**[Truck face twins](https://www.dawn.com/news/1771485/truck-face-twins)**

[Shahzad Sharjeel](https://www.dawn.com/authors/7601/shahzad-sharjeel) Published August 22, 2023

THEY have the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, we have the Bhutto-Zardari clan. They had a foreign-origin first lady, we could have had one too, but she was hounded out. They have Rahul, we have Bilawal. Both are young compared to their septuagenarian competitors who have been variously and dismissively calling them pappu (prepubescent lad), baby, etc.

The higher judiciary in both countries plays a significant political role. Legislators in both places have an embarrassing number of criminal cases against them, ranging from goat theft to murder. The list of similarities is endless, but where we see a clear divergence emerging is how election campaigns and canvassing are done. The tech side of it has been somewhat replicated by the PTI, but where legwork is concerned, we clearly lag — rallies led from the cool environs of SUVs and biryani-fed sit-ins do not count.

Rahul’s Bharat Jodo Yatra from one end of India to the other and his truck rides in Indian Punjab and Haryana and between Washington and New York are cases in point. Both endeavours were at least partially aimed at dispelling criticism that the top party leadership is disconnected from the street and the reality of life for citizens at home and the diaspora abroad.

Our political elites’ outings are restricted to wading through ankle-deep rainwater in knee-high boots or staged showings at shelters for the homeless and orphanages, where the epitome of their public empathy is, ‘wo aam logon mein ghul mil gaey’(they mingled with the common folk). Imran Khan is in jail, but it is a matter of time before he is allowed to go abroad on health grounds. Neither the referees in robes nor the coaches in uniform would want him permanently ‘out’ as sparring partners are needed even for fixed matches.

Despite Pak-India similarities, there are divergences in poll campaigning.

Some people may come to Bilawal’s defence, citing the history of violence against his family and continuing security threats as reasons behind his lack of street credentials. But the argument doesn’t hold as Rahul’s grandmother and father lost their lives to assassins’ bullets and a suicide bomb; the former while in office, the latter as former prime minister. His last speech in parliament and subsequent statements may have sounded rebellious, but Bilawal should know that one cannot ditch the baggage without renouncing the fortune.

Any politician who can connect with even 10 per cent of the electorate is a force to reckon with, believes Sanjaya Baru, veteran journalist and author of Accidental Prime Minister. Mr Baru, who has witnessed power politics firsthand as media adviser to then prime minister Manmohan Singh, feels that Bharat Jodo Yatra will play an important part in Congress’s resurgence and Rahul’s coming into his own as party leader.

Like Pakistan, the present dispensation in India is trying to knock the opposition leader out of the fray. Rahul has managed to hang on to his Lok Sabha seat through the supreme court’s suspension of a lower court order to unseat him on libel charges for making false accusations against PM Modi.

Among the plethora of charges against him, Imran Khan can face multiple cases for breaching the Official Secrets Act. Legislation in this regard was passed with undue haste by parliament. Many see the legislation as PTI-specific.

Not that Imran has not been cavalier in his handling of classified information, ranging from the cipher concerning a purported US conspiracy for regime change in Pakistan to an alleged statement by a former army chief regarding the fuel gauges of tanks. The PDM alliance’s unseemly haste in pushing through a slew of legislation has hurt the cause of democratic nor­ms as much as PTI’s gleeful de­­clar­a­tions did of being on the same page with the establishment.

Jawaharlal Nehru, during his premiership, told Achariya Kripalani, the Congress president at the time, that if he wanted to know what went on behind closed doors in government meetings, he could join his cabinet as a minister without portfolio, as the Official Secrets Act prevented him from sharing classified information with anyone outside the cabinet. It is difficult to say how much Prime Minister Modi shares with the RSS but his frequent huddles with it along with BJP officeholders are well known.

The Indians have had their accidental prime ministers like Manmohan Singh and Rajiv Gandhi. We have had our share of accidental and dental presidents. Let us hope that the Pakistani voters are allowed to elect their next prime minister and do so carefully, and that there is nothing accidental about it before and after. It is, however, unrealistic to hope that the next dispensation will have no truck with tanks. Bilawal’s belligerent albeit accurate depiction of Modi could make him an early applicant to be the next same ‘pageboy’.

*The writer is a poet. His latest publication is a collection of satire essays titled Rindana.*

[**shahzadsharjeel1@gmail.com**](mailto:shahzadsharjeel1@gmail.com)

*Published in Dawn, August 22nd, 2023*