**In Search of a Messiah**

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A few years ago, Pakistan pinned its hopes on one man to change its destiny and that man is now languishing in jail – ironically on petty theft charges. In my June 2, 2022 op-ed column I had written: “IK’s main goal is to eliminate all political rivals to monopolise the Pakistani political landscape. A sage would advise him not to live in a fool’s paradise. Pakistan has hung, assassinated or ousted all its prime ministers in its 75 years of history. It is beyond IK to break the cycle ………. the IK phenomenon is a political suicide waiting to happen. It is only a matter of time before his political groupies cancel him.”

The main takeaway from the PTI’s rise and fall is the wicked nature of Pakistani politics. We are perhaps the only country in the world where our ruling elite alternates between ruling the country while sitting in the highest office or spending time in jail. While in power they send their rivals to jail to settle scores, and when out of power, they are jailed themselves by their rivals now in power. This long-standing tradition of Pakistani political leadership is very off-putting and intimidating for anyone who aspires to be the leader who turns things around for Pakistan.

This trend is wholly and solely due to a lack of principles and ethics. In every functioning democracy in the world, a political party has an agenda and a worldview. In Pakistan, political parties only have a leader who offers empty slogans. The PPP hangs on to the person of Z.A Bhutto and their slogan is that of democracy. The PML-N is all about Nawaz Sharif and his populist slogans are rhetorical. The PTI was all about the now-jailed Imran Khan and his expedient slogans kept changing from justice to Medina’s past glory to freedom.

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To enter politics and become a political leader, one requires a considerable fortune and a network of supporters and workers along the length and breadth of Pakistan to host rallies and campaign for him or her. Supporters join a movement for personal gain by being appointed to public offices and receiving financial gains once their leader assumes power. This is true for the PPP, PML and PTI – although PTI also had a few supporters who were driven by patriotism.

This give-and-take arrangement crucial for the development and sustainment of a political leader inevitably leads to corruption. A leader nurtured by stakeholders has to reciprocate the favours he or she has received from those who catapulted him or her to power. Merit gets compromised this way in the pursuit of political power as cronies get important appointments. The system is thus inherently flawed.

The Pakistani nation desires elections and democracy and also hails Islam and the Riyasat-e-Medina of yore. Caliph Umar bin Khattab epitomized the Rashidun Caliphate and he firmly rejected dynastic leadership when someone recommended that his son become the caliph after him. Instead on his deathbed, Caliph Umar bin Khattab created a six-person committee tasked with the responsibility of choosing the next Caliph. Caliph Umar bin Khattab’s way was not in line with the functioning of a modern democracy where every adult citizen votes to elect their area’s representative in the government. Under this system, the votes of an unlettered deadbeat holding a national identity card and a human rights activist lawyer, carry the same weight.

Since Pakistani love Islam and its systems, they should know that Caliph Umar bin Khattab’s method was to appoint the next caliph through a vote of a committee. The committee of the six wise people knew the demands of the working of the state as well as the calibre of those they considered to appoint as the leader. It may be noted that all six members of the committee chosen by Caliph Umar bin Khattab were the ones foretold of paradise by the Prophet (pbuh). As opposed to this, in Pakistan, under the system of a modern democracy, poorly educated feudals with very little understanding of human rights, governance and ethics get elected.. Then these members of parliament choose the prime minister based on their self-interest. This system can never create an honest, able and charismatic leader. It can only empower people who excel at the Machiavellian art of realpolitik.

The system is flawed and offers no hope for any messiah who can change Pakistan’s fortunes. Some time ago, a certain percentage of Pakistanis were pinning their hopes on the revival of the Islamic caliphate. However, after Imran Khan chanted Riyasat-e-Medina ad nauseum, and since the likes of the terrorist organization the TTP, clamor for a caliphate, people have despaired of a religious messiah. Pakistanis no longer see anyone coming to their rescue to transform the nation through just and able governance.

Pakistanis are now trying their best to flee Pakistan. The tragic sinking of the ferry carrying hundreds of Pakistanis in Greek waters was a desperate attempt to escape from their country which offers them no hope.

That said, all is not lost and to despair is to utter kufr or disbelief, as per our Islamic belief. The modern system of democracy may fail at producing a great leader but there are other means too. Muhammad Yunus is one man who transformed Bangladesh from a desperately poor country to a fast-developing economy. He rolled up his sleeves and first worked with the poor and then with the state to transform sectors of the Bangladeshi society and economy one by one. His selfless and untiring work transformed his country. I have discussed in detail his work in my two-part op-ed column published on June 11 and June 14, 2022. India on the other hand has developed thanks to the combined efforts of the men and women in their academia and their business leaders such as Mukesh Ambani, Ratan Tata Narayan Murthi etc. Pakistan’s messiah too is somewhere among the masses — soon to emerge like the golden phoenix.

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