**[Misplaced PTI euphoria?](https://www.dawn.com/news/1604632/misplaced-pti-euphoria)**

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THE next three months will test Prime Minister Imran Khan’s hypothesis that the opposition Pakistan Democratic Movement has run out of steam and is in the process of disintegrating with the coalescing partners PPP and PML-N pulling in different directions.

It was a sign of the prime minister’s supreme confidence in his ability to stay in the saddle that on Thursday he openly suggested he favoured an authoritarian system and blamed democratic dispensations for the country’s lack of economic progress.

The prime minister also termed the 2008-2018 (one tenure each of PPP and PML-N in office) as the worst period in the country’s history. He has in the past expressed great admiration for the dictatorial regime of Field Marshal Ayub Khan.

He said he’d been to China and told there that Beijing charts its course to economic development by planning 18 to 20 years ahead of time, while, the prime minister claimed, Pakistan gets bogged down due to the ‘tragedy’ of elections every five years and, therefore, struggles with long-term planning.

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No denying that China will be the biggest global economy by the end of this decade, overtaking the US in the process but to blame democracy for our slow growth is a bit much. We need only look at other democracies to understand this point; and to study the China model and its key drivers better.

To be honest, this will be a tall ask, given our commitment, or lack thereof, to acquiring knowledge in any meaningful manner. Even when we are unaware of the facts that are in the public domain, we have a remarkable ability to hold forth as confidently, as profoundly as some wise sage.

Let’s look at two key World Bank statistics for the past 40 years, the ‘real’ GDP or growth rates of India and Pakistan and the per capita income. India’s averaged real GDP growth of 6.1 per cent against Pakistan’s 4.8pc.

Today, this has translated into a yawning difference between the two in per capita GDP or ‘purchasing power parity’ in real terms, with India’s standing at $6,997 and Pakistan’s at $4,898.

Since 1947, India has had 17 elections. Not one was disputed. Pakistan has had 11 elections. Apart from one all were disputed. We don’t even need to look at Western economies thriving in democratic eras. Bangladesh will suffice.

(Thoughts on the China model will have to wait as they demand at least one whole column if not more. Let me say comparisons of China and our country would be to talk of chalk and cheese.)

Apart from these World Bank stats, the other worth a mention are the GDP growth figures plotted on a graph for the period 2008-2018 (PPP and PML-N tenures). Apart from the first two years of this decade, the graph represents a consistently rising curve up to 2018. This, despite, the hard time given to the PPP and PML-N by we all know who.

In 2018, the graph starts its sharp downward journey before plummeting to its lowest point in 22 years. Given these facts, it appears, what was said to be the “decade of darkness marred by massive corruption, political expediency and inefficiency”, wasn’t really that.

So, even as the prime minister says the game is over for the PDM, the actual state of play will emerge over the next two to three months. The first marker or pointer will be the Senate elections and the Punjab by-elections for a couple of National and Punjab Assembly seats now vacant due to the death of the members.

The opposition claims that people are angry and fed up with the inflation triggered by massive devaluation and unemployment due to the faltering economy. Therefore, they will nullify any incumbency advantages accruing to the PTI in the by-elections. This claim is yet to be tested at the ballot box.

If the PML-N were to win the by-elections in any significant manner, the party will feel encouraged to offer mass resignations even if the PPP refuses to follow suit. The government may have said it will happily hold by-elections if that were to happen, but the truth is it won’t be easy to control and contain mass mobilisation during scores of by-elections.

If the party does not do as well as it thinks it will in the by-polls, the PPP proposal to move a no-confidence motion against Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar, to start with, may become acceptable to those PDM parties that have not warmed up to it thus far.

Given the numerical strength of the prime minister compared to the Punjab chief minister, the latter seems more vulnerable to such a move. But even that vulnerability will hinge hugely on whether the establishment stays neutral. If it does not, the move could well be stillborn.

Against the backdrop of Nawaz Sharif’s insistence that any in-house change is pointless unless a new social contract is in place and fresh, fair elections are held, the political moves the PML-N makes will be significant.

Whether the PML-N stands its ground or move towards PPP leader Asif Zardari’s view that some sort of reconciliation and change is possible within the existing framework, will depend on how the events unfold post-Senate elections and the Punjab by-elections.

Any mass resignations with a sizeable number of supporters gathered in the capital will bring unprecedented pressure on the powers that be because of the paralysis it would cause. Any further adverse impact on the economy may force the hand of the government’s backers.

To my mind, the state of the economy over the coming few months will most likely dictate the direction of politics in the country. A continued downtrend in the economy, unhappy masses and rising defence needs in a hostile regional environment will be the factors to watch.

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