**Misinterpreting the constitution**

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Interior minister Rana Sanaullah addressing a press conference in Faisalabad on Sunday said “Polls in two provinces—Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will be unconstitutional as they would lead to the next general elections not being held under caretaker setups in the provinces. According to the constitution, a caretaker setup is required for the provincial and National Assembly elections. No one will accept the results of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa if held under political governments later this year,” He however reiterated that the government would follow the decision of the SC and ECP regarding elections. I am afraid Rana Saheb has perhaps not read the constitution property. The constitution nowhere stipulates that the general elections in the centre and provinces will be held simultaneously under all circumstances. The provision for general elections for the National Assembly and provincial assemblies to be held simultaneously is relevant only when they are dissolved after the expiry of their mandated period. Article 224 (1) says “A general election to the National Assembly or PA shall be held with a period of sixty days immediately following the day on which the term of the Assembly is due to expire unless Assembly has been dissolved sooner.” When any assembly is dissolved before the expiry of its tenure Clause (2) comes into play which says, “When the National Assembly or a provincial Assembly has dissolved a general election to the Assembly shall be held within a period of ninety days after the dissolution” So Article 224 (2) does provide constitutional provision for general elections being held separately if one or more provincial assemblies have been dissolved prematurely. As is evident the statement by Rana Sanaullah that holding separate elections will be unconstitutional is a misinterpretation of the constitution.

[PM calls coalition partners' parliamentary party meeting on Wednesday](https://www.nation.com.pk/04-Apr-2023/pm-calls-coalition-partners-parliamentary-party-meeting-on-wednesday)

Perhaps it is also pertinent to mention that the Prime Minister and the Chief Ministers can dissolve the assemblies any time they feel like doing so. There is no mention in the constitution of the circumstances under which the Prime Minister or the Chief Minister of a province can resort to this step before the completion of the mandated period of the assemblies. Article 58(1) empowers the Prime Minister to dissolve the National Assembly at any time by advising the President to do so. However, the fear expressed by Rana Sanaullah that if the general elections to the National Assembly and two remaining provinces under the care-taker government are held separately while the two provinces are already under the rule of a certain political party—nobody is going to accept the results as those parties could influence the outcome of elections—cannot be dismissed lightly. Our history bears testimony to the fact that incumbent governments have always manipulated the results. Even when the elections have been held simultaneously under the care-taker governments all over the country the results have invariably been disputed by the party losing the elections. The fuss created by Imran Khan over the results of the 2018 general elections and the rigging done by the PTI government during by-elections to NA-75 amply proves this contention. My considered view is that the single constituency system of electing our representative is extremely prone to rigging and manipulation. The Election Commission which is responsible for holding free and fair elections is not equipped with the required manpower of its own to conduct the elections. It relies on the provincial setups to provide the staff at the polling stations including the presiding officers. The ROs are either taken from the judiciary or the respective provincial administrations. What happens at the polling stations or during the elections for a particular assembly seat is not within its control and the local administration and police can help any individual or party in winning the election through the rigging as was witnessed during a by-election in NA-75. The ECP while announcing the results relies entirely on the information provided by the ROs who in turn are dependent on DROs and Presiding Officers in compiling the results. It is an unwieldy process prone to rigging and manipulation.

[Imran seeks explanation from PDM for delay in Punjab Assembly polls](https://www.nation.com.pk/04-Apr-2023/imran-seeks-explanation-from-pdm-for-delay-in-punjab-assembly-polls)

The system breeds power politics as in the numbers game it is quite easy for no-democratic forces to manipulate results or play a major role in the make and break of a government which is a proven historic fact. The system also promotes horse trading. I do not think that the elections held under the present system are the solution to the perennial political instability in the country. The best alternative to the single constituency arrangement is the system of proportional representation in which people vote for the party and not the individuals. The parties get representation in the assemblies in line with the percentage of votes obtained. The other big advantage of this system is that even the regional parties get the chance to play their role in mainstream politics. It eliminates horse trading and also scuttles the chances of anti-democratic forces installing governments of their own choice by coercing the elected members to switch sides. There is a need for a national dialogue on changing course and holding the elections only after electoral reforms to bring political stability to the country which is pivotal to reviving the economy. It is the obligation of all political parties to say adieu to power politics. False egos must give way to the national spirit and urge for national unity and integration.