**[Year-end yearnings](https://www.dawn.com/news/1596985/year-end-yearnings)**

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FEW people in the world have been so consistently betrayed by their leaders, governments, political parties and security institutions as the people of Pakistan. They have been lied to; denied basic human rights, dignity and entitlements; robbed of essential human development resources to finance elite priorities and lifestyles; induced to look to the hereafter for justice, etc. Within this anti-democratic and anti-people system, minimal alleviating initiatives are touted as the fulfilment of promised reforms.

The PDM keeps reiterating its resolve to topple the PTI-led government. It alleges the government has reneged on all its campaign promises, and instead of providing good governance it is covering up its incompetence by a vendetta against the political opposition. The PDM insists the PTI was ‘selected’ by the ‘deep state’ to govern in subordination to it. The real power centre is no longer shy of making clear, if not public, that it indeed rules the country. Needless to say, both the PTI and its benefactors deny this. The PTI has its own counter narrative, while the patrons insist they are above the political fray. The people, however, see what they see, even with eyes that try not to see.

There is a widespread view among the political intelligentsia that the PDM’s narrative is not without merit. But it hardly lies in the mouth of leaders of discredited parties to make accusations, given their respective contributions to the current state of the nation. Even if the PTI government is fast forfeiting its legitimacy, the fact remains that the opposition is made up of persons who have demonstrably and comprehensively failed the country on more than one occasion. Accordingly, returning the country to their tender mercies would be as much a betrayal of the people as continuing with the current dysfunctional dispensation.

Does this in any way justify rule by unelected and unaccountable structures? Certainly not! Such rule, both overt and covert, has been tried and tested before and, without exception, has left the country in worse condition. It took the country to, or was led into, wars with disastrous consequences that are still with us. It stymied the maturing of political and civil society, and created the myth of the need for praetorian political supervision.

Elite constituencies win or lose, the people forever lose.

Today, ‘hybrid war’ is being waged against the people. A shadow democracy fronts for undemocratic rule. Those who have constitutional legitimacy have no power largely because they have no competence; and those who have power have no need for competence and absolutely no constitutional legitimacy. The people who are driven towards life below the poverty line are too distracted by the need to survive, while those precariously or safely above this line are either too insecure to do much or too secure to want to do much. Elite constituencies play games with each other and, win or lose, the people forever lose.

Meanwhile, looming existential challenges accumulate, converge and descend upon Pakistan without any impact on governance. There is neither capacity nor will to mobilise the resources of the people to meet these challenges for fear they may realise their potential to bring about genuine democracy. What is to be done? The answers, both generally and in specific detail, and both ethically and technically, have long been available. Implementing them, however, has been impossible because of the powers that be. So where do we go from here? The answers are similarly known and irrelevant. Incremental change within a detrimental system will not do. Handing the economy over to the IMF has always been a deliberate ploy by the elite to preserve the socioeconomic status quo and criminally cast the working and middle classes into the hell of ‘structural adjustment’ without any prospect of relief other than palliative measures. We’ve done this 21 times, so it has become the norm.

Let us mention just a few of the things we should ardently hope for but not really expect in 2021. The prime minister gives a nation-wide accounting of his government’s performance, including the state of implementation of promises made once a month. The media and the opposition are afforded every opportunity to assess and criticise the government’s performance without fear of consequences. The prime minister regularly attends parliament and institutes a regular question-hour session that is televised live. The influence of corporate money and security constituencies in parliamentary decision-making is markedly reduced. Budgetary priorities are rationalised to provide adequate basic human development services such as healthcare, education, human rights protections, civil service and judicial reforms, financing a Green New Deal to keep climate catastrophe at bay, etc. Defence allocations and expenditures are subjected to parliamentary accounting, scrutiny and debate in the context of competing national priorities.

‘Civil-military relations’ are not allowed to undermine the constitutional and democratic imperative of civilian supremacy. Divisive and hate narratives are effectively prohibited no matter the political cost as they tear the fabric of a national political society. The three smaller provinces develop a genuine sense of increased and equitable participation in the national project through a genuine devolution of power to the provincial and local levels of governance. Disappearances are stopped. The voluntary creation of more provinces to bring governance closer to the people and to balance inter-provincial relations is encouraged. Long-held perceptions of corruption and malfeasance in government and political institutions, which render the personal integrity of a national leader irrelevant, are significantly reduced and reflected in reputable international indices. The miserable spectacle of corrupt elites endlessly cursing each other in a joint enterprise to defraud and cheat the people is ended. The judiciary, including NAB, become beyond reproach.

In conclusion, a vigilant and organised public opinion that finds expression in a free, professional and responsible media is an essential assist for an elected government to deliver on its pledges. The power establishment must depoliticise itself, stay within the confines of the Constitution, and allow or even facilitate a transition from illiberal and illusory to inclusive and participatory democracy. That would, indeed, be a contribution to Pakistan’s security and stability.

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