**Things Fall Apart II**

[Ummar Ziauddin](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/ummar-ziauddin/" \o "More Articles by Ummar Ziauddin)

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Lawyers are not allowed to enter the High Court premises. We need to satisfy the law enforcement personnel that we have a case to argue before we are allowed in. The policeman at the gate verifies the credentials of the lawyer; checks if the lawyer is not one of the suspected terrorists as he skims through his list and then determines whether it is safe to let that lawyer in. These precautions are being taken in the wake of vandalizing of the High Court by the black coats aka black terror. Today, all lawyers are suspected terrorists unless proven otherwise; that this is still a rebuttable presumption is hardly comforting. As a community, the Islamabad Bar has fallen into a bottomless pit and its keep getting worse by the day. What a great fall, humpty!

The writer of the column certainly did not imagine such a day would arrive. That our entry is barred from our own workplace; that the Rangers are deployed to protect the court premises from lawyers; that lawyers are imminent and present danger; that a call needs to be made whether it is safe to let lawyers into the premises of the Court and that raids are being conducted or planned to arrest the suspected terrorists in town. They say, a sense of humour was given to man to console him for who is. Lawyers; when we sit down with colleagues, we reflect on these developments and how low we have stooped; one response we offer is to laugh it all off. But even self-deprecatory humour this time would not cut it. How do you motivate yourself as a lawyer and keep slogging in this system?

The Islamabad Bar Council responded on 16th February, 2021 stating “while no …. words can justify the series of the unfortunate events, which unfolded on 08/02/2021, at the same time, one has to look at the cause…”

The honourable Chief Justice of Islamabad High Court on 11th February, 2021 apprised both the Pakistan Bar Council and Islamabad Bar Council about the “grave misconduct of members of the legal fraternity”. He penned: “Despite the grave nature of the incident, I have chosen to write to you in the first place, as I cannot imagine that the statutory regulatory authorities would remain oblivious to an event of such magnitude causing grave consternation to all right-thinking members of our society.” The “faith” reposed by the Chief Justice has received a lukewarm response from the Bar Councils.

The Islamabad Bar Council responded on 16th February, 2021 stating “while no …. words can justify the series of the unfortunate events, which unfolded on 08/02/2021, at the same time, one has to look at the cause…” The cause, according to the response, being demolition of the lawyers’ chambers. On issue of taking appropriate action, the response read: “My Lord, let us assure you that if the requisite details are provided to the Islamabad Bar Council about the complained misconduct, the Bar Council shall commence proceedings in accordance with law.” No action has been taken as yet. The stills and video footage have been shared by the Islamabad High Court.

The events of 8th February, 2021 cannot simply be diluted and reduced as a reaction to razing of chambers. It was an act of sheer madness – so daft on the scales that to simply call it a reaction, and not an independent act of vandalism, would be to act as accomplice.

The non-committal response from the Islamabad Bar Council is unfortunate but not unexpected. The incumbency-constant keeps the Bar Council from taking the right decisions. Members of the Bar Council owe their power, title and office to the members of the Bar. And the right decision in this case is not suspension of licenses but outright cancellation. Those who stormed the High Court have no place or should have no place in this profession. Would we get that decision in the next coming weeks? Well, we know better!

One can argue that the response of the honourable judges to the storming of the Court could be reviewed too. Today, more than ever, this Court needs to exercise restraint. The Court has issued contempt notices to prime suspects. But it should not proceed to frame charges against the mob leaders. Every time the Bench confronts the Bar; it stands to lose and not gain – regardless of the outcome. Let the regulatory body and the law enforcement take appropriate actions against suspects and the Court should leave it to their better judgement. It is a difficult call but one that would enhance the credibility of the Court in the long run – as today’s Court would always be remembered as the one, that despite the odds, chose not be the judge in its own cause.

“A shape with lion body and the head of a man” would not resurrect “out of Spiritus Mundi” and rescue this profession from ignoble vigilantism. The actions of a few have scarred the entire fraternity. The Bar Council needs to be a little more than an innocent bystander and act decisively – not just for today for the future of this profession too. Chambers can be legally constructed again but damage to honor and dignity of the profession, also contributed by omission of the Bar Council to act against miscreants, would be irreparable!

*The writer attended Berkeley and is a Barrister of Lincoln’s Inn*