**A mafia land**

By Raoof Hasan

Friday, Jun 03, 2022

When I was much younger in life, I had umpteen opportunities to have left this country, but I resisted the temptation with pride. The opportunities kept coming during later years, yet my insistence to stay in my own country never wavered. As a matter of fact, even as things were visibly deteriorating in Pakistan, my passion kept growing stronger that this was the place I belonged to, and this is where I am going to be.

I must concede that, at this late stage in life, this resolve has grown wobbly. I am numbed by the happenings of recent times and feel highly embarrassed to be living in a country which is ruled by a cabal of convicts, alleged criminals and absconders. Almost 70 per cent of the incumbent cabinet is made of such kind of people which is a matter of unmitigated shame for every self-respecting citizen. But this gruesome reality is not likely to have an impact on the orchestrators of this latest tragedy which has befallen the country.

Virtually all institutions of the state are guilty of having contributed to the fulfilment of a sinister plan to dismantle a democratic and constitutional government. They became willing partners in committing this crime in violation of all moral, constitutional, judicial and such other practices on which the edifice of the civilized world proudly rests. In the process, Pakistan has become a rare country where crime is not treated as crime and its perpetration is legitimised by the institutions which are deemed as the custodians of law and constitution. This is the new norm which is being instilled into the national ethos.

Indeed, we are such a rare country, and in so many different ways. Find me another country which has been so malevolently handed over to a bunch of certified criminals to restart their spree of loot and plunder. Find me another country where state institutions are lined up to pander to the sinister pleasure of the orchestrators, irrespective of whether doing so would be in conformity with democratic traditions and constitutional provisions.

Find me another country where the courts open at midnight to implement a foreign-inspired and funded regime-change conspiracy in collaboration with local thugs and crooks by transgressing into what strictly falls within the domain of parliament. Find me another country where an imported government comprising a myriad variety of criminals moves to make person-specific amendments in laws that would facilitate their exoneration from grievous financial, money-laundering and other crimes. Find me another country where protesters are doused in poisonous tear gas and state terror of draconian measure is unleashed upon peaceful marchers, where women are manhandled and dragged out of their vehicles and cases registered against all with indiscriminate haste.

Find me another country where parliamentarians are hauled as animals because they are purchased commodities for a price for changing political loyalties and where the leader of the opposition establishes his compromised status by stating that he would be fighting the next election on the ticket awarded by the party of the sitting prime minister. Find me another country where human conscience is the cheapest article displayed on the stands. Find me another country where shame is an extinct commodity and crime is celebrated publicly with victory signs.

This humiliation list is endless – the one narrating it would be exhausted in the process. As T S Eliot once wrote, “I am tired with my own life and the lives of those after me/I am dying in my own death and the deaths of those after me”. It is such an excruciatingly painful phenomenon that one is at a loss for words to describe it.

For most of the years since its creation, the people of this country remained in deep slumber as it was being brutally ravaged. They neither had the awareness of what was happening around them, nor the power to confront the onslaught. They were enslaved by the beneficiary elite across the sprawling urban habitations and the backward rural communities. Economic enslavement was the most vicious form of this capture where generations are sold out for pittance as people pass through the rumblings of life with their fates sealed and their destinies stamped. They don’t have a clue what lies in store for them except that they are lumbered like animals on the day of elections to vote in favour of the masters they have sold their future to. It is a merciless enactment of how the fate of the country is enslaved in the hands of the privileged elite who use the vilest tactics to keep people in perpetual bondage.

Pakistan owes it to the passionate exhortations of Imran Khan to sensitize people to look after their interests and safeguard the sanctity of the country from those who are out to dishonour it. That is why they have increasingly grown conscious of the tragedy that stalks their lives. They have broken the shackles of fear and servitude and are today more vocal than they have been in the past. The manner in which they have responded to Khan’s calls is unprecedented in the political history of the country and the passion they have exhibited at the protest gatherings has been phenomenal. This reflects a paradigm shift: the ones who were clueless about their own bondage and the lack of opportunities they had for improving their lot are today not only vocal about it; they are also raring to act to snatch it from the usurpers. There is this incredible drive which is propelling them forward with boundless passion.

The task of embedding this change is monumental. It is not just a case of struggling to win back your rights. It is not just a moment for demanding what is stipulated in the constitution. It is not just an opportunity for ensuring that state institutions refrain from interfering in the functioning of the government in any manner which is inconsistent with the laws of the land. The challenge is much more formidable than that. The challenge we are faced with is that of shaping a revolution which will alter the way how this country has been reared, how its people think about their rights, and how the siege that the beneficiary elite have laid upon their lives can be lifted. All this has to be secured to free the people from the humiliating bondage they have been caged in.

In the meanwhile, the country has been reduced to becoming a harrowing crime circus, a sickly mafia land. I shall resist the temptation of naming the Don.

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