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Master Plan for the Youth?

Three Olympic Gold Medals, with no medal since the field hockey bronze in 1992. One ODI World Cup and T20 world cup each in cricket. No hockey world cup win since the fourth title in 1994. No appearance in a British or World Open Final since Jansher Khan in 1998. These are glimpses Pakistan Sports' performances at the highest level in the last three decades. Fair to say, the turn of the century has not boded well with our country's sporting adventures.

With such lackluster performances all round, can we conclude that the newer generations lack talent? **OBVIOUSLY NOT!** It is important to ponder what though has changed? A small comparison of our surroundings today with a few decades ago might help us find the answer.

Moving through streets of the country, today we see huge blocks of cement decorated with the most modern tiles and paints in the name of housing societies. What we do not get to see are children playing in streets, trying to imitate their national heroes and international stars. To be able to see the youngsters competing in grounds is not even a wish anymore since the grounds have completely vanished from our residential plans. Who really is drawing up these lines on papers calling them the master plans with no grounds for the youth to play on? Who are these people living in expensive housing societies and apartment buildings with no playing area for their children?

The shift from Galli & Mohalla to Lanes was not just a shift of living standard, it also marked the change of our attitudes. Attitudes which represent no place for the children and youth. The biggest curse for our youth's

progress has been handing over of urban planning and so called master plans of cities to architects alone whose entire focus remains on trying something out of the box when the solution lies right inside the box. Opportunities, not aesthetics, should have been the motive behind our urban planning and design, but our fixation with concrete walls and glasswork has left no chances for the youth to grow.

Moreover, as education got expensive, the schools got smaller. Finding a school in our urban centers is as easy as finding your next door neighbor, but finding adequate playing facilities in these educational institutes is just a dream now. Locking up children in rooms, be it in the house or educational institutes will never produce world champions. In fact, it will not even produce productive human beings. This depletion of space for the youngsters to play, compete and learn is the reason why Pakistan has failed to produce any significant superstars in the sporting field, with only one cricket T20 world cup and champions trophy each as our only major sporting achievements of the 21st century.

Besides, the space for youth has not just been killed in sports, but everywhere else too. As mentioned earlier, we have pulled our kids out of the playing grounds and thrown them inside rooms in the name of education. We, however, have failed to provide them with any quality education either. PIDE studies reflect a staggering lack of professors in our universities, averaging even below 1% of the total faculty in some regions of the country. Educational institutions are not just about creating infrastructure, but more about the quality of teaching being

provided. Unfortunately, our focus has entirely been on brick-n-mortar and producing mere degree holders. With such a large number of graduates every year at a time when the economy is not creating enough jobs, we continue increasing unemployment in the country. PIDE research has shown that graduate unemployment is has reached extreme highs with unemployment being the highest among the 15-29 years of age group i.e. the youth.

No exposure for sports, no jobs and no opportunities for businesses either. The permission economy, or in other words the multiple NOCs required to initiate even a small set up is a disincentive for any individual to turn towards businesses. Furthermore, there is absolutely no concept of city economy in Pakistan. Our city master planners know nothing beyond cement, brick and mortar in urban designs. The need for an inclusivity, openness and interaction among all segments of the city is an important feature of any urban center that is missing from our master plans. Instead, roads, bridges, flyovers coupled with housing structures have killed our lifestyles and the opportunities for the youth to excel.

It's time we take a step back and rethink our priorities. Its time, we develop a master plan for the youth. Let's give our youth a chance at competing at the international stage, and be the best in every aspect of life.

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