**Emerging Political Scenario**

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Former commissioner Rawalpindi Division Liaqat Ali Chatha has triggered political turmoil in the country by confessing that he supervised rigging in the NA and provincial assembly seats belonging to Rawalpindi Division. While accepting responsibility for this alleged fraud he also tried to implicate ECP and the Chief Justice of Pakistan in it.

Impact-wise his confession has not only reinforced the narrative of PTI and other parties regarding rigging jeopardizing the credibility of the general elections but has also provided ammunition to the detractors and enemies of Pakistan to malign and tarnish its democratic credentials.

The most unfortunate aspect of the episode is that the bulk of the media is also feverishly engaged in rubbing in the same notion without ascertaining the veracity of the claims made by the commissioner. Nobody seems prepared to give the same attention to the press conference by the new commissioner of Rawalpindi along with DROs and ROs of the rank of Deputy Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner who have strongly dismissed the claims made by Liaqat Ali Chatha. One thing worth noting is that the commissioner was not at all directly concerned with the conduct of elections. DROs and ROs were appointed by ECP and they were in direct contact with the ECP.

Consequent to the split mandate given by the people, no political party enjoys a simple majority and is not in a position to form a government on its own at the federal level.

The ECP has constituted a high-level three-member committee to probe the allegations and submit its report within three days. What was his motive behind what he has said will surely become known after the committee submits its report. I will wait for the outcome of that report to offer more comments on this earthshaking and unprecedented convulsion of the former commissioner. At this stage, it is suffice to say that it smacks of a conspiracy to foment chaos in the country.

Meanwhile consequent upon the split mandate given by the people, no political party enjoys a simple majority and is not in a position to form government on its own at the federal level. It is rightly said that politics is the art of the possible. Accordingly, the parties are frantically engaged in exploring the possibility of forming the federal government by enlisting the support of the other parties to reach the numbers required in this regard. It is a situation where we might see strange scenarios emerging like the most hostile political entities embracing each other to clinch power; formal allies in the PDM government indulging in politicking to pressure the party having majority of national assembly seats to concede a number of pivotal positions to it including Presidency for possible support to have its nominee elected as Prime Minister without becoming part of the government.

Who would have thought that Imran Khan who has been incessantly hurling insults at Maulana Fazlur Rehman and calling him derogatory names and the latter who has been persistently calling the former an agent of the Jews, could make moves to orchestrate bonhomie between them and make a common cause against the sitting government as well as the rival parties? A delegation of PTI leaders with the permission of Imran Khan called on Maulana to discuss a possible alliance between the two parties. Though Maulana did not formally announce to form an alliance with PTI, at the end of the negotiations he toed the PTI line of rigging and supported its movement against the alleged rigging.

In view of the ground realities, I do not think that even if PTI and JUI(F) ally they would be able to form a government in the centre unless one of the other major political parties like PPP and PML(N) also support the claim of PTI to form the government. Similarly, PTI cannot rule as Punjab PML (N) enjoys a clear majority to form the government.

PML (N) and PPP are also engaged in a dialogue regarding the formation of government at the centre. If these two parties succeed in arriving at an agreed arrangement that would be an ideal situation under the circumstances to form a stable government at the centre and bring back the much-needed political stability in the country. However, from the reports that have emerged as a result of the deliberations between the two parties, the PPP is trying to be over clever to extract maximum concession even some underserved.

While the PPP has shown its willingness to vote for the PML (N) nominee as Prime Minister it does not want to formally join the government. For this support, it is demanding positions of President, Chairman Senate, Speaker of National Assembly, Governor Punjab and support for the formation of government in Balochistan. The party wants to enjoy power without sharing the responsibility of the policies that are launched to tackle the challenges confronting the country. Probably it is under the impression that since PML (N) is dying to form a government at the centre it would concede to its demands. In my view, they are wrong to look at the things that way. PML (N) would never agree to these unreasonable propositions and rightly so. Reports emerging from the PML(N) huddle two days do suggest that PML(N) would not like to form the government at the centre without the PPP formally joining the government and sharing the successes and failures that might come its way.

Reports have also emerged that there have been contacts between PPP and PTI through a business tycoon who is friendly to both these parties to explore the possibilities of forming the government at the centre. However, there is a very remote possibility of any such alliance. If the PPP wants its government in Balochistan it would require the support of PM L (N) or JUI (F) there.

If the PPP sticks to its stated position the chances of the formation of a federal government would recede as the PML (N) is not likely to join the proposed arrangement. A stalwart of PML (N) Khawaj Saad Rafiq has already asked PTI to form government at the centre if it can and PML (N) would sit in the opposition. That possibility is also not there. A meeting of the PTI-backed MNAs was convened to be addressed by the PTI nominee for the post of Prime Minister where 35 of them were missing indicating that they might have shifted loyalties. In view of this development, the latest announcement from PTI is that it would sit in the opposition at the centre and in Punjab.

The only viable possibility for forming a government in the centre is a coalition between PML (N) and PPP wherein they share cabinet and other positions in proportion to their declared strength. I am sure ultimately better sense will prevail and these parties will be able to resolve the issue amicably.

As regards agitation by PTI and other parties against rigging I think it is unwarranted as it would add to political instability in the country. It is advisable for them to seek redress to their grievances through the legal channels available in this regard. The first step is the election tribunals followed by appeals with ECP and finally the courts if it is felt that justice has not been done. Resorting to agitation and creating a law and order situation represent distrust in all the state institutions and that is not the way state affairs are managed.

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