**Our Politicians Never Learn Any Lesson**

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The Supreme Court, in a recent verdict, admitted that Z A Bhutto was denied all opportunities for a fair trial in Nawab Ahmed Khan’s murder case. It, however, remained shy of overturning its earlier judgement. In the course of the mock trial of Late Bhutto, many known local and foreign jurists had extensively dilated on the legal and juridical flaws of the prosecution’s case. However, the lord judges of Lahore High Court and Chief Justice Moulvi Mushtaq Hussain who had a burning grudge against Bhutto ignored all the glaring legal loopholes. Justice Mushtaq never missed an opportunity to humiliate the former Prime Minister during the hearing.

The Judges of the Apex Court under Justice Anwar ul Haq too succumbed to the pressure of the Martial administration and rejected Bhutto’s appeal by a majority decision. Shockingly, the first democratically elected leader of the country was executed on a split decision entirely founded on the confessional statements of the state witnesses recorded under duress while they were in the custody of the Martial Law administration.

Dictator Zia was determined to send Bhutto to the gallows. On his maiden visit to Balochistan, he called on the ailing Sardar Attaullah Mengal especially to ask him to register an FIR for the murder of his son Asadullah Mengal against Bhutto. He assured the Sardar he would ensure a severe punishment to Bhutto. By then, Bhutto had already been arrested and lodged in prison on murder charges. “Look, General, I have lost many sons in the security operation. Bhutto is already in distress. I do not want to go down in history as a small, spiteful and vindictive man by adding to the sufferings of the fallen man”, was his reply to General Zia. This reflected the high political standards some of our political leaders were then known for.

Had our leaders shown some courage to support the transfer of power to the majority party in 1970, the country, as many agree, could have been saved even as a confederation.

This takes me on a nostalgic journey down the memory lane. We achieved our conscious age when the politics of ideology, nationalism and secular ideals reigned supreme in the country until 1970. The political landscape was dominated by leaders of the standing of Hussein Suharwardi, Shaikh Mujeeb-ur-Rehman, A.K. Fazal Haq, Moulana Abdul Hameed Bhashani, Khan Abdul Wali Khan, Abdul Samad Khan Achakzai, Mir Ghous Bukhsh Bezenjo, Sardar Attaullah Mengal, Khair Bukhsh Mari, Hyder Bukhsh Jatoi, G.M. Syed, Rasool Bukhsh Palijo, Shaikh Ayaz, Fatahyab Ali Khan – just name a few.

Later, ZA Bhutto and his followers – GA Rahim, Muhammad Rashid Shaikh, Dr Mubashar Hassan, Mukhtar Raana, Mairaj Muhammad Khan, Abdul Waheed Katpar and Tariq Aziz – joined the lot of left-wingers. The prominent student leaders from both aisles who readily come to my mind were Liaquat Baloch, Javed Hashmi, Matti-ur-Rehman Nizami, Shaikh Rashid, Abdul Hayee Baloch, Nawab Yousaf Talpur, Iqbal Tareen, Dr Qadir Magsi, Bashir Ahmed Qureshi, Amanullah Shaikh etc. They were famously known for their courage and resilience. They suffered imprisonment but never wavered from their avowed political and nationalist ideals.

Standing in direct ideological confrontation with the nationalists and left-wingers were Syed Abul Ala Maudoudi, Mufti Mahmood, Moulvi Farid Ahmed, Chaudhry Muhammad Ali, Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan and Muslim Leaguers of the fame of Muhammad Ayub Khuhro, Mumtaz Daulatana, Khan Abdul Qayum Khan, Chaudhry Zahoor Illahi, Pir Pagara etc. Both the right and left wingers represented the socio-cultural ethos and ethical values of honesty, mutual tolerance and respect in politics. The affliction of corruption as painfully known today was rarely found in the erstwhile political lot. Even, the first PPP administration did not attract allegations of financial corruption.

The election campaign of 1970 witnessed tough competition between the left-wingers and rightist parties and even between certain religious political parties. Over 100 religious leaders issued an edict that the Late Bhutto preaching godless socialism had fallen out of the pale of Islam. Bhutto had to add the prefix of ‘Islami’ to socialism. Bhutto was subjected to intense criticism by the religious and rightist parties. He retaliated calling some of his opponents derogatory names. They included Khan Abdul Qayum Khan, Asghar Khan, Mian Mumtaz Doultana, Ayub Khuhro and Qazi Fazalullah. The political polarization of 1970 continued unabatedly in the mid1970s because of the strong arm politics of Late Bhutto arresting and jailing many of his political opponents on frivolous grounds.

The Awami League of Shaikh Mujeeb won hands down the 1970 elections capturing all the 160 seats of the National Assembly from East Pakistan. Bhutto’s PPP emerged as the second biggest party with 80 seats in Western Pakistan. He opposed the immediate session of the National Assembly to have time to discuss with Shaikh Mujeeb certain features of the new Constitution to be framed by the Assembly. The Martial Law administration postponed the National Assembly session which triggered violent protests. Bhutto cannot be blamed for the postponement of the Assembly session as he was not in power to dictate his terms to the Generals. It was the Generals’ own decision.

The deadlock between the Awami League and the ruling military junta culminated in a military operation; paving the way for India’s military intervention and the disintegration of the country. It is a fact that no politician of any worth from West Pakistan opposed the military operation in the former East Pakistan. Had these leaders shown some courage to support the transfer of power to the majority party, the country, as many agree, could have been saved even as a confederation.

Our leaders should have learnt a lesson from the shocking debacle in East Pakistan. There was no soul searching and no heads rolled. The findings of the Judicial Commission were swept under the carpet. We unabashedly returned to vindictive and strong-arm politics. It was sad to see all this happening in the government of a democratically elected leader. The confrontation between Bhutto and his nationalist and rightist opponents further intensified in the election campaign of 1977; becoming more foul and disparaging than in 1970.

(To be concluded)

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