**In Biden`s reign**

BY A S H A `A R R E H M A N 2020-11-13

THE Americans might still have a few mountains to climb before they can have Joe Biden as their president but the Democrat is ruling over minds in Pakistan.

The US president-elect is behind some crucial events in the thinking of Pakistanis who may only be half serious when they share this crucial secret with the public; but it is also in the minds of Pakistanis who seem to mean it.

The government has finally been unable to prevent bail for Mir Shakilur Rahman, the media mogul who spent eight months in NAB custody.

Who is behind the change in this government mood? Certainly not our journalist brethren who have been running the campaign to free MSR. It is a certain Joe who is going to run our everyday lives for us from now on, pending a final Donald Trump concession of defeat.

An even bigger recipient of the early and original Biden favour as the president of the most powerful country in the world had to be the leader of one of the most notorious parties ever to be born.

As the general plot goes, it appears that the next White House occupant was barely into the lead in Georgia when he realised that some urgent work in Pakistan needed his attention. We believe his intervention in the affair has been thorough.

He was told that an old ally, the PPP, was caught up in an uphill battle in a corner of the globe that needed him badly. The speed with which he reacted was truly worthy of a world power. He did everything that was needed fast and was able to return to his post to pose with patience with that lady who took about as much time to get ready her mobile phone for the mandatory memorable selfie as it takes for an American president to fix an election in a faraway land.

A preferred piece of truth doing the rounds has Mr Biden ringing up the right people in Pakistan to ensure that Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari was not expelled from Gilgit-Baltistan, where he is running an election campaign against giants such as Ali Amin Gandapur and Zulfi Bukhari. This was just the beginning. More fertile and more perceptive minds in the country were keen to claim for the record that BBZ and his desperate party were oncourse to a win in the polls scheduled for Nov 15.

The PPP leader has been working very hard in the area where his party colours have been abundantly on display during his election campaign, a rare sight outside Sindh. I don`t know how many times this line has been repeated, but the scenes have rel(indled among incurable PPP-ites and others hopes that the party could yet return from its current status as a band of the most catchy tunes during a jalsa.

GB is a test for BBZ. It`s going to show theresponse to his hard work as a campaigner trying to rediscover a lost family fortune, retracing the footsteps of his predecessors in territory which had blessed them with proud chunks of riches.

The Bhuttos are still believed to have a special place in GB, although downhill it has become easier for people of this country to not overtly owe to the PPP shaheeds. It`s crucial for the PPP to find some momentum and see how much capital BBZ`s personal appeal can earn the party in a region that is not exactly as unfriendly and non-conducive for his slogans as, for example, Punjab, especially its central parts.

The GB polls are also unique since, at least on the surface, three `major` parties are competing for votes here. A three-way contest in certain constituencies would at least provide an ideal opportunity to assess whether the old assertion, which said that such an equation favoured the PPP, was still valid.

However, much more than the hardworkingimage of BBZ and these old formulae through which Pakistani politics has been measured for long, the jury is on the lookout for `positive` effects of the willingness the current PPP leadership has been showing to get along and work with the more local influentials of national politics.

Since no rules are required to decide issues of favouritism, it is essential that the BBZ gestures perhaps aimed at pleasing any chance sponsors around do not come in the way of his direct patronage by Mr Biden. The good part is that the person who must be aware of the importance of the local elements seems to have undergone the course insisted upon by his mother and made mandatory by his father.

Those who want BBZ to side with Mian sahib`s narrative may shout themselves hoarse. He knows when it`s best for him to miss Quetta as a high-priority tour resort on the opposition`s itinerary and escape to Gilgit.

The simple revolutionaries believe they have been robbed of their victory again. If only Bibi sahiba`s son could stand with Mian sahib`s message instead of forever playing polite with his daughter.

They have little idea that it was Mr Nawaz Sharif again who was playing the October hijacker, taking off in Gujranwala.

Yes, yes... BBZ could be a little more roundabout in some of his recent reactions. He could have tried to pretend, not so much for the sake of old times, for it would be debatable when and if that period existed, but to give some sense of relevance to old-timers.

The warm, almost pre-emptive embrace with which the mature PPP chairman has greeted the recent report on the `kidnapping` of IG Police Sindh has come as a real shock to many. Considering that there was some reference in the report to laxity or laziness on the part of BBZ`s Sindh setup that caused the emotional outburst and then the ugly incident, he could have been a wee bit less welcoming. But then he is in that mood. He is forever smiling in his meetings with those his party has had problems with in the past. There is something in Maryam`s alphabets.  The writer is Dawn`s resident editor in Lahore.