**Head-on against corruption**

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Imran Ahmed Khan Niazi (IK) took the oath of office as the 22nd Prime Minister (PM) of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on August 14, 2018. As an honest and upright leader, despite being warned, he decided to take the demon of corruption head-on. Perhaps he underestimated the depth of this pandemic that has seriously affected almost every state institution. Today, IK finds himself pitted against the entire system. During his regime, IK had valiantly fought against the demon of corruption; despite odds and setbacks, he held his ground.

Lee Kuan Yew, the great leader of Singapore strongly enforced merit and contained corruption with an iron hand as he believed that these two factors play an important role in nation building. Pakistan started off well, but then lost its way. Till the fateful partyless elections of 1985, the pandemic of corruption was widely controlled. In the 1970 free and fair elections, ideology prevailed over state manipulation.

In East Pakistan, it was autonomy while in the Western wing it was social justice or Islamic Socialism, as it was projected. The term was first mentioned by Dr Khalifa Abdul Hakim in his book, ‘Islam and Communism’. He believed that together with the five pillars of faith, if roti (bread) is added, it brings us very close to socialism. Imran Khan, in his party manifesto, introduced the concept of a welfare state which he termed Riasat-e-Madina.

My friend the great Comrade Parvez Saleh has written extensively about the need to control election expenses as a means of controlling political corruption. Millions are reportedly first spent in election campaigns, billions are then recovered through corrupt practices. He has suggested that fool-proof systems should be put in place to monitor and control campaign finances but the big question of enforcement remains. Widespread corruption may come in the way.

In the Charter of Democracy (COD) originally signed in London by Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, it was agreed to form a Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the South African model.

While IK’s fight to combat corruption is commendable, but lack of convictions after over three years of hot pursuit raises serious questions about the ability of our legal system to combat white-collar crime. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission may be a better option to clean the stables.

Despite being deprived of his position, IK continues to hold his ground with the firm resolve of eradicating the menace of corruption. He remains on a collision course even after threats to his life. Hopefully with the efforts of a few brave and upright officers, together with the direction of the Kaptaan, results will be produced.

On May 20, 2022 the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) de-seated 25 dissident members of PTI who crossed the party line to vote for Hamza. Now the nation anxiously awaits the Long March to set the stage for new elections. It seems the Islamic Republic of Pakistan is finally on a course correction. While his supporters whole-heartedly support IK and believe in his honesty and integrity, getting rid of this deeply-penetrated menace will remain a major challenge. Some out-of-the-box solutions may be required to chain the demon of corruption for all times to come.

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