**[Disaster ahead](https://www.dawn.com/news/1740993/disaster-ahead)**

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WE are heading towards a shipwreck. But there seems to be no realisation of the impending calamity, with the warring political forces refusing to pull back from the precipice. While a rudderless dispensation has already hit the rocks, the opposition is set on bringing down the entire edifice. There seems to be no way out of the current stand-off. With no political solution in sight, the situation is fast becoming untenable.

There is no indication that the government is complying with the Supreme Court’s ruling of holding elections in Punjab and KP within the stipulated timeframe. While the president has announced an election date for the Punjab Assembly, as per the order of the court, the KP governor is dragging his feet over the poll date for his province. Recent statements by the federal interior minister and other leaders of the ruling coalition have left no ambiguity regarding the government’s defiance of the court order.

There is a deliberate move to make the [Supreme Court ruling](https://www.dawn.com/news/1739739) controversial. True, there are some valid questions regarding the suo motu notice taken by the chief justice on the issue and the formation of the bench hearing the case, but the majority judgement cannot be negated. There is no ambiguity in the Constitution about the holding of election within 90 days of the dissolution of an assembly. It is quite clear that the ruling coalition is not willing to face the electorate.

Maulana Fazlur Rehman, who heads the ruling Pakistan Democratic Movement, has [called for postponement](https://www.dawn.com/news/1740663) of the elections in the two provinces due to the financial crisis facing the country and the tenuous security situation. Not surprisingly, the PDM leaders have come out guns blazing against the top judiciary, accusing it of being partisan. The Constitution and all the state institutions seem to have become a casualty in this sordid power game.

The ruling elite resembles a political circus rather than a government trying its best to deliver.

Indeed, there are some valid concerns over scattered provincial assembly elections and the political and constitutional problems they may create. One expected that the government would remove the anomaly by going for early general elections.

Instead, the government is insistent on perpetuating its stay in power, despite its diminishing mandate and the absence of effective political and economic governance.

Maryam Nawaz’s [recent statement](https://www.dawn.com/news/1738111) calling for accountability before polls raises questions about the PML-N’s democratic credentials. It reminds one of the military dictators who used similar slogans to suppress the democratic process in the past.

Such statements reinforce the public perception that the ruling party is running away from the polls. Attempts to hide behind worsening security and financial problems only confirm this view.

Almost one year after [taking power](https://www.dawn.com/news/1684500), the coalition government led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has proved itself to be one of the most disastrous dispensations in Pakistan’s recent political history. The prime minister presides over a cabinet of more than 70 minsters and advisors, many of whom don’t even have a portfolio.

Each of the coalition parties have to be accommodated. The bloated cabinet is not only a huge burden on the exchequer, it also makes a mockery of the entire system. It is becoming more and more ridiculous, given the shrinking mandate of the federal government.

The prime minister seems to be more interested in foreign tours than focusing on the critical economic and security issues confronting the country. The ruling elite resembles a political circus rather than a government trying its best to deliver on key policy issues. Coalition leaders and cabinet ministers are never tired of telling the nation that they have sacrificed their political capital to save the state. Nothing could be more preposterous than these platitudes. The 11-month rule of the PDM has taken the country further downhill.

It’s not clear whether the prime minister is really in charge as all major political decisions are taken in London by Nawaz Sharif. Then there are the coalition partners who have their own vested interest in making it extremely difficult for the system to work. Having two provinces under caretaker governments has further added to the chaos.

Most alarming is the government’s handling of the economy. A member of the Sharif family, Ishaq Dar was given charge of running economic affairs — with disastrous consequences. His ‘Inshallah’ approach has brought the country close to an economic meltdown. The former accountant of the Sharif family business enterprise, Dar has been singularly responsible for pushing the country towards possible default.

His belated actions on IMF conditionalities have proved extremely costly for the country. Despite all the new taxes, the revival of the bailout package remains doubtful. Dar epitomises the incompetence that has become the hallmark of our governance. Despite the disaster he has wrought, he remains the economic czar. Therefore, calling for elections to be delayed on grounds of the deteriorating financial situation is highly preposterous. Dar being at the helm of the economy has only added to the PML-N’s growing unpopularity.

Ironically, the government has not learnt any lesson from the past and is resorting to the same tactics of intimidation against its rivals that it had accused the Imran Khan government of using. Sedition cases are being filed against opposition leaders. The former prime minister has been implicated in scores of criminal and civil cases. Such tactics have not worked in the past and will certainly not work now.

These kinds of coercive measures can only intensify political confrontation and polarisation, further weakening the democratic political process in the country. What is more worrisome is that the unfolding political power game has sharpened the clash of institutions, resulting in a systemic collapse.

It may be true that elections will not necessarily bring political stability and resolve all our problems, but there is no other way out of the existing political turmoil.

Slogans like ‘accountability before elections’ won’t help the PML-N regain its fast-eroding political capital. A weak government with a limited mandate cannot bring stability to the country. It’s also important for the opposition to discard the politics of confrontation and agree to a reconciliation.

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