**Constitutional rights of the downtrodden**

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Asad Qaiser, the sitting speaker of the National Assembly remarked after meeting the craftiest evergreen politicians, the Chaudhry brothers of Gujrat; the “No confidence motion is a constitutional right of the opposition.”

Finally, their rights have been recognised, together with the much-trumpeted claim of the majority to rule. Unfortunately, there is no talk about the welfare of the downtrodden people of the republic.

Who is there to fight for them? Everyone seems to be silent where it really matters.

In the 1973 constitution, there is a chapter on fundamental rights with several clauses (8 to 28) which cover a broad spectrum, starting from security, to a fair trial, all the way to the right to education (Article 25 A).

Not many debates, bills or ordinances have been presented in the house since July 1977 to cover any one of these pro-people pieces of legislation.

With over a dozen manipulated electoral contests in the last four decades, it is time for the citizens to demand their rights, which have been repeatedly usurped with reckless impunity both by the opposition and the parties that have been in power.

As a Muslim League child, I have painfully watched the hijacking of the founding party of Pakistan. The power game has continued through leadership like the Chaudhrys of Gujrat and the Sharifs of Lahore.

To give the devil their due, the Chaudhry’s have steadfastly stood by the establishment. Except for the Pakistan Muslim League’s (PML-N) recent stint (2013 to 2018), their party (PML-Q) has managed to cling to power. Currently they are at the centrestage of politics as they have positioned themselves well.

It is through such political outfits that the people of Pakistan have been denied their due rights as enshrined in the constitution.

They may yet come out the biggest beneficiaries of the current political tussle between the opposition and the party in power while leaving behind the real stakeholders, the hapless masses.

In the decade of the seventies, it was Bhutto who succeeded in moving politics out of the drawing rooms onto the streets, but the Chaudhrys have brought it back to their arena. All the tail wagers are now showing up there.

The time is ripe for the people of Pakistan to stand up for their rights and push the exploiters off stage on both sides of the house. For the next three months only the fundamental rights of the people should be debated in the parliament.

Both the government and opposition should agree on the complete implementation of Articles 8 to 28 of the consensual document which was signed by all parties in 1973.

After about half a century of delay (1973 to 2022) it is time to get rid of the political ‘scoundrels’ who continue to grow at the cost of the people they are required to serve.

This ‘rogue’ democracy has seemingly no public support; as such it must come to an end for the people’s power to prevail. In the current political tug of war, the masses will be the big losers due to the resulting confusion and turmoil that will follow.

Our elected representatives have continued to fail us since 1985, which must change now for the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to move forward.

The people of the republic have to be served, not exploited. The constitution is an agreement between the rulers and the ruled which has to be followed in letter and spirit.

The question is of fundamental rights of the ruled, not the unbridled powers and opportunities of the rulers. At the end of the day, it is governance, not the government that needs to be changed.

The Punjabi saying “Khoti rahe boor thaley” (the donkey remains under the tree) aptly describes the situation; it is time to unburden the donkey.

The jokes must end, they have gone too far. The people’s power must finally prevail in the form of struggle against the dreaded status-quo and its players.