**Demise of the Charter of Democracy?**

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After sixteen years, the Charter of Democracy (COD) has been all but scrapped. The COD was signed by Nawaz Sharif (NS) and Benazir Bhutto (BB) on May 14, 2006. After her assassination in the year 2007, Bhutto’s party was taken over by Asif Ali Zardari.
Coming from a business family, I was always told that real success comes through honest hard work, not through short cuts and manipulation of state power through political influence as has been the case in the last about forty years (1977 to 2018).
In the decade of the seventies, ZAB stood for free and fair elections on the basis of one-man, one-vote (adult franchise) and the redistribution of wealth, while Sheikh Mujib demanded provincial autonomy. Both leaders demanded major course correction. After the unfortunate civil war in the eastern wing and the break-up of Jinnah’s Pakistan, ZAB picked up the pieces of what was left.
A major rebuilding process was started which included the formulation of the constitution, revamping of the nuclear programme and basic/defence industrialisation. In the current political scenario, Imran Khan (IK) seeks another course correction to put an end to the ‘Zia Dark Ages’, which destroyed most civilian institutions. Despite his heroic struggle, the legal system has failed him badly. Adjournments after adjournments have been the norm.
The IK I know will neither withdraw nor surrender. I remember the words of Wali Khan, “Na Bikthe hain, na Baghtay hain” (Neither saleable nor runaway). He will fight till the last ball no matter what the odds are stacked against him. In his own words: “I will fight till my last breath”.
Currently there are no cases against Bilawal Zardari, he may still have a chance if he breaks loose from the past and acts more like a Bhutto. His illustrious mother had signed the COD. Though I am not in favour of dynastic politics, I personally think Fatima Bhutto is the rightful heir of the Bhutto legacy. The COD could have established real democracy in the country.
Pakistan started off as the ‘land of the pure’; it is time to restore its purity. The task at hand is not easy but the ‘task master’ is equally battle hardened to deal with the corrupt and to clean up their mess. Being the only functional institution in the country, the Armed Forces have a major role to play in this crusade. In the nineties, the then COAS General Jehangir Karamat sided with the forces of democracy; he thwarted the coup attempt against an elected government.
His appointment was on merit under the principle of seniority, no one was superseded. Now that the appointment of a new chief is being considered, the selection process should be revisited. Like the judiciary, for the sake of transparency, the seniority principle should be applied here as well.
In addition to external threats, the republic faces serious internal fissures. IK stands out as a beacon of hope, a lighthouse to direct the young and the restless so that they come ashore to build ‘Naya Pakistan’, the land of the pure, able and brave.
In other words, it would be a one-on-one contest between PTI and PDM, quite similar to the 1977 electoral contest between PPP and PNA (Pakistan National Alliance). Hopefully the same mistakes will be avoided this time.
A lot of water has flown under the bridge between the years 1977 to 2022. If the people’s mandate is manipulated this time, there will be trouble. Free and fair elections are the only way forward. History sides with the righteous, the forces of honesty will prevail.

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