**75 years of Life in Freedom: A Moment Of Reckoning (Part II)**

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Pakistan was achieved through a democratic movement and given its territorial making or geographical composition. It could have been kept together by functional democratic institutions as a federal and parliamentary state with adequate autonomy to its constituent states. The third Martial Law in the country by General Zia was a fatal blow to democracy in the new Pakistan. However, it failed to stunt the nation’s aspiration for representative governance.

The struggle for the restoration of democracy in the mid-1980s incurred the wrath of the Junta. The rural regions of Sindh remained ablaze for months witnessing the bloodiest clashes with the security forces. Karachi and Punjab remained indifferent to this heroic struggle. The Junta had already sowed the seeds of ethnic division in Sindh encouraging and patronizing the Urdu-speaking segment of its population to gather into a mafia-like political organization. The new sons of Karachi amassed heaps of weapons and shamelessly engaged in bloodletting. Ironically enough, the first victim of their militancy was the peace, tranquillity and tolerance of Karachi.

Their violent struggle for political clout and the ensuing turf war witnessed the brutal murder of eminent persons including Hakeem Muhammad Saeed. The post-1988 governments failed to bring any respite to Karachi or any improvement in the living conditions of the poor and were rather engaged in their desperate struggle for survival. The civilian presidents were breathing over their necks with draconian powers under the Eighth Amendment. They exercised these powers ruthlessly to send packing home the civilian governments on charges of corruption and incompetence.

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The overthrow of the government of Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif by General Pervaiz Musharraf in 1999 heralded new political chicanery with mock democracy and powerless Prime Ministers. After the elections of 2002, the Metropolis of Karachi, as a matter of political expediency, was handed over to the MQM to prop up the Federal and Provincial Governments in Islamabad and Sindh. The party, weakened by the earlier security operations, rapidly regained its organizational strength, street power and militant prowess to the peril of peace and tranquillity of the Metropolis. They remained the uncrowned king of the city, reining it in a fascist fashion. They continued to have this privilege and power during the successive PPP governments in the centre and the province holding this vibrant city hostage to their whims. On frivolous pretexts, their young motorcyclists could shut it down within minutes harming the country with billions in economic loss. No one at the helm of state affairs would bother about this harm to the country and harassment to the population of the Metropolis.

The General ruled the country for a decade playing havoc with the constitution and judiciary. Under pressure from his Western allies, the General struck a deal with the PPP leader Muhtarma Benazir Bhutto closing her corruption cases abroad in exchange for political partnership. Muhtarma Benazir did not see the dawn of democracy. Her life was shortened by enemies. We have had a hybrid democracy since 2008 ebbing and flowing in choppy waters. The stock of leadership we have is unable to strengthen democratic institutions, and strike a balance in the chronically strained relations between civil governments and military commanders.

The people of Pakistan had harboured aspirations for the development of the country into a modern, moderate and progressive state aspiring to have a political system in which the rule of law, merit, equality before the law, freedom of profession and faith and the liberty of expression and assemblage would reign supreme, with representative governments committed to political and democratic norms, honesty, social justice and economic equity. Their dream is yet to be realised.

Who would not acutely feel the pain and sorrow if the human rights violations are rampant and the forced disappearances continue unabated in his land? Who would be happy at the sight of religious intolerance acquiring xenophobic proportions; corruption and violence becoming endemic and education in public schools, colleges and universities almost collapsing? The population growth is galloping unbridled. The urban and rural regions are devoid of the basic human needs while the economic gap between haves and haves-not is widening. Over 65 per cent of the arable land is held by a small number of landlords, leaving 50 million peasants to live on crumbs sharing the remaining 35 per cent of the land among themselves. What aspect from the above can soothe crying eyes and bleeding hearts?

We have many positive achievements to contrast with the catalogue of our failures. We have progressed well in infrastructural communication, technological and industrial development, defence technology and prosperity in the upper echelons of society. All these achievements over 75 years pale into insignificance when compared to our monumental national failures. We have developed a habit of highlighting our minor successes and finding scapegoats for big failures. We have yet to decide whether we are going to have a theocratic, garrison or a democratic state in Pakistan. The capture of power and state resources by the elite has rendered the life of over 70 per cent of 220 million people miserable. We are caught once again in an intractable political logjam shaking the very foundations of the country. It is no less dangerous than the eventful occurrences of 1970, 1977 and 1999. The strained civil-military relationship seems to be at the heart of this turmoil. The whole nation is gripped by fear and uncertainty. The foreign-aided economy is sinking. The gravity of the situation has forced the military chief to set aside all the pretensions and use his clout with friendly states for financial rescue.

In such a political impasse, the democratic dispensations or wise nations take recourse to the electorate. But we have neither a democratic dispensation in the true sense nor wise leaders. The ruling coalition fears heavy electoral loss and is engaged in efforts to discredit its political challenger. We all know from our experience that disqualifying popular leaders and banning political parties on flimsy grounds have all backfired. Our leaders don’t give two hoots about past experiences.

The nation celebrates the 75th year of Independence in awe and fear.

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