**[Bar Elections 2020](https://nation.com.pk/01-Mar-2020/bar-elections-2020%22%20%5Ct%20%22_new)**

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Each year, during the months of January – February, Bar associations across Pakistan hold elections to choose their office-bearers. And today (Saturday) is election day in the honorable Lahore High Court.

This year, the bar elections (especially in Lahore) are of particular importance for one reason: these are the first bar elections after the PIC incident, being carried out under the shade of its infamy, and will decide what direction our bar associations will take for the coming year.

During the election campaign, each year, court surroundings and chambers are decked up with life-size (and larger) photo-posters of the candidates vying for office of the respective Bar associations. At each turn of the Court premises, every hallway, each Bar-room, there is a junta of individuals “humbly” requesting other lawyers to vote for candidates of their choice. There is that customary reiteration of long-forgotten promises of Bar reform, of humility, and a new sense of purpose in Bar leadership. Periodic endorsement parties, full of self-congratulatory rhetoric, delve upon the “qurbanis” rendered in the fabled Lawyer’s Movement.

And then suddenly, once the election is concluded, everyone goes back to regular life. The posters, plastered all across the court premises, slowly start to rot in a clutter. And the elected officers become local power brokers, (allegedly) reaping personal benefits from their political success.

Year after year, this election frenzy culminates in no real reform of the Bar culture. There is no tangible move towards enforcing ethical standards in Bar practices. No palpable push towards continuing education for lawyers. No introduction of stringent standards for the enrollment of Advocates. No guidance or career-counseling for young Advocates. No coherent policy towards judicial elevation. No review of the strike culture. And, most importantly, no pledge to prevent PIC-esque incidents, or break the yoke of wukulagardi amidst our ranks.

I will be the first to accept that we – the lawyers as individuals, and Bar Associations as institutions – have contributed to the deprecation of our system of justice. That lawyers (even more so than the judiciary!) have the loudest say in determining what cases are brought to our courts of law, how they are argued, and the manner and speed in which they are disposed of. Lawyers advise the clients about which litigation is meaningful, and what is frivolous. We assist the courts in terms of the law and procedure. And most importantly, we are the face and the reflection of our justice system among the litigants, and in society at large.

In this spirit, it is important to summon the honesty to accept that the greatest hindrance in the speedy dispensation of justice in this land, is the conduct and lack of professionalism in our legal community today.

Every day, cases are adjourned because a lawyer for one of the parties did not tender appearance (being “indisposed” elsewhere). And cases are frequently delayed because the counsel was not prepared with the arguments. Is this lack of professionalism not a grave violation of a lawyer’s responsibility, as officers of the court? Is this not a betrayal of the trust that clients place in legal enterprise? And, perhaps most importantly, is it not infidelity to the spirit of law, and to those highest ideals of justice that each lawyer takes an unspoken oath to defend and protect? Can we really then sit in the Bar room, sip tea, and criticize the legislators or the judges for not instituting measures that reduce the back-log of cases?

And about incidents like the PIC ransacking? Or this general culture of strikes?

The truth is that despite its countless gains, one of the most disturbing legacies of the Lawyer’s Movement is this newfound belief that hooliganism, and boycotting the courts, in the best way for us – the guardians of our Constitution – to express a point or register a protest.

Over the past some years, members of our community have beaten-up police officials and media personnel, with impunity. We have thrashed district judges in Faisalabad. We prevented the Sessions Judge of Lahore to work at his post, and threatened him with physical harm. We vandalized the premises of the honorable Supreme Court. Some, among us, pelted stones at the courtroom of Chief Justice LHC, and refused to appear before him (even after a series of contempt notices had been issued). We boycotted the courts in response to media scandals, and terrorism events. We have observed strikes for when a traffic warden misbehaved with a few lawyers. We shut down our courts, when a corrupt business-tycoon alleged corruption upon a prodigal son. And then we proceeded to attack the PIC building, committing cold-blooded murder.

The genie is out of the bottle; and no one knows how to put it back again. With all the talk that surrounds rule of law and reform of judiciary in our land, perhaps more attention is required on the issue of lawyers and Bar associations acting beyond the contours of professional responsibility and ethics. And this issue must be front and center for any and all candidates participating in the Bar elections. Because till such time that we instill a sense of constitutionalism in these officers of the courts, there can be little hope of embracing constitutionalism as our national ethos.

We must not forget that the black coat that we wear, is the same uniform that Mohmmad Ali Jinnah once wore. That we are the inheritors of an unblemished tradition of professionalism. That we live and breathe, in the shadow of giants. And those giants, through the construct of our law and the Constitution, have placed a solemn duty upon our undeserving shoulders. A duty that our profession and its creed will one day shine the light of law in the darkest of corners of this country. That we will be the voice of those who cannot speak, the strength of those who cannot stand, and the hope of those who no longer believe in the future of this land. That through the ideals that we represent and uphold, the oppressed and subjugated masses will once again reinherit the earth.

As the Bar Associations, across Pakistan, enter a new tenure of elected officers, let these ideals be our guide for the coming year, and the times beyond.