**Ominous ides**

B Y F.S. AIJAZUD D IN 2021-02-18

DEMOCRACY in the United States was killed on Jan 6, 2021, when the US Capitol building housing the Senate was stormed by a mob incited by former president Donald Trump. It was buried in a ballot box on Feb13, when 43 out of 50 Republican senators voted not to impeach Trump.

That murder of democracy is being mourned by 81 million who voted for sanity and celebrated by 74m followers of former president Donald Trump. Its wake shall continue until 2022 when the next Senate elections take place the first mid-term electoral assessment of President Biden`s performance.

Their result might disturb the presently poised 50:50 balance between the Republicans and the Democrats in the US Senate.

Impeachments are essentially bloodless assassinations. Robert Clive`s impeachment trial, for example, lingered from 1787 to 1795.

It ended with his acquittal, but destroyed his reputation, his wealth and his health. Since the 1860s, three US presidents have been impeached Andrew Jackson (1868), Bill Clinton (1998), and Donald Trump (2019 and again in 2021). None was convicted, which meant they could continue or hold public office again. Richard Nixon is the only US president who, when threatened with impeachment in 1974, escaped the guillotine by resigning.

Winston Churchill once observed that his 19th-century predecessor Lord Rosebery had the misfortune of living at a time of `great men and small events`. Trump and many leaders of our time are (in Richard Nixon`s words) `small men trying to cope with great events`. A leader`s greatness, Nixon analysed, became apparent only when he or she was challenged to the limits of his/her ability. He contended that the challenge of war brings forth qualities that can be readily measured, and though `the challenges of peace may be as great [,] the leader`s triumph over them is neither as dramatic nor as clearly visible`.

In this World War III against the global pandemic Covid-19 virus and its inventive allied mutations, wartime conditions have been created during peacetime. It is a new form of a Cold War. The colder, the better, for what matters is the temperature at which these vaccines can be safely stored.

Producing nations the United States, Great Britain, Europe, Russia and China are winter-bound. Our subcontinent is in a state of thaw, with forewarnings of a punishing summer. One wonders when, how, from where and at what cost over 200 million vaccines times two doses will become available for every Pakistani still at risk? We will get what we can afford. Will it be the Sputnik or the Sinopharm? Remember: centuries ago, the Chinese inventedlethal gunpowder. The `Wuhan`virus is their latest lethal of fering to civilisation.

Successive Pakistani governments havehandled epidemics ineptly whether polio, hepatitis, dengue or now Covid-19. Noisy campaigns to increase public awareness of their dangers are invariably followed by periods of Trappist silence. Government health of ficials obviously believe these pandemics can be shouted down into submission.

On the broader plane of national governance, the fissures between our provinces and the federal government are deepening. The Punjab and KP, with the encouragement of the federal government, have assured their residents medical coverage through Sehat health cards. Yet, Pakistanis are said to live also in Sindh and other provinces. Or must they resign themselves to being treated as step-siblings? History has not forgotten the federal-provincial frictions when the Benazir Bhutto governments ruled in Islamabad and Sharif governments governed Punjab. These are now being replayed in the PTI`s endless honeymoon with its favoured inamorato Buzdar`s Punjab, to the chagrin of the PPP governmentin Sindh. Islamabad pillories Sindh as a caricature of incompetent administration, inefficient governance, and venalcorruption.Itslatest rebuke is inexplicable. For the forthcoming Senate elections next month, the PTI Banigala has fielded two candidates -Faisal Vawda and Saifullah Abro both unacceptable to PTI Sindh.

Allegations have already begun to swirl in the murky swill of Islamabad`s politics that Senate seats are being priced. Old videos filmed during the last Senate elections are being aired (like reruns of television dramas), showing villainous politicians accepting taintedhandouts.

Af ter watching the shenanigans during the impeachment trialin the US Senate,it is comforting to know that moral degradation is not a Pakistani product, invented in Pakistan. It is simply perfected here.

What is it about the word `senate`? Why does it appear like some rosy apple, hung high, desirable, but eaten hollow from within by worms? The Pakistan Senate elections are scheduled for March 3. It is a month chilly with omens. Beware the Ides of March, Julius Caesar was warned on his way to the Senate.

And how did his assassin Cassius describe fellow senators? `We petty men ... peep about.

To find ourselves dishonourable graves.` The writer is an author.

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