

Hope

Hina Husain



When Imran Khan swept the elections in Pakistan in 2018, my mother—a long-time admirer and secret superfan of the cricketer turned politician—asked if I wanted to go on a once-in-a-lifetime tour of Pakistan’s majestic, mountainous northern region bordering India and China. Never mind that we would be two women travelling alone in a country where that sort of thing is unheard of. We’d been promised “Naya Pakistan” (New Pakistan) and we’d be bold pioneers cruising the waves of Pakistan’s coming renaissance. In September that year, we set out from Canada and embarked on a three-week road trip starting from my hometown of Lahore, going all the way up to the Hunza Valley in the province of Gilgit-Baltistan, and making our way to the ancient, sacred Buddhist city of Taxila before heading back to Lahore via the capital, Islamabad.

The people of our land, their customs, traditions, foods, stories and the pristine beauty of the north were out of some sort of Sufi poetry. I felt hopeful about my country. I felt that maybe the future was actually

brighter than the previous two decades of instability, which had given rise to wealth inequality and inflamed religious extremism, causing dozens of deadly bombings and shootings across the nation. Maybe all that was finally behind us.

It’s been five years since that trip, and it’s sad to see that not only did the promise of Naya Pakistan never materialise, the country is actually much worse off today. Imran Khan was ousted from power in April 2022, throwing the country into political turmoil. That summer saw a third of Pakistan submerged underwater by flooding, leaving millions of low-income and working-class Pakistanis homeless.

Pakistan has since been hit by record-high inflation and economic instability, with millions of people unable to afford basic staples like flour and rice. Hundreds of Pakistanis—people desperate to escape the country before complete economic collapse—have drowned off the coast of Greece on migrant boats headed to Europe.

It seems almost vain to think about my trip to Pakistan in the face of all the calamity, but I’m glad I had

the opportunity to make such good memories back then. I don’t know if I will have another chance. Pakistan’s future seems uncertain.

I hope the country can weather this difficult period, and its citizens don’t have to suffer any longer. Until then, I hold on to the feeling I had when I was sitting by the river in Naran, a town up in the Valley, with my mother eating freshly caught trout the locals prepared for us. The feeling that this country, for all its imperfections and struggles, would one day rise up and show the world the gems it has hidden within it. I hope this flame of hope within me will never be extinguished. Whether it’s a Naya Pakistan or something else, the people of Pakistan deserve a country that shines as bright as their hearts. □

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