



A revolution for Pakistan?

**By
Dr. Muzaffar Iqbal**

Jasmines are about to blossom in Islamabad, but is there any possibility of a Jasmine revolution in Pakistan? Such a revolution began in Tunisia, it arrived in Egypt and then spread to several other Arab countries with mixed success. Can Pakistan be on its itinerary?

The Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions depended on the resilience of the civil society and youth against terrible odds. The ambiguity inherent in the term 'civil society' notwithstanding, there is a broad base of educated people in Pakistan and hence this component is similar to the Egyptian and Tunisian situation. This segment of Pakistani society has already demonstrated its ability to bring about change in the past, most notably in the case of the restoration of the chief justice and departure of the last military dictator. So, can it bring about change again?

The Tunisian and Egyptian demonstrations started due to high unemployment, soaring prices of food items, corruption, poor living conditions, and the lack of freedom of speech; all but the last are present in Pakistan. The protests in Tunisia and Egypt were not led by any recognised political leadership; in Pakistan there are too many leaders. So, is it the presence of these tried and failed leaders which is preventing a Jasmine revolution in Pakistan? Or is it the absence of a clear-cut agenda of change? If the latter were the case, one can easily construct an agenda.

A Jasmine revolution in Pakistan can begin on the basis of the surrender of the country's sovereignty by the rulers. This needs no proof – even an upstart like David Cameron can cause a near total shutdown of the city when he arrives. Far less important people have caused the entire security apparatus of the country to be surrendered to foreigners; that should be enough proof and if it were not sufficient then the mid-night release of a double murderer and CIA operative, and continuous drone attacks should be enough cause for a civil society revolt against the existing system.

In addition, the continuously rising prices of essential items, high unemployment, and poverty provide enough reasons to hope for the emergence of waves of protest by the middle class and educated youth.

All of these conditions have been present for some time and one would expect that any local group can utilise them to ignite the initial spark. The fact that this has not happened so far is rather difficult to explain; the only explanation one can think of is a great sense of doom and despair that exists throughout the country.

Wherever two Pakistanis are sitting, there is endless talk about the dismal state of the country, the corruption and incompetence of its politicians, and the unending intrigues and political drama, but there is never a spark of hope. Perhaps, it is this lack of hope that has hampered the Jasmine revolution, but then, Egypt was worse in this respect. There, two whole generations had grown up without hope. So, was it the intensity of their hopelessness that made change possible? Are Pakistanis not sufficiently engulfed in darkness?

Revolutionaries must be clear about what they want. Let there be a charter of minimum, non-negotiable demands with the top item being regaining sovereignty. It should be written in bold letters: Henceforth, all drone attacks will be responded to in kind.

Furthermore, all CIA operatives must leave the country within 36 hours. All politicians must declare their wealth to the public within 24 hours and whatever is not declared should become public property and whatever is declared should be scrutinised by an independent commission.

In addition, there should be a list of basic national problems for which solutions must be found within a reasonable time by an independent council of experts who should have the power to implement solutions. On top of the list will be the energy crisis, which has been blamed on corruption, poor planning, lack of resources and just about everything else. However, there are ways to estimate demand for gas and electricity and all that the country needs is a transparent and fast track procedure to meet this demand.

It will cost money, but money is not the problem here; the problem is sheer incompetence and corruption. It has been claimed that if Pakistan were to replace its old grid wires, there will be enough electricity to meet our needs. And it has also been said that if Pakistan's rulers were to stop their extravagance, there will be enough money to overhaul this grid system.

In Egypt and Tunisia, Jasmine revolutions had strong technological components: the internet and various social networking platforms. These platforms were needed because of extreme political suppression; in Pakistan these are likely to play a secondary role in the presence of relatively free news media.

Those who started the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions were just small youth groups; in Pakistan these can easily come into existence through existing mechanisms and hence, objective analysis indicates that the time is just right for a Jasmine revolution in Pakistan.

Pakistan has an abundance of educated youth. These young men and women have great ideas and plans for a different kind of society. All that this new generation lacks at this point is the initial ray of hope; someone just needs to provide them that initial spark of hope and there will blossom a spirit of change.

The writer is a freelance columnist. Email: quantumnotes@gmail.com.

Dr. Muzaffar Iqbal, "A revolution for Pakistan," *The News*. 08-04-2011.

Keywords: Political science, Politicians, Politics, International relations, Foreign policy, Corruption, Planning, National issues, Energy crisis, Egypt, Pakistan