remain remarkably similar.

Considering Pakistan's current circumstances, one of the most important questions is: What lies ahead if the same policies and style of governance continue? This question is directed not only at the government but also at the opposition, state institutions, economists, and every citizen concerned about the country's future.

History demonstrates that economic crises rarely emerge overnight. They are typically the result of years of poor planning, political instability, mounting debt, weak economic management, and ineffective policymaking. When governments fail to introduce timely reforms, problems gradually accumulate until they become increasingly difficult to control.

Several countries offer valuable lessons.

Sri Lanka, once regarded as one of South Asia's stronger economies, eventually descended into a severe economic crisis due to rising debt, poor fiscal decisions, declining foreign exchange reserves, and flawed tax policies. In 2022, the country experienced fuel shortages, prolonged power outages, and shortages of food and medicines. Massive public protests ultimately forced the president to flee the country. This crisis did not emerge suddenly; it developed over many years.

Greece also became overwhelmed by debt. The government implemented painful austerity measures, reduced public spending, and endured years of high unemployment before economic reforms gradually improved conditions. However, the entire nation paid a significant price during the recovery process.

Argentina continues to struggle with persistent inflation and recurring currency crises. Although governments have changed repeatedly, many of the country's structural economic problems have remained unresolved until broader reforms were pursued.

Conversely, South Korea provides an example of successful recovery. Following the Asian financial crisis of 1997, the country implemented difficult reforms, invested heavily in industry, education, exports, and technology, strengthened its institutions, and within a relatively short period emerged as one of the world's leading economies. This illustrates the profound difference between effective governance and weak governance.

Pakistan's situation is not identical to these countries, yet many economists emphasize that without timely reforms, economic pressures could intensify. This is precisely why responsible and forward-looking policy decisions are essential.

If current conditions continue, investment may decline further, industries may face greater difficulties, unemployment could increase, educated young people may continue emigrating, agricultural productivity may weaken, food security could become increasingly vulnerable, and the burden of public debt may place even greater pressure on future generations.

These outcomes are not inevitable. They represent potential risks that can still be avoided through consistent policies, greater transparency, institutional reforms, and long-term planning.

Pakistan is not lacking in resources. It possesses fertile agricultural land, a large and youthful population, abundant mineral resources, and a strategically important geographical location. The fundamental question is whether these assets are being utilized effectively and responsibly.

The government should strengthen the agricultural sector, ensure fair compensation for farmers, provide affordable energy to industries, establish a more equitable tax system so that the burden is not borne disproportionately by salaried individuals, prioritize education, healthcare, and scientific research, and implement impartial accountability under the equal application of the law. Such measures would help restore public confidence and create a stronger foundation for sustainable growth.

Today, Pakistan requires economic stability more than political slogans. Citizens seek practical results rather than promises. They want lower inflation, greater employment opportunities, affordable electricity, a prosperous agricultural sector, thriving industries, and a future in which young people can confidently build their lives within their own country.

Pakistan belongs not only to its government but to all 240 million of its citizens. If national interests continue to be overshadowed by personal and political considerations, history may ultimately conclude that it was not a lack of resources but poor decision-making, prolonged political conflict, and weak governance that slowed the progress of a nation with tremendous potential.

There is still time to learn from past mistakes. Differences of opinion are natural, but consensus on national priorities is essential. Strong states are not built by power alone; they are built through public trust, justice, transparent governance, and sound policymaking. This is the path that can guide Pakistan out of crisis and toward lasting stability and sustainable development..