**Justice system on trial**

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February 21, 2021

A seed only sprouts when the soil is prepared properly; planted at the appropriate time, the right depth and receives moisture. Till then it remains latent. That seems to be the condition of our nation too. Pakistanis are a talented lot, bold and enterprising but they lacked direction, sincere leadership and suitable conditions. I have noticed in the past few months that positive ingredients are coming together to turn us into a nation on the move.

A tall claim in such a negative landscape painted by media! Anchors and analysts compete with each other to portray the darkest picture. They create controversies where none exist just to achieve ratings. My friend Mahmood Awan and I were chatting with a high-profile TV channel CEO the other day. His entire career and focus revolves around program ratings. What gets him ratings? Vicious debate, rude behavior, name calling and obnoxious attacks. He admitted there is no room for sensible or logical programming.

How do you expect truth or real facts to emerge in such an environment? Pakistan faces humongous issues and problems. Negative media and tainted political elite portray it like a 20/20 match, betting on each ball since Prime Minister Imran Khan assumed power. Folks, it is a 5-day test match series requiring total dedication, integrity, and continuous hard work. PM IK is lacking none of the above in nearly three years of governance. Yes, he had a relatively inexperienced team, he may be deficient in some areas, but he gets full marks for trying and never giving up.

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Finally, an environment is emerging where right and wrong are beginning to matter. The Judiciary’s recent actions clearly point in that direction. We have been electing Senators in Pakistan since 1973. In the eighties Chief Minister Nawaz Sharif started a “Mandi”. A street-smart trader, guided by Mian Sharif, he opened the doors of greed and avarice through LDA Lahore. He distributed plots to MPAs, political lackeys, bureaucrats and journalists like candy to bribe and gain favors. Since then, Senate seats are sold to the highest bidders both by PPP and PML (N).

The rates go up every two years with corrupt practice’s footprint widening each time. Party leaders enriched themselves and unscrupulous members of Parliament are bought and sold like cattle. It reached a crescendo in 2018 Senate elections when 20 PTI MPAs were bought off in KP for PPP Senate candidates. A vicious slap across the face of this distorted elite run democracy. Prime Minister Imran Khan reacted by firing these MPAs putting his Government at risk.

The video showing the lowest of the low selling their souls with a straight face is such a disgrace. All Party leaders paid lip service expressing disgust at such wicked practices. PPP, PML (N) and PTI have supported open voting in Senate at various times. Yet in 2021 all except PTI have backed off and knives are being sharpened to do exactly the same. PTI has filed a reference in the Supreme Court on this matter.

The five-member Honorable Bench have taken the bull by the horn. They have taken to task the Election Commission entrusted with maintaining the moral compass of the entire electoral process. As guardians of integrity, they have been wimpy and imbeciles. It is refreshing to see the highest Court of the country stepping up to put an end to this “Mandi”, a disgrace for the nation. It is a first in Pakistan and one prays it is taken to its logical conclusion. A test for Judiciary.

At the height of Hitler’s offensive in WW II, Winston Churchill sized the threat stating “If UK’s courts are functional the Country will survive”. What happens when the guardians of these Courts are the ones committing the attacks? The recent attack on IHC and its Chief Justice by the lawyers is one such black blob on the face of Quaid’s adopted profession. Since Ifitikhar Chaudhry lawyers’ movement, militancy and aggression have become the hallmark of collective behavior by the legal community.

This ruckus was to save illegal chambers constructed on lands earmarked for public’s recreation. The black coats, of which I am one, defamed this noble profession meant to safeguard the rights of the weak. The bullies have met their equal. Previously such events were always brushed under the carpet. IHC bench has refused to brook such nonsense. They have cut through the “stay” orders of unscrupulously accommodative lower judiciary and ordered demolition of illegal structures. Another test for Judiciary. One prays that such upright behavior becomes infectious amongst the Judiciary and other power structures in Pakistan.

I picked up on an order by Chief Justice Lahore. He has ordered steps to improve the efficiency and efficacy of Civil Procedure Code and Criminal Code in providing relief to the masses. A much-needed reform desperately needed to ease the burden of delayed and manipulated justice. We have to wait and see whether these changes get implemented in real time or get discarded into the cruel bin of history as yet another futile effort. Effectiveness of judicial reforms is on trial here.

Reforming a society cannot be a task for individuals. It has to be a contribution by all who enjoy positions of power. Nursing this much abused system and those governed by it is a national challenge. It requires reaching deep into the goodness of your soul and a determined and committed effort by those who matter.

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