**Mega Corruption and Accountability**

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Political discussions are once again revolving around Al-Qadir Trust case. The verdict is likely to be announced in a few days.

As a matter of principle, justice cannot prevail in the true sense without holding the elites accountable for their wrongdoings. The former ruling party, the PTI adopted her name with the slogan of Justice (Insaf) and marched a long way on the drumbeat of accountability.

The party leadership had been igniting public sentiments by alleging all political opponents of financial corruption for two decades. The irony is that, after entering the power corridors, PTI leadership also got entangled in the same web of corruption.

The ongoing case of Al Qadir Trust is an irrefutable episode of PTI’s disappointing performance on account of governance and transparency. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan, his wife, close aides and a real estate tycoon are the central characters in a mega corruption scandal. Media has extensively reported how UK authorities (NCA) detected the illegal transfer of 190 million pounds from Pakistan.

The transaction was traced back to the real estate tycoon. As per the dictates of British law, detected money was transferred to the state of Pakistan. This transfer of 190 million pounds took place during the PTI’s government. Contrary to the expectations and much-hyped self-righteous image, the PTI government could not handle the issue transparently.

Surprisingly, the amount of 190 million pounds received from the British National Crime Agency was used to settle the fine imposed on the renowned housing scheme. Interestingly, the fine was imposed on the housing scheme authorities in an entirely different case. Media have extensively reported the mysterious and unprecedented nature of the method adopted to seek the approval from Federal cabinet.

No verifiable documents were brought in front of the cabinet members. A closed envelope was shown in the cabinet session and the members were instructed to approve the adjustment of 190 million pounds against the fine imposed on the housing scheme. Interestingly, the shadowy deal was approved as such by the worthy cabinet.

Later on, many of the former cabinet members openly criticized this non-transparent deal through statements and interviews in TV shows. The matter turned more complex when large pieces of land (approximately 458 canals) were transferred to the Al Qadir University trust. This is worth noting that the trust at that time comprised the former prime Minister, his spouse and close party aides.

According to media reports, the court is going to announce the verdict in this case anytime soon. PTI leadership is allocating more energies to label the judicial trial as a political vendetta. PTI is striving hard to prove the innocence and non-involvement of the founding chairman in a mega corruption case. This all seems like an unimpressive replay of arguments presented in the past by PPP and PMLN camps in defence of their leaders.

Why does every ruling party land in trial court immediately after exiting from power corridors? For how long we would undermine the laborious accountability process with the controversial phrase of “political vendetta”? Certain aspects of the dubious 190 million pounds transfer issue merit serious attention.

This trial is expected to clarify that illegally transferred money abroad belongs to the state once sent back after detection. Since 190 million pounds belonged to the state then how could the PTI government use this money to clear the fine imposed on the accused in an entirely different case? This is not the end of shocking revelations.

The clash of interest factor is more meaningful and complex. Swift approval of a deal or so-called agreement closed in an envelope, puts serious questions on the integrity of the ruling party and its cabinet. A big financial relief was given to the owners of the renowned housing scheme. No rocket science is required to understand how the beneficiary real state giant returned the favour by transferring the land to Al Qadir Trust.

The informed world cannot digest these easily connectable transactions and land transfers as coincidences. Legal experts opine that the case against the former prime minister is very solid. Reportedly, the performance of defending lawyers is not very impressive and lacks requisite convincing arguments. This trial carries a lot of importance in the peculiar toxic political environment of Pakistan. The political credibility of PTI is at stake.

Conviction of former prime minister and first lady, in this case, may demolish the PTI’s castle of accountability and transparency. This will also remind the people how miserably PTI failed to ensure the accountability drive during her government.

The special advisor on accountability matters was removed from the post for persistent failure. As usual, PTI is laying more emphasis on political rhetoric and trying hard to overplay the political victimization narratives. This misplaced activism may not fetch any relief for the imprisoned leader. Legal matters will eventually be settled in the courts. The upcoming verdict in the Al Qadir trust case will have multi-dimensional impacts on the already turbulent domestic politics.

Justice cannot prevail in the true sense without holding the elite accountable for their wrongdoings.

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