

Anything can happen in Pakistani politics. We can merely observe what deal the Saudis or Anglo-Americans can secure with the army and corrupt politicians.

Bangladesh or Pakistan?

The long suffering Pakistani people are watching serious interference in their lives by foreign groups and an unseemly bout of horse-trading between power brokers. None of the competing groups are offering an alternative economic vision for an extremely poor population. Meanwhile, leaders of civil society agitate for democratic freedoms. While they are maintaining a brave rearguard action, they must know that even if there were a free and fair election, there would be little positive benefit for the country. They saw Bhutto and Sharif both bring the economy to a standstill over twelve years. Musharraf can boast of economic growth data, less so about how the fruits of that growth have failed to trickle down beyond the business and middle classes.

Not to say our situations are at all comparable; nevertheless it is worth noting, funnily enough, that the previous paragraph could also have been written about Bangladesh.

As we well know there are historical reasons for such similarities. It is imperative that as Ekushey and then March 26 arrive, we face up to the unpalatable fact that there is a pronounced pro-Pakistan tilt among too many of the elite in Dhaka. They will camouflage their true alignment with bouts of nationalist rhetoric. After all, even Jamaat can claim, with a straight face, that they were Bangladeshi nationalists in 1971. They hope that time will erode the memories and that they can re-write history.

Nevertheless, we should not focus only on Jamaat and old Muslim Leaguers. Their leaders from that era deserve to have their records examined and be prosecuted. That goes without saying, though it has taken more than three decades for intellectuals to realise that the constitution allows trials.

That process is all about looking back and drawing a line once and for all. While we need to do that, we should not also wallow in grief and continually hark back to the golden age of liberation struggle, while covering up the strategic mistakes made by most of the national leadership of that era.

I am more interested in what Pakistan means as we look forward. In particular, what does it mean to the elite who have never given up their sympathy for Pakistan? It reached its apogee during the period of the last regime. Given we are in a state of transition, it is opportune for us to take a new look at what motivates our elite and where it is going to take us.

It is up to ordinary Pakistanis to decide their own fate. The tragedy is that they have never been able to. I do not argue for the dissolution of that state. I just cannot see it survive because no progressive political force looks like forming in the near future. Instead, I would prefer we thought more about the interests of Bangladesh and think anew about what we need to do for our own benefit.

For instance, I am a firm believer in close relations with the Seven