**Things fall apart**

[Ummar Ziauddin](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/ummar-ziauddin/%22%20%5Co%20%22More%20Articles%20by%20Ummar%20Ziauddin)

February 15, 2021

We are all used to vukulagardi by now. It does not even register as a news – which is alarming by itself. But for lawyers to even outdo themselves – that is rare – still. In Islamabad, on 8th February, goons in black coats damaged the Islamabad High Court building, attacked employees of the High Court, entered the Chief’s chambers; misbehaved – throwing insults, hurling shoes and holding judges of superior judiciary hostage inside their own chambers. The Islamabad Bar has now set new standards – for delinquents.

The press release of the Islamabad Bar Council reads that it takes “strong exception to the illegal acts of the Islamabad District Administration” for “razing the chambers of the learned Advocates”. The statement calls the action of the District Administration illegal even though it is common knowledge in the city that the chambers have been illegally constructed. “Learned” lawyers don’t dispute it. They want CDA to earmark a space for the lawyers to construct their chambers – which is a genuine demand. But that is not a defence of illegal construction nor its justification.

The statement seeks release of the lawyers already arrested and also pleads to “restore the chambers which have been illegally razed.” It then formulates its own threat in these words: “In case the aforesaid justified demands of the lawyers are not addressed amicably, the legal fraternity will agitate the matter at all forums under the leadership of the Islamabad Bar Council and will not rest till the justified demands of the legal fraternity are redressed amicably.” The statement makes no reference to the hooliganism of the lawyers and once again panders to the galleries. Business as usual!

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Lawyers have acted with such defiant criminal impunity because they are aware that there will be no consequences. There were none in the past. We have let so many opportunities slip. And if we miss this bus again- the next time these lawyers would not just “disgrace” the judges in the manner we saw; they would be inclined to do the most heinous of acts.

The bar councils are constituted under The Legal Practitioners and Bar Councils Act, 1973. Their functions are regulatory in nature. Their role is to admit persons as advocates on the roll and for practice before the High Courts, entertain and determine cases of misconduct against advocates and to promote and suggest law reform etc. The representative bodies of the lawyers on the other hand are bar associations that are elected every year – annual election is a part of the problem. But more so, our bar councils have failed to provide a rigorous curriculum for the law schools, they have not regulated entry into the profession and law reforms are simply beyond them. In fact, they have resisted changes in the law reforms only recently, including reforms in the civil procedure code of the country.

It appears that both the bar council and bar association now would only act for political outcomes alone. That is how the members are programmed. They don’t have the capacity to work towards or deliver the mandate of the bar councils or associations. It is because the professional lawyers have yielded space with no alternative plan to offer leadership to the bar. “The best lack all conviction, while the worst /Are full of passionate intensity.” Unless this system receives a nudge; the vested interests in black cloats would consolidate greater power.

The statement of the bar council epitomizes abject failure of the self-regulatory model. It’s all but clear that we cannot cleanse the fountain without outside intervention. Outside intervention must not come from the judiciary though. Every time the judiciary has intervened against lawyers; it has backfired. It backfired in Islamabad too under the present Chief Justice, in the wake of Lahore fiasco and nationwide strikes after it. The Executive, aided by the new legislation by the parliament for regulation of the bars, needs to intervene. And sooner!

*Look, “The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere!” The writer attended Berkeley and is a Barrister of Lincoln’s Inn*