**A song of resistance, a ray of light**

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What this country has been so pathetically denuded of over the last many years is a quotient of hope. There is virtually no one, across societal divides, who still thinks that living here would be beneficial for them or their families. The rich want to leave here chasing their assets, mostly illicit and stashed abroad, and the poor want to go in anticipation of a better future where their merit would be acknowledged, and their labour rewarded.

This state of hopelessness has not been a sudden development. The decline had been visible for some time, but the ruling elite paid no heed as they were singularly engrossed in inventing ever more innovative ways of looting and plundering the country to amass their mountains of wealth and siphon it abroad. This kept them busy to an extent that they had no inclination left to attend to other things, the gradual destruction of the country being the most important.

Hope usually comes through the functionality of state institutions. With their performance, they inspire people to get involved and help things move along for scaling challenging barriers towards progress. But if the institutions are stalled simply because their transparent and effective operation does not suit the interests of a small coterie of beneficiary usurpers, most notably those vested with the power to rule the country, they generate stagnation which, after some time, starts exuding a pungent smell. That is what we have experienced here in the past many decades as the acidity of this stagnation has continued to grow more stifling with time.

Though those in the seats of power will not concede it, the country is perched on the verge of collapse requiring a mere nudge to go hurtling down. While our debt continues to pile, we need further loans to pay the interest on previously drawn billions. So, with a begging bowl in our hands and clad in designer suits, we go from country to country and institution to institution beseeching for more dole-outs. Other than verbose communiques of support, we secure little in substantive terms. But we don’t feel humiliated and continue remorselessly in our mission to pile on further debt.

What we are confronted with is a monumental challenge that is growing worse with time. But, instead of realizing its enormity and taking remedial steps by initiating an informed and inclusive approach, we remain smitten with eliminating political opponents at the cost of the state and its inherent interests. That is not only increasing our alienation in the comity of nations but also rendering us untrustworthy and unreliable, thus making our challenge even more daunting and formidable. But those in the hollow seats of power, and those who command them, remain beholden to their ill-conceived design of perpetuating the myopic status quo.

But just when one thought that there was no coming out of this deepening quagmire, a light shone through the thicket of dark. It came from nowhere but the institution of the judiciary. Six judges of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) decided to break free of the stranglehold and write their story on a piece of paper. Citing from the experience of being subjected to pressure from the executive and operatives of intelligence agencies, they approached the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) to convene a convention to hear other judges about their experiences.

Instead of being inspired by the brave initiative, an effort was made to stifle it under a pile of executive authority. But when the honourable judge who was appointed to head the commission to investigate recused himself over his dissatisfaction with the SOPs, the matter was referred to the provincial high courts for their input.

More incriminating evidence was contained in the high courts’ submissions which should have spurred urgent action. But no. Ever since then, the matter has been languishing in some pile of files.

But the original effort of six judges has given heart to so many others who have broken the shackles and started speaking their minds through their judgments, honouring their oath to uphold the tenets of the constitution and law. This has changed the shape and tenor of the entire institution which is now basking in the light of a promising morning spelling its freedom from the chains of slavery and subjugation.

While the judiciary may have decided to charter a new course, some other institutions and operatives remain mired in the past and its inglorious practices. The causes could range from the fear factor to inertia caused over decades and the prospect of loss of billions in illicit earnings secured by submitting before the powerful.

Despite some bright sparks emanating from the judicial forums, the overall situation remains despondent. Bereft of any groundbreaking initiative from the power-wielders, the operatives remain caught up in their traditional practices, thus strengthening an unconstitutional and illegal authority that remains unwilling to cede its hold which has been used mercilessly in the past to cause incalculable damage to the interests of the state and the aspirations of the people. This has kept Pakistan frozen in the vestibule of time as one has seen it denuded of hope and the urge to resist the incursions of the despots.

While the power of the powerful enjoys no legitimacy, the one who rules the hearts of the people remains incarcerated in a death cell with no exposure to the outside world. This reflects nothing but an infatuation with what is decidedly a gravely flawed approach of ostracising the popular leadership of the people and, in its place, hoisting those whose past is littered with volumes outlining their crimes and corruption. What is most alarming is the espousal of such people by those who hold real power as the mechanism of hoisting compromised leaders is bound to cause further damage to the state.

The process of untangling from a stricken past is difficult and painful as one will have to cede the appendages of power that one is used to flaunting. But if Pakistan is to survive and get back on course to redemption, this is the only path to follow: let power be exercised by those who have the mandate of the people.

The place for such leaders is not a death cell. They belong in the hearts of the people and that is where they shall continue serenading their song of resistance and spreading the ray of light.

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