**And then the deluge**

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Friday, Mar 08, 2024

Tampering with the election process has been a favourite pastime of the power-wielders in the country. It is sardonically stated that the only free and fair elections conducted in the country tragically led to its bifurcation.

It is also a reality that every new visit to the hustings has generated more grievous and damning controversies than before, resulting in political destabilization and economic crises. Yet we have refused to learn from our mistakes and persist in engineering elections to fulfil some jaundiced objectives.

In the 2024 elections, the power-wielders went a step too far in decimating the two-thirds majority of the PTI to help a coalition of the corrupt sneak into power. So massive was the verdict in favour of the PTI and so passionate its support base across the country that they have vehemently refused to accept the gross fabrication. Consequently, the initial murmurings of disquiet are becoming more audible over time, with fear lurking that it may spill over onto the streets.

As a result, on the one hand, we are confronted with the prospect of a government in the saddle that has no mandate or credibility, and, on the other, there is an increasingly restive population threatening to remedy the midnight assault on the ballot results. Instead of subsiding, this unrest seems to be igniting further with people incessantly adamant that their mandate should be accorded to those it was meant for.

And why not? What are the reasons which make it necessary for power-wielders to interfere in the electoral process to concoct results that they desire in preference to results the people of this country deliver? Why is the system hijacked to refashion the outcome to fulfil agendas that may not be to the benefit of the country or its people? Why is it that a gang of proven criminals is hoisted in seats of power to dictate the fate of a people who have no faith or respect for them and who have not voted them in?

And why are state institutions used to wash people clean of their myriad crimes of which they have been duly held guilty by a court of honourable judges? Must this pantomime show continue ad nauseam to inflict further harm upon a country which is already teetering on the brink? Why must a select gang of anointed ones commandeer the fate of the state to the exclusion of its people who are its real masters? These are only some of the grave anomalies which are accentuating further with time, casting ominous dark shadows upon the future of Pakistan and its impoverished and marginalized people.

What is shocking is that the entire operation to hijack the results has been conducted in a patently crude and brazen manner. Forms 45 issued after voting hours were replaced overnight with fake replicas showing results starkly different from those announced at the polling stations.

When the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) finally uploaded the forms on its website after a delay of many weeks, the tampering was visible to the naked eye. Upon uproar in the media, rights bodies and political parties, the forms were promptly removed by the ECP. This and more speak volumes of the institution’s electoral crimes.

So, the sordid history of hijacking elections in the country has not only lingered but degenerated to a humiliatingly low level where the constitution, rule of law and morality have been torn to shreds and blown away. This is also evident from the fact that unconstitutional and illegal governments have been conducting the affairs of the state for months preceding the elections. Their legitimacy and, consequently that of the elections, remains doubtful which, in due course, could be referred to courts of law.

Multiple incisions have been inflicted upon the body of the state, which is bleeding profusely and is in dire need of a healing touch. But those who could have administered the medicine have all become complicit in the morbid act of causing the wounds. They also remain adamant that things can and will move forward only their way which, incidentally, is the original cause of the sufferance. So, as the patient waits in acute pain, the doctors have all taken to the devil.

Many people ask if there is still a way out of this deepening quagmire and if we will ever be able to weather our problems in a dignified manner and per law. Yes, we could, but that is not without its provisos, the most important being that the constraints of the constitution and rule of law apply to all without exception. And those who cross the bounds, no matter what their status or position may be, no matter how much power they may wield, should also be held responsible for their transgressions.

It is a wish list that has been dreamt of often, but the crisis is that, though we know what needs to be done, it is never done because some people emerge as more powerful than the system they should follow. They hail from the tribe of the beneficiary elite who have hijacked the system for long and used it to their wanton advantage. That is how, in the last couple of years, the constitution and rule of law have been sacrificed at the altar of inducting a certified criminal gang into the annals of power.

For this coalition of the corrupt, it is not their first time in command of things. They have been there before and each time they have ravaged the country to their hearts’ content without as much as an iota of compunction. They are a bunch of gangsters on the prowl looking for their prey to pounce upon. Pakistan is the most profitable and satisfying prey they can set their sights on. And here it has been handed over to them to strip it of the last shred of flesh that may still hang over its body.

In the past, too, elections have been stolen and governments inducted against the express will of the people. But this time around, the mammoth midnight robbery of the mandate has not sunk in well and there is resistance brewing against this unconstitutional and illegal enactment. People are angry. They are not willing to accept what they did not vote for. From toying with droplets of water, this is a deluge the power wielders have plunged into. The paradox is that the one they tried to oust by enacting this hideous drama grows more powerful with each day that passes.

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