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**Saving the PTI - Part II**

Positions of party leadership are now out of reach of Pakistan’s middle-class let alone its peasants and daily-wagers. The PTI, like other traditional parties, is now a rich-boys club. Instead of politically empowering ordinary people of Pakistan, the party’s vision for a State of Medina can’t seem to think of them being beyond the receiving end of charity.

The PTI we see today is not Imran’s original PTI. This twisted version of the party is successfully sinking itself and Imran’s legacy with it.

Maryam and Bilawal have long realized this. They had initially feared Imran would come true on his promises and develop the PTI into a powerhouse where talented middle-class citizens became a mainstay in national politics. They feared empowerment of the common man through local bodies. They feared the depoliticization of the police and the bureaucracy. They feared the implementation of business and industrial policies that provided a level playing field to the middle-class to compete with their businesses.

With the PTI currently acting like just another traditional party, and with age on their side, Maryam and Bilawal know they simply have to wait Imran out. Once he’s gone, the PTI in its current state goes with him.

There are no two ways about it, as chairman of the party, the buck for this mess stops with Imran. Whatever the electables did to the party, they did it right under Imran’s nose with his full backing.

To be fair to Imran, at the time, it was probably hard to resist the allure of deep pockets and political resourcefulness such as that of Jahangir Tareen. The old-guard, as sincere as they were to Imran’s cause, were organizationally always playing catch-up with the demands of the party’s growing popularity. There were significant differences and bickering among them with every petty squabble taken straight to Imran for mediation. It must have been exhausting for him. Jahangir provided a stress-free package: planes, personal assistants, electables, all through one man.

True champions accept failure and quickly turn it around into an opportunity for growth and improvement. This process is second nature to Imran Khan, which is why I personally haven’t lost hope in him. But he must change tact – and do so immediately.

Being at the helm of state machinery for almost three years now, he should be convinced there is no problem the country faces that can be solved within his lifetime. And, with the PTI in its current state, unable to carry out Imran’s vision after him, any improvements made by his honest leadership will be undone in a matter of weeks after he’s gone.

Imran must therefore focus on the party and resurrect its original identity, tearing off the mantle of traditional politics that has taken hold of it. He needs to leave behind a party that is able to select competent people from ordinary families on merit, and provide them the resources to get elected.

Immediate steps he can take towards this end would include activating the PTI’s urban middle-class professionals to work on three objectives: raising funds, conducting a fresh intra-party election and reactivating the party’s policy wings.

The first two will be crucial if the PTI is to have any hope of organizing itself to successfully campaign in the next general elections.

The intra-party elections should form the selection body that distributes the majority of the party tickets. A quota of party tickets should also be reserved for the party’s professionals and members of the policy wings.

If we had not abandoned the policy wings, we could have operated a system where each minister was provided a team of policy experts bankrolled by the party that supported him or her in the execution of their responsibilities. These policy experts could at the same time report on performance back to the party and the prime minister. In this way we would have operated along the same lines of political parties in the developed world.

In the same vein, if we had not abandoned our elected local bodies officials, we would have had an army on the ground acting as the eyes and ears of the party. They would have aided in implementation of policies, including Covid SOPs; provided a feedback loop monitoring the effectiveness of policies; and kept a check on the disbursement of development funds.

Together, the professionals, policy wings and grassroots party officials would have presented checks and balances ensuring the original party ethos are maintained.

There should be no doubt we lost a lot more than whatever we gained by following the electables-strategy. If we are wise, we might choose to learn from the lesson and make it the blessing that makes up for all the losses.

Finally, Imran should consider stepping down as PM to focus on saving the PTI. We need him to build the party instead of getting bogged down in untangling a national mess that will take decades to fix.

Imran is lucky to have Asad Umer by his side. Who better than Asad to become the PM. He is the only person, after the first cabinet shuffle, who had the character to choose sitting on the backbenches than to accept just any ministry like others did. This is the personification of the PTI’s ethos and the PM Pakistan deserves after Imran. Why not give him the position now and free Imran to save the PTI

Concluded

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