**[It is positive](https://www.dawn.com/news/1688934/it-is-positive)**

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WE of the generation that lived through the nerve-racking 1977 trauma would like to caution media analysts against giving an overdose of pessimism to the people and predicting an apocalypse. Emotions are high, and people come to blows, but there are cogent reasons why the crisis we are passing through is in essence positive in character. Notice the absence of fissiparous movements, centrifugal tendencies and parochial sentiments.

The harrowing scenes of mob violence bordering on anarchy that my generation witnessed during the movement launched by the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) against the PPP government are part of our history. As today so too then, partisan polarisation gripped society and turned political differences into personal enmity. Families were divided as were friends, office colleagues, and neighbours. Decades have passed but I can say on the basis of my personal experience that I lost many friends, and even though in some cases reconciliation did take place, neither side has completely forgotten the episodes that fortunately didn’t turn slugfests into fisticuffs.

Let the analysts grasp one positive factor. If people are passionately partisan, they are not charged along provincial lines or for ethnic or religious considerations. If a family is a house divided against itself, surely the siblings have fallen out over political loyalties. Guess who a native of, say, Nawabshah feels himself closer to? Is he chummy with someone he looks down upon in his own city if he is a fanatic follower of the other party, or is he closer to a citizen in Kohat and Sialkot who is on his side of the divide?

Somehow, the nightmare America lived through in January 2021 cannot be shrugged off by us. But the one phenomenon that ultimately triumphed was the tenacity of America’s constitution. Twice in the last century, America kept going despite such grave crises as Watergate and the Monica Lewinsky affair.

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The Jan 6, 2021, raid on the Capitol was more than a disagreeable episode, for it had the potential to trigger a conflict whose consequences could have shaken the pillars of America’s federal edifice. However, those who run America prevailed because they remained true to its democratic traditions as exemplified by the stance taken by vice president Mike Pence, who refused to go along with president Donald Trump in the end.

What about Pakistan? A comparison with America would sound odd, but constitutionally speaking there is a world of difference between what this country was in 1977 and what it is now. The 1973 Constitution was then four years old, and the PNA, dominated by religious parties, gloated over Ziaul Haq’s act of treason. What mattered to them was the ouster of an ‘unIslamic, socialist regime’. They were hand in glove with Zia, joined his cabinet without any qualms, flattered him brazenly and — something that will forever live in history — looked on as military courts had journalists flogged.

Today, let us not stretch the July 5, 1977, act of treachery to a point where it goes against the day’s robust, positive realities. The PNA sought a military takeover because they knew what the results of a general election would be. On taking over power, Ziaul Haq promised an election ‘inshallah’ within three months. However, when the election campaign began, the PNA and Zia were horrified to know that PPP rallies were drawing huge crowds. Then — and that is where the act of betrayal prevailed — an ongoing election campaign was called off.

Today, neither the government alliance nor the PTI would want a military intervention or a postponement of the polls because both feel a five-year term is within reach. The ISPR chief’s April 14 press conference over the foreign conspiracy issue made it clear the army leadership has no stomach for a fresh bout of martial law. Moreover, the 1973 Constitution has shown astonishing resilience. In 1977, it was four years old; today the basic law crafted by Z.A. Bhutto is one year short of half a century and commands loyalty. Witness the regularity of transfer of power within the ambit of the Constitution since Gen Pervez Musharraf’s departure and accept the fact that the assumption of power by the coalition took place within the constitutional framework despite the disgraceful behaviour of our legislators.

The present wave of fanatic loyalty to the two power contenders will subside when sanity returns, but it is unlikely that the present turmoil will end in anarchy or in a military putsch. The 1971 conflict concluded tragically because its root cause was ethnicity; today, parochial feelings are nowhere in sight because the Pakistani people’s party loyalties are within the framework of the state created by Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Much to the distaste of the banned TTP and similar groups, it is Pakistani nationalism that reigns. It is non-negotiable, adamantine and centripetal.

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*Published in Dawn, May 10th, 2022*