**Battle for Hope**

[Andleeb Abbas](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/andleeb-abbas/)

February 12, 2023

“Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit ’em, but remember it is a sin to kill a mockingbird.” This was a famous quote from the bestseller by Harper Lee. This book was published in 1960 when America was going through the oppression that had given rise to the civil rights movement led by Dr Martin Luther King. Mockingbirds are a symbol of the good in society. The American society beset with racism and injustice was at its lowest ebb. This famous quotation talks about how when oppression starts and random violence emerges, one way of keeping some sanity is by not killing the mockingbird. The mockingbird is the most harmless creature who only keeps singing. The mockingbird symbolizes the soft part of a harsh, evil environment. The mockingbird is the silver lining. The mockingbird is the hope.

What is happening today in Pakistan is not just a systematic cleansing of the voice that opposes oppression, but even more dangerous: the continuous erosion of the hope reservoir that resides in the people who live in this country. What makes people move, plan, stand and fight for anything is hope. When you kill hope, you turn a person into dead wood. That is what the plan is. That is what the agenda is. Make people feel it is impossible. Make people feel it is worthless. Make people feel no headway can be made. This cycle starts with despondency, gathers force to become despair and if let be, ends in hopelessness. The whole narrative about Imran Khan and PTI not succeeding is being drummed up repetitively. In this environment, everything that is announced by PTI is ridiculed and mocked. Little do they realize that they are in this obsessive trap of only focusing on Imran khan and thus neglecting the core of politics i.e the vote and the voter. Let us see which battles are ongoing and which strategic moves are making headway:

Force Vs Inspire- For people who are power-dependent, the only way to get “ahead” is by overpowering opponents. Crush Resistance is their handy strategy. It has many advantages. It is resourceful. Decision makers are on command. It has a tested tried execution plan. It is almost certain to get results. The present strategy of attacking Imran Khan physically, personally and politically has made progress. He was shot. He had to leave the long march. He is grounded at Zaman Park. Personal attack audios on him are also creating some bad taste in the borderline supporters. Arrests and torture of his team members like Shahbaz Gill, Azam Swati, and Fawad Chaudhry are creating fear and despondency in some sections. The biggest shortcoming of this strategy is that it is not enduring and not engaging. Fear beyond a limit creates uncontrollable reactions. On the other hand, Imran Khan is inspiring his followers. He does not have the position, the power, or the resources but is using personal effort and sacrifice as examples to inspire people to withstand the onslaught of an oppressive regime.

Fear beyond a limit creates uncontrollable reactions.

Blame Vs Responsibility- The economy is on a terrifying slide. PDM government has not managed the crisis. The internal tussle between the two Finance ministers has put paid to their narrative of blaming PTI for the economic mess. Thus they are working now on two alternative strategies. Firstly since their 10-month government has performed beyond comprehension levels of incompetence, they have started comparing their 2013 to 2017 performance with PTI’s 3.5 years. The problem is that this digging up the archive exercise is not convincing anybody. The second strategy is to equate the economic mess of the previous three decades and then say that PTI is not serious about doing a charter of the economy. This thread has some resonance but only some. IMF has also demanded that the government take into consultation with the most popular party. Many business people and professionals desperate to save their falling revenues are saying that PTI should for the sake of saving the economy collaborate with PDM. But these are just short-term demands made under pressure that are not going to prove beneficial in the long run. If PDM parties have been in government for the last three decades and have consistently failed to develop Pakistan, how can they be a solution to the problems they have created?

Collusion Vs Election-When you are killing hope you try to close all options to make people feel useless and hapless. People’s hope build up in by-elections when they felt that their effort can make a difference even when the most powerful are doing the contrary. The 17th July and 16th October elections defeated the all-powerful. This was a huge hope builder. When the 13 parties and its most powerful 14th party saw this they decided to ensure that no elections take place. First, they tried to postpone elections and prevent the dissolution of the assembly as they wanted to make people feel that nothing will work. This means that they are also going to violate the constitution. For this purpose the Pindi Party, selective influencers in the courts and the media are being “managed” to ensure “no election strategy”. The clever thing is that they are making their illegal intent public. Open references to the fact that Imran Khan will be disqualified and arrested etc are being made to tell people that there is no chance at all. This effort to convince people of the futility of all efforts is so blatant that they are not shy of implying that the death threats to Imran Khan may be real.

Personal Vs Political- The attacks on Imran Khan are all at the personal level. Audio leaks are targeted to hit his credibility. This is due to the fact that their previous narrative of “selected” has fallen on its face as the 13 parties are the most “hand-picked” lot in the history of political engineering in Pakistan. The second narrative of an incompetent government has just about faced them due to the mega economic disaster they have created. Tosha khana seemed to have made some headway. As the judge called for previous gift lists that case has lost its steam on the public. The focus now is on the Tyrian White case. There is a whole focus on proving that Imran khan did not declare his “daughter” in the declaration papers. This is not just to malign PTI and Imran Khan but also to create this perception in the public that they are not going to let him come back to the government.

Most movements are movements of hope. Most struggles are struggles for a better future. Force, suppression, and oppression do create suspensions of expectations but many times this also revives dead spirits. What has happened in Pakistan is that a more or less indifferent nation, that gave up a long time ago, has stirred to action in the last 10 months. This kindling of hope is repeatedly reflected in the sentence “IK is our last hope” by his mass support base. That is why the operation “minus Imran” has been in full swing. But that is why the “Fill the jails” option has opened up too. As they say, the most creative openings emerge when all shutters come down.

*The writer is a columnist, consultant, coach, and an analyst and can be reached at andleeb.abbas1@gmail,com. She tweets at @AndleebAbbas*