

Detailed SUMMARY of the Article “Focus on Actions,” by Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Dawn, March 117th, 2024

The article emphasizes the importance of implementing actionable plans to address key priorities identified through national dialogue. It outlines five sets of actions for the government to consider:

1. **Political Stability:** The prime minister should initiate a national dialogue involving all political parties and major institutions to strengthen democratic norms, local governments, electoral processes, anti-corruption measures, and fiscal responsibilities.
2. **Economic Stability:** Measures include reducing wasteful expenditure,

privatizing loss-making state-owned enterprises (SOEs), negotiating with the IMF for debt restructuring, expanding regional trade opportunities, focusing on job creation, and implementing civil service reforms.

3. **Infrastructure Development:** Immediate operationalization of the Gwadar port, expansion of border markets with Iran, establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), and opening the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Industrial Park to private sector investments.

4. **Security Coordination:** Energizing the office of the national security adviser (NSA) to coordinate responses to internal and external security challenges, proposing reforms in the police and criminal justice system, and enhancing collaboration with intelligence agencies.

5. **Foreign Policy Review:** Comprehensive review of foreign policy to address evolving global and regional geopolitics, major power competition, and relations with neighbors, involving a high-level task force comprising stakeholders and experts.

These actions aim to address political, economic, infrastructure, security, and foreign policy challenges, laying the foundation for broader reforms.

Easy/Short SUMMARY:

The article highlights the need for concrete actions to address key priorities identified through national dialogue. It suggests five sets of actions for the government to focus on, including strengthening political stability, restoring economic stability, developing infrastructure, enhancing security coordination, and reviewing foreign policy. These actions aim to tackle various challenges and pave the way for broader reforms in Pakistan.

SOLUTIONS of The Problem:

Political Stability

Initiate a national dialogue involving all political parties and major institutions to strengthen democratic norms, local governments, electoral processes, anti-corruption measures, and fiscal responsibilities.

Economic Stability

Implement measures to reduce wasteful expenditure, privatize loss-making state-owned enterprises (SOEs), negotiate with the IMF for debt restructuring, expand regional trade opportunities, focus on job creation, and implement civil service reforms.

Infrastructure Development

Operationalize the Gwadar port, expand border markets with Iran, establish Special Economic Zones (SEZs), and open the SCO Industrial Park to private sector investments.

Security Coordination

Energize the office of the national security adviser (NSA) to coordinate responses to internal and external security challenges, propose reforms in the police and criminal justice system, and enhance collaboration with intelligence agencies.

Foreign Policy Review

Conduct a comprehensive review of foreign policy to address evolving global and regional geopolitics, major power competition, and relations with neighbors, involving a high-level task force comprising stakeholders and experts.

These solutions aim to address political, economic, infrastructure, security, and foreign policy challenges, laying the foundation for broader reforms.

IMPORTANT Facts and Figures Given in the Article:

- A 10-point priority agenda was evolved during conversations convened by the Sanobar Institute.
- The article emphasizes the need for actionable plans to implement these priorities effectively.
- Five sets of actions are proposed, covering political stability, economic stability, infrastructure development, security coordination, and foreign policy review.
- The suggested actions aim to address key challenges and pave the way for broader reforms in Pakistan.

MCQs from the Article:

1. What is emphasized in the article regarding the importance of priorities?

A. Setting priorities without actions



B. Setting priorities with implementable action plans

- C. Setting priorities without a national dialogue
- D. Setting priorities without involving major institutions

2. Which of the following is NOT one of the suggested sets of actions proposed in the article?

- A. Political Stability
- B. Economic Stability
- C. Infrastructure Development
- D. Education Reform**

3. What is proposed regarding economic stability in the article?

- A. Increasing wasteful expenditure
- B. Nationalizing loss-making state-owned enterprises
- C. Negotiating with the IMF for debt restructuring**
- D. Decreasing regional trade opportunities

4. What is the focus of infrastructure development suggested in the article?

- A. Expanding regional trade opportunities
- B. Operationalizing the Gwadar port**
- C. Opening luxury shopping malls
- D. Privatizing Special Economic Zones (SEZs)

5. What action is proposed for enhancing security coordination in the article?

- A. Decreasing collaboration with intelligence agencies
- B. Ignoring internal security challenges
- C. Energizing the office of the national security adviser (NSA)**
- D. Proposing reforms in the education system

VOCABULARY:

1. **Uninterruptable** (adjective) (□□□□□ □□□): Unable to be stopped or interrupted.
2. **Devolved** (verb) (□□□□ □□□□□): Transfer or delegate (power) to a lower level, especially from central government to local or regional administration.
3. **Privatisation** (noun) (□□□□□ □□□□□): The transfer of ownership, property, or business from the government to the private sector.
4. **Multipronged** (adjective) (□□ □□□□□ □□□□□): Involving several different aspects or approaches.
5. **Populist** (adjective) (□□□□□): Relating to a political approach that strives to appeal to ordinary people who feel that their concerns are disregarded by established elite groups.
6. **Enabling** (adjective) (□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□□): Providing the means or opportunity to do something.
7. **Misgivings** (noun) (□□): A feeling of doubt or apprehension about the outcome or consequences of something.
8. **Energised** (verb) (□□□□ □□□□□): Give vitality and enthusiasm to.
9. **Comprehensive** (adjective) (□□□□□): Including all or nearly all elements or aspects of something.
10. **Pragmatic** (adjective) (□□□□□): Dealing with things sensibly and realistically in a way that is based on practical rather than theoretical considerations.
11. **Exhaustive** (adjective) (□□□□□□□): Comprehensive; including all possibilities.
12. **Multipronged Approach** (noun) (□□□□□□ □□ □□□□□ □□□□□□): An approach involving several different strategies or methods to achieve a particular goal.
13. **Coordination** (noun) (□□□□□□ □□): The organization of the different elements of a complex body or activity so as to enable them to work together effectively.
14. **Prudent** (adjective) (□□□□□□□□): Acting with or showing care and thought for the future.
15. **Efficacy** (noun) (□□□□□□□): The ability to produce a desired or intended result.

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Focus on actions

Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry

5 – 6 minutes

A 10-POINT priority agenda evolved during various conversations convened by the Sanober Institute was laid out in my article, 'Setting priorities', last week. However, setting priorities can only be effective if accompanied by an implementable action plan. To that end, there are essentially five sets of actions that the government should consider in order to implement these priorities.

First, to achieve sustainable and uninterrupted political stability, the prime minister should invite the opposition for a national dialogue involving all political parties in parliament as well as major institutions, including the judiciary, ECP, the military, intelligence agencies, the civil bureaucracy, and those representing trade and industry.

The dialogue should focus on a five-point agenda: (i) strengthening local governments, which are not receiving their due share from the resources devolved to the provinces; (ii) strengthening the ECP, which must ensure intra-party elections and transparently acquired funding for poll campaigns; (iii) reforming NAB, which has been politicised, thus depleting the confidence of bureaucracy and business; (iv) reconsidering the NFC award, which has left the centre too resource-deficient to handle debt payments and defence costs; and (v) a solemn commitment by all stakeholders to ensure, within their respective domains, merit, transparency, accountability, and the rule of law.

The outcome of the dialogue should be a national consensus to strengthen democratic norms and conduct, ensure the rule of law and meritocracy; and enable the continuity of economic policies — a kind of charter of democracy, good governance, and economy.

A national dialogue is needed to achieve political stability.

Second, restoring economic stability needs multipronged actions. The prime minister has already constituted a committee to suggest ways to reduce wasteful expenditure in the central government. The real test would be to implement the recommendations. A similar effort is required in the provinces. Federal ministries dealing with subjects already devolved to the provinces under the 18th Amendment should be immediately dissolved. It is a welcome development that the process of privatisation of loss-making SOEs like PIA and the Steel Mills has gained momentum. And the new finance minister has prioritised negotiations with the IMF for a Pakistan-owned, Pakistan-led programme, debt restructuring, broadening the tax base, exports-led growth, and digitising the economy.

For relief from the pressure of price hikes affecting ordinary people, regional trade opportunities, however limited in scope, should be explored, particularly for the provision of vegetables, fruit and other essential commodities. The government should not spend scarce resources on populist measures like dole-outs and charity programmes. Instead, efforts should be focused on creating jobs via an enabling environment for IT and microfinance. The much-needed civil service reforms should be implemented. No new task force or commission is required as considerable work has already been done, including by the Ishrat Husain-led committee, which had made doable and cost-effective recommendations.

Third, the nearly completed port in Gwadar should be immediately operationalised to handle more commercial traffic, with a mandatory share of jobs for Gwadar and other Balochistan residents. Border markets with Iran should be expanded at the three main crossing points to create jobs for Balochistan’s people. The new government has shown seriousness about setting up Special Economic Zones. Likewise, opening SIFC to private sector investments could stimulate action in key sectors of the economy. The SIFC should create more public awareness about its achievements so far to counter the misgivings some people have about it.



Fourth, the office of national security adviser should be energised to effectively coordinate our response to security challenges. For internal security, a task force should be set up under the NSA to propose reforms in the police and criminal justice system. Apropos external security threats, the NSA’s office should work with intelligence agencies and other stakeholders to suggest options for decisions by the National Security Committee.

Finally, our foreign policy should be reviewed comprehensively so that it can address the challenges of evolving global and regional geopolitics, particularly major power competition, relations with neighbours, and the geo-economics pivot. To that end, a high-level task force comprising all relevant stakeholders and invitees from academia and think tanks could be constituted within the foreign ministry to propose, within three months, doable and pragmatic foreign policy options.

The above is not an exhaustive list of actions. If implementation is initiated, a stage could be set to undertake broader reforms.

The writer is a former foreign secretary.

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