**Stalling change**

On **Jul 5, 2022** [Dr Farid A Malik](https://nation.com.pk/authorpost/columnist/dr-farid-a-malik/)

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan (IRP) has been struggling for change ever since it came into existence on August 14, 1947. After the assassination of the PM in 1951, the slide started, which continues unabated till today. However, the quest for freedom has continued despite the coercion of the state apparatus. In the late sixties, it was Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (ZAB) who parted ways with his mentor Ayub Khan and challenged the rule of the first usurper of the republic. In November 1967, Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) was launched in Lahore as a progressive movement for democracy and change. In October 1968, when the dictator decided to celebrate his decade of progress which for the majority was more of a period of decadence, street protests started all over the country. By March 1969, the Ayub era came to an end, followed by elections in 1970. The rest is history, as they say. While Bangladesh emerged on the world map, ZAB picked up the pieces of what remained of Quaid’s Pakistan.

The transition to real freedom started in both wings of the original Pakistan. ZAB had prevailed in the 1970 electoral contest with the help of the progressives. The ‘comrades of change’ were on his team. In Lahore, Dr Mubashir Hasan polled the highest number of votes. The ‘sarkari’ Muslim League had to bite the dust. Under the leadership of a popularly elected PM, hope was in the air. ZAB moved fast, in the year 1972, an interim constitution was promulgated with the martial law lifted. Work started on a permanent version of the document. On August 14, 1973, a constitutional republic emerged under an elected PM. While Bhutto’s party was in power at the centre and two provinces (Punjab, Sindh) Balochistan and KP (NWFP) were ruled by a coalition of Wali Khan’s National Awami Party and Mufti Mahmood’s Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam. While the democratic order was taking roots, the negative forces of the status quo started to regroup and succeeded in surrounding the PM. One by one, the comrades of change were sidelined. Progressives like Dr Mubashir and Mairaj Muhammad Khan were out of the cabinet. In 1975, ZAB dismissed the provincial governments of the opposition followed by military action in Balochistan. It proved to be the beginning of the end of the era of democracy and freedom. In early 1977, when the PM dissolved the assemblies to seek a fresh mandate, his team consisted of those very individuals against whom he had waged a valiant struggle for change. The party idealogues were either out of the party or sidelined and ignored. When the crunch time came, ZAB was isolated with no one to fight for him or his cause except for his wife and daughter. The forces of the status quo were back in the driver’s seat while the Quaid-e-Awam rotted in his death cell. Zia’s ‘dark ages’ that started on July 5, 1977 continue to haunt the nation till today.

On October 30, 2011 the ‘soldiers of change’ regrouped at Minar-e-Pakistan under the leadership of Imran Khan (IK), a son of the soil. Hope for change and freedom was re-kindled. When the caravan of hope arrived at the Mazar-e-Quaid on December 25, 2011 the team had been changed. Instead of the ‘comrades of change’ IK was surrounded by the stalwarts of the status-quo. While ZAB entered the office of the PM with the progressives, IK was seriously handicapped as several retrogressive members were on his team, those who had been in the corridors of power before but delivered nothing worth mentioning, their track record was poor. While IK talked about his experts in the party, the political ‘mercenaries’ around him made sure that they were kept away. Now that the chips are down, IK has decided to reach out to the ‘comrades of change’ with whom he had started his political struggle. Hopefully, some lessons have been learnt. While ZAB never got a second chance, IK has managed to get one with his popularity on the rise. His Azadi March has large-scale public support. With the public’s trust, his chances to stage a comeback are bright.

The person at the top can make the difference by selecting low or high-flying team members. The fate of 220 million Pakistanis hangs in the balance. In a world driven by technology, only change is permanent which has been denied to the people in the land of the pure. The enemy is within, there is negativity in the system that must be removed, not ignored as has been the case in the last 75 years. Structural, not cosmetic changes are required. While ZAB tried in the decade of the seventies, IK is currently leading the charge.

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