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Challenges to National Integration:

Can we become one?

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An old man, in his last breathing, called his four sons. He handed each son a single stick and asked them to break it. They did it easily. Then, he tied the four sticks together and asked them to break the bundle. None was able to do so. The old man then said, "United we stand divided we fall". This simple lesson reflects the essence of

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National Integration. Just as the sticks were unbreakable when united, similarly Pakistan's integration lies in its unity.

National Integration is the process of creating a sense of unity and cohesion among the nation diverse groups of the nation. However, this great nation which was supposed to be united country is faced with disintegration. Evil forces are vying for destabilizing the unity of Pakistan. Pakistan's ethnic and linguistic conflicts undermine national cohesion. Religious sectarianism fuels the division. Not only this, its economic disparities also exacerbates social inequality.

And a series of other complications are hindering its path to achieve national integration. Observe the situation with the people of Balochistan who are facing economic and political neglect and being marginalized since decades.

Now, a question arises: can we become one? ~~Can~~ If yes then, how can these challenges be addressed? What steps should be taken? The answer to these questions will shape the future of national integration of the nation.

Although Pakistan is facing challenges such as linguistic and ethnic fault lines, socioeconomic inequalities and others. However,

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National integration can be achieved by promoting unity amidst diversity, reinforcing rule of law, ensuring fair distribution of resources, and actively participating in civil society.

As, nation is described as collection of people, sharing common tradition, culture, norms and value. On the other hand, integration means diverse collection within a domain that are privileged by law with similar rights. So, collectively National integration can be summarized as vast ocean where rivers of diverse culture and background converge to create unified force of national harmony and pride. The National Integration Conference Report, 1961 states - "National integration is a psychological and educational process involving the feeling of unity, solidarity and cohesion in the heart of people, a sense of common citizenship and feeling of loyalty to the nation." This defines that national integration is the pursuit of harmony within a state.

Historically, emergence of Pakistan on the globe was also based on ideas of national integration. The motive was

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to create a society for people of diverse regions under shared identity.

However, this unity was soon challenged. Refer to the example of East Pakistan where language rights exposed the fracture of national unity. It led to the separation of East Pakistan in 1971 and creation of Bangladesh. The challenges are not ended here. Even today Pakistan is facing struggles to achieve its national cohesion within ^{its} provinces. There are conflicts among provinces on a variety of issues. Even within province, one ethnic or linguistic group is at enmity with another group.

Conflicts arising from country's ethnic and linguistic diversity pose a serious challenge to its national integration. In multilingual civilization language is an ~~the~~ extremely important rule which can unite or break the nation. Similarly, ethnic groups also demand greater political economy, fair resources and cultural recognition. Different ethnic groups, such as, Punjabis, Sindhis, Pashtuns and Balochs, often prioritize their regional identity over nation's identity. These divisions weaken the national unity and make it difficult to achieve national cohesion.

At the time of independence, it was decided declared that everyone is free to practice ~~this~~ ^{his} religion ^{and} ~~or~~ sect without any fear or interference. However, with the passage of time increasing religious sectarianism has made this idea difficult to achieve. Sectarian tensions specially between shia and sunni ^{groups} have ~~made~~ involved into violent clashes and widespread discrimination. Take the recent case of Pakistan's Parachinar district assault that had left at least 44 shia Muslims dead, with militant group using heavy weaponry in the attack. Such brutal sectarian divide led to a climate of mistrust, violence and undermine the country's social peace. ^{These} Subsequently, development ^{resulted} in religious in religious sectarianism, extremism, militancy, terrorism and hatred ^{weaken} within Pakistan further ^{weaken} ~~complicate~~ the integration.

Another ~~the~~ major challenge to national integration in Pakistan is unequal distribution of resources across different regions and communities. This disparity creates sense of injustice ^{among} ~~within~~ provinces. The unequal distribution of resources provoked the feeling of marginalization. Consider the example

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of Balochistan where the ongoing conflicts in region, heated by demands for greater autonomy and share of province's resources, have resulted in violence, kidnappings and protests. So when such inequalities occurs, it ex provoke regional disparities that make it hard to achieve national integration.

Not only this, weak democratic institutions have also hindered national integration. The democratic institutions are responsible for transparency, equity and accountability. but, when such institutions lack these things it will eventually create chaos and disrupt the national cohesion. Weak governance in any nation reflects the divides the space for law and order situation. Because when one group or province get's preferential treatment at the expense of others, it shattered the social harmony of the nation integration.

Moving ahead, Unaddressed grievances of provinces have led to a rise of sub-nationalist tendencies.

Historically from the years of Independence, various regions have felt neglected by the central government. It has ~~risen~~ raised the tensions. Due to such oppress neglect provinces gave birth to a number of sub nationalist ~~and~~ movements, which continue to appear on national scene. In result, long term neglect, self serving political agendas, tribal traditions and weak governance have further contributed to the growth of sub nationalism. Anti state group take advantage of this condition and spread militancy. This violence challenge the national unity and make it hard to achieve national integration.

In context to this, hostile agencies also play significant role in weakening national unity. The main motive of these anti state groups is to fuel unrest and exploit internal division. These foreign backed element often support separatist movements, they provide financial military aid to destabilize the country.

For instance, India's intelligence agency (RAW) has been linked to support anti state groups in Pakistan. Such interferences deepen the ethnic and

values and create regional divides. Thus, ~~such~~ ~~it~~ ~~make~~ their interference make it difficult for government to promote national union.

Another most crucial challenge that can not be underestimated is economic disparities between centre and provinces. Imbalance provision of resources, uneven infrastructure and industrial development, lack of employment opportunities. All resulted where there is disparity in economic prosperity of people. Take the case of Sindh, where Sindh has been complained about disproportionate water allocation. Sindh, being lower riparian, accusing upper riparian and central government for diverting flow water from Indus river. If such economic disparities ~~will~~ ^{will} not be addressed, they will ~~str~~ further strain centre and provincial ties.

Adding more to challenges, Climate change is also a growing threat to country's national integration. Unfortunately, Pakistan is environmentally vulnerable state. Climate impact, such as droughts, floods, & water shortage

disproportionately affect different regions. Climate change leads to internal migrations, regional tensions and ~~direct~~ conflicts over vital resources.

The 2022 floods in Pakistan devastated nearly every province. It caused widespread destruction and displacement. Significant number of people were forced to migrate from affected regions. This disaster underscore that how climate ~~induced~~ crisis can undermine national unity.

The question whether Pakistan can become nationally integrated nation is a subject to varying perspectives of different school of thoughts. Optimistic believe that through different and innovative way and equal distribution of resources, Pakistan can become a nationally integrated country. whereas, on the other hand skeptics suggest that deep rooted ethnic, linguistic and tensions and economic disparities make it difficult for Pakistan to become one. While another group or neutral stance believed that integration is possible, it will require ~~int~~ long term efforts to address emerging challenges raised by skeptics.

So while looking on optimistic sides, to overcome challenges and make Pakistan a nationally integrated nation, start with promoting unity in diversity. When everyone embraces and celebrates country's rich cultural, ethnic and religious differences, communities ^{start} ~~can~~ working together more effectively.

This approach helps to reduce conflicts and create stronger national identity.

Take an example of the Lahooti Meelo, a music festival celebrating diverse ~~musical festival celebrating diverse~~ musical tradition from across Pakistan, brings together people from different regions and backgrounds. This reflects how cultural celebration can unite people and bridge the divides.

Another vital way to overcome challenges is equal distribution of resource among provinces. It is evident that when resources are distributed to ~~the~~ provinces, it reduces tensions ~~and~~ and build trust. This approach helps to create a balanced and cohesive society. The prime example of this

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is 18th Amendment of constitution of Pakistan, which increased the provincial autonomy and devolved financial resources to the provinces. So, when provinces are empowered with greater control over their resources, they will be allowed for more localized development. It will also work for fully addressing regional needs more effectively. This working effectively on this approach will also enhance national unity.

Strengthening the rule of law is also ~~promoting~~ a way to achieve national ~~at~~ integration. Its strength ensures fair treatment for everyone. Because when laws are applied consistently, it reduces discrimination and builds trust. For example, even at minute level law legal processes for handling corruption help ensure justice for all citizen.

This approach supports a more peaceful and prosperous society. And can be the reason of national integration.

Adding more to overcome challenges, Non-kinetic means are very important for achieving national

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integration. Applying such means foster unity through peaceful talks, and method. Use of strategies like dialogue, education and cultural exchange helps build understanding among diverse groups. It can also be applied by arranging programs that bring together youths from various ethnic and religious backgrounds for joint activities promote social cohesion. Thus, the implications of such these approaches - brings can strengthen national unity of Pakistan.

Similarly, Media also play effective role in national amalgamation. An improved media helps in combating issues. Media A responsible media significantly contribute to counter terrorism efforts by promoting awareness and fostering unity. It also shape public opinion and encourage unity in diversity. A balanced and nonbiased view of media highlights shared values. For example, the Pakistan Against Terrorism campaign utilized traditional media alongside social media platform like Twitter and Facebook to spread information and engage with broader audience. These type of campaign

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Promote communal peace, counter the foreign media influence and promote a soft "image" of Pakistan on globe.

Consensus building for stronger democracy is also a way to make Pakistan a nationally integrated nation. Consensus building ensures that all voices are listened in governance. It requires extra focus on underdeveloped provinces and Tribal areas. This focus will do away with injustice to that people. For instance, the National Finance Commission (NFC) Awards involves multiple stakeholder to equal resource distribution. Proper implementation of such development will surely uplift the people trust in nation. Thus, consensus building strengthens democracy that will eventually work for nation's integration.

likewise, when diverse communities are involved in decision making and social activities it promotes national integration. Collaboration on local projects help build a sense of belonging among different groups. Civil society engagement is considered as the most simple and

effective way of promoting national integration from grass root level. There are so many NGOs that are running cultural exchange program and bring of diverse group together. These NGOs are specifically working on community development and for nation's progress. Thus, engaging civil society through such involvements help to create a more unified society.

National integration involves uniting diverse regional into a whole. It faces ~~and~~ ^{and} irrespective of religion, cast, creed, ethnicity, language, national integration binds ~~and~~ ^{and} every segment of society. There are certain challenges that create hindrance to achieve it completely. But by addressing challenges through effective measures, such as engagement of civil society, leveraging positive balancing media to promote consensus can build bridge gaps. ~~and~~ ^{and} with persistent efforts and a focus on shared objectives, Pakistan has a great opportunity to achieve greater unity and integration. And it can be seen that

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country is already making strides, with continued dedication, Pakistan will likely complete its journey towards becoming a fully integrated nation.

National integration is the assimilation of entire people of a country to a common identity.

Benjamin Franklin