**Desperate histrionics**

Raoof Hasan

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The opposition is threatening to launch another series of protests against rising inflation in the country. They have announced some demonstrations in a few cities beginning this month. But, because of differences within their ranks, there has been no final decision regarding the long march towards Islamabad.

This is neither the first time that such protests have been threatened, nor will this be the last time to partake of the indulgence. However, the results are not likely to be any different from previous such ventures. Rather than unfurling a serious endeavour to address the problems people are faced with, this is another desperate effort to see the back of a government they perceive as a threat to their political futures.

There is good reason for this desperation. For the first time in the country, a sincere effort is being made to sensitise people to the destruction wreaked by corruption and proceed against those found guilty. Despite numerous hiccups at the institutional level, the accountability process is being actively pursued – constituting a looming threat hanging over the fate of the political careers of several opposition leaders. This prospect will disappear only if they succeed in removing the government through employing whatever means possible. With time, this desperation is turning into paranoia in view of their fast-depleting chances to escape punishment. It is in this environment that another protest movement is being resorted to.

Inflation is a serious issue. But the crisis is not of the government’s making. It is a reflection of an international phenomenon which struck the world in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Prices of all commodities have registered sharp increases in countries all over the world. Pakistan has been no exception to its effects. It is also true that its impact has been the harshest on the impoverished communities and daily wagers. No country has escaped its belittling ravages. Pinning the blame on the government alone is a travesty not rooted in reality. It is a fabrication meant solely to target the government to achieve the self-serving and myopic agenda of weakening it.

On its part, the government has been trying to mitigate the effects of this phenomenon by passing on relief to poverty-stricken targeted communities most impacted with the ongoing wave of inflation. Over Rs1,200 billion has recently been earmarked for this project and relief amounts are being delivered to the needy.

Ever since the induction of the government, it has been labelled with one accusation or the other. There has been virtually no relief in this ceaseless tirade of unashamed abuse and litany, all because the prime minister has persistently refused to do a deal with the corrupt elements that have ravaged the state resources during their stints in power. Obstacles have been raised in the path of carrying forward the accountability process, fully aided and abetted by some state institutions and other corrupt elements that facilitated the loot spree in the past.

In this process, the negative role played by the judiciary and the media stands out because of the shame it has brought upon the two institutions. Instead of extending unquestioned support in expediting the process of accountability, they have either impeded it through unwarranted interventions, or glorified the crimes of the principal offenders as also of their retinues of bootlegging cronies and sycophants, thus creating doubts in the minds of the people about the process itself. Nothing could be more damaging for the cause of the state than this singularly pathetic attempt to derail the process of holding people to account for their conduct.

Plan what they may and do as they may, there is going to be no relenting in implementing this key constituent of the PTI manifesto which is likely to pick up in robustness and incisiveness as it moves along. Let’s also face that, without establishing the supremacy of accountability in governance, the country cannot face a slew of grave challenges. Those who have stripped it of assets and resources must be punished. This should not be limited to incarceration alone; the guilty should also be forced to bring back the looted billions to be put back in the state exchequer for investment in the welfare of the marginalised people.

What is really worrisome is the lack of awareness about the damage this deep-rooted cycle of corruption has inflicted upon the state and the people. Billions which could have been invested in initiating welfare schemes for the people and taking the country forward on the trail of progress have been laundered into the personal coffers of the rulers of the past. What is even more shameful is to see these criminals challenging the writ of the government when confronted with the prospect of being held to account. That is when they resort to using part of the loot to buy their way out of tight legal nets and also advertise their false innocence through investing heavily in various echelons of the media. Sensing danger, virtually the entire crime syndicate converges together in support of their partners in the disgusting trade.

Much has been lost to crime without punishment. This spree of loot has put the country back by years and also muddied the concept of justice and accountability which has damaged the national ethos in innumerable ways. What is needed is to carry forth the process of cleansing the national fabric of these grave ailments as an article of faith. We can neither live with it nor afford to overlook it. It is an established reality that the tentacles of corruption are dug in deep. It requires unwavering resolve, renewed commitment and vigour to completely uproot the scourge from across the national expanse.

If people could truly understand the destructive impact of corruption and how it has taken away their opportunities to savour the benefits of progress, they would join in the campaign to defang the criminals and force them to face justice. People – ordinary people who have the most stakes in the development of the country – must be galvanised to actively participate in this battle against corruption. It is only when that happens that the task would be rendered easier to start moving quickly towards cleansing the national fabric of the scourge of corruption and freeing the country of its shackles to move forward and deliver to the deserving people.

Elimination of corruption is a key constituent of the national reform process. These desperate histrionics of the corrupt beneficiary elite constitute a wicked stratagem behind which huge profits of their daylight banditry are hidden. They must be exposed, shamed and punished.

The writer is the special assistant to the PM on information, a political and security strategist, and the founder of the Regional Peace Institute.

Twitter: @RaoofHasan