**Pakistan is the destination**

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The Friday Column

By Raoof Hasan

It seems there is nothing static around us these days. Everything seems to be in a perpetual flux, a kind of movement which is taking us into alleys that had not been accessed before. The realities of the time are dawning in different hues and shapes, and it is difficult to ignore them as they come laden with indomitable passion. At times it appears as if we will be washed away in their intrepid currents.

The movement that commenced with the unconstitutional removal of the Khan government through a foreign-engineered vote of no-confidence has gradually morphed into a revolution for restoration of Pakistan’s sovereignty and honour. Such a prospect would have been a million miles away from the minds of those who engineered the plot principally to stop Pakistan from pursuing an independent foreign policy that would safeguard its interests and shape its future. Instead, it wanted to plunge the country back into becoming a vassal state to do the master’s bidding.

The most credible proof of the veracity of this projection is the government that has been put together for implementing the project. It mostly comprises alleged criminals wanted by the law who are out on temporary relief by the courts. They are accused of having committed huge financial crimes which left behind an indelible trail of tell-tale marks. Instead of responding to the allegations in the courts of law and secure exoneration, the matter has been delayed by resorting to petty technicalities including making themselves unavailable at the hearings. Consequently, the cases have dragged on for months without a decision in sight with the alleged criminals being the principal beneficiaries. One such person sits as the prime minister of the country and the other is purporting to have been elected as the chief minister of Punjab. A fair number of the cabinet members are also out on bail from the courts of law. This makes them excessively vulnerable before the forces which have engineered their induction. The question that is being asked is: do such people have the credibility to defend the interests of the state before the very forces which are the architects of their present sojourn in power?

This, in fact, has added to the intensity of the divide that one is witnessing in the country. With an unprecedented number of people responding to Imran Khan’s calls to participate in rallies and protests, there is practically little support forthcoming for the concoction which has taken shape in the wake of the VONC. Its members are actually being heckled whenever they are spotted in public in an expression of intense displeasure at what people believe has happened in the country through a process of intervention that unfolded involving foreign hands as well as local collaborators and facilitators. This has been perceived as a clear assault on Pakistan’s sovereignty and honour which people have set out to restore in earnest.

It is also a reality that it is Khan who has the people on his side. He is calling the shots and has the support that is needed to take the battle forward. This is vociferously demonstrated by the mammoth attendance at his protest rallies in all parts of the country. So far these have been extraordinarily peaceful, but will they remain so when, by the end of the month, these protests take the shape of an Independence March towards Islamabad? The desperadoes sitting within the folds of the government may have different ideas and resorting to violence may be a key instrument that may be used as a means to save their citadel of power. But will that salvage the day for the wobbly fabrication?

One thing is certain: Pakistan is poised for a change. But it is also true that such a change could have been moulded in a peaceful manner which, unfortunately, has not been the case and we stand on the verge of some turbulent times. We have been pushed this far because of the ill-advised role that some state institutions have played in the matter. The avoidance of violence in the battle that is looming will also depend greatly on the role that institutions end up playing when confronted with the fallout of the events that are likely to follow. The judicial role has, in fact, been a major catalyst in the crisis. There are many stories meandering through the grapevine which one would not like to believe. However, the institution will likely have a decisive role in keeping the situation manageable. For that, it may have to take stock of the ground realities and demonstrate a more just and even-handed dispensation to deal with the potential challenges of the ensuing situation.

A change is inevitable. It is already taking shape. An unjust system cannot prevail, particularly when people have been effectively sensitised to this deep-rooted malady. For long they have suffered the ravages of an inequitable exclusion from the mainstream of national life. They have survived on the fringes on the throw-away morsels of the privileged and the powerful segments which usurped the riches of the state and held within their control all the avenues to progress honourably.

Coinciding with the advent of Khan in the annals of power, this has all changed irreversibly in the last few months. He brought about a paradigm shift in the way people thought of these things. They have cast off their fears. They are no longer afraid of raising their voice. They are no longer fearful of the consequences of their struggle. They are no longer willing to watch from the sidelines the loot and plunder unleashed by the privileged lot. They no longer lack the confidence in criticising the role of institutions. They are conscious of the grave injustices perpetrated and, more importantly, they are determined to bring about a meaningful change.

This is the crossroads where Pakistan stands today. The process that has been set in motion is irreversible. The only factor that may help matters from slipping out of control is for state institutions to play a judicious role. They must understand that Pakistan is as much the country of the suffering millions as it is theirs. These people have set out to reclaim their inherent right to the ownership of their country. They are leading a colossal movement which is charged on the scent of their dream.

A sovereign and honourable Pakistan is the destination. Does anyone have a reason to oppose that?

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