**Enforcing human rights**

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On May 21, 2022 Dr Shireen Mazari, the former minister of Human Rights was arrested by the Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE) of Punjab. She asked for arrest warrants which were not produced. She was pulled out of her vehicle by the Police force of Islamabad and handed over to ACE for onward transfer to Lahore. Her brave daughter, with the help of PTI activists, approached the Islamabad High Court. A hearing was held by the Chief Justice (CJ) late at night. She was set free by the court.

In the shadow cabinet announced by Imran Khan in 2009, Dr Mazari was given the portfolio of Foreign Affairs which is her forte. It was perhaps the ablest cabinet ever, with four members having doctoral degrees of and one medical doctor looking after the Health Department. After the pandemic of the electables that hit PTI after the October 2011 Lahore Jalsa, this team of experts was ignored together with the functional party think tanks.

Despite being a republic since August 1973 after the enactment of the unanimously agreed constitution, Pakistan continues to be governed through colonial era laws. The Government of India Official Secrets Act 1923 took several decades to be replaced by Right to Information Act 2013.

As power was devolved to the provinces, the government of KP was the first to launch the Information Commission in early 2014 while Punjab followed later that year. At the federal level the Pakistan Information Commission started to function in 2018. Now these commissions have become vibrant in obtaining the much-needed information for the public but the colonial bureaucracy of Pakistan continues to hide behind the 1923 Official Secrets Act and the 1935 Government of India Act.

The 1973 constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan has over twenty clauses covering human rights; not one of them has ever been implemented properly. It’s all about freedom. Imran Khan (IK) the 22nd Prime Minister (PM) after being in power for about four years has finally realised that it’s all about freedom and relief to the public. As a leader he has demonstrated resilience and commitment to gain freedom together with a large following of people from across the length and breadth of the republic.

As an activist, I will keep my tradition of participating in the Long March but will keep my fingers crossed on the long-term implications of this effort. A change of approach is needed. Despite the efforts of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and the life long struggle of the great Comrade I. A. Rehman, the ground realities continue to be grim but we cannot give up.

In the land of the pure, political parties champion human rights while in opposition, but they blatantly deny them when in power. State power is used to intimidate for purposes of exploiting the masses. In the words of Comrade Rehman Sahib, “We never recovered from the onslaught on human rights that started during the Ayub Era and has continued since then.” Complete implementation of the 1973 constitution is the best way forward.

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