**Post-election Situation**

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The credibility of general elections has been seriously damaged. The voting trend until late at night showed a clear victory for PTI. However, the outcome of polls in the morning resulted in a hung parliament necessitating a coalition government with the participation of the partners of the erstwhile PDM regime with MQM’s elevated parliamentary strength. Though the PTI-supported independents have emerged as the largest parliamentary group, they are not in a position to form the government without a handshake with PPP, PMLN or MQM. The PTI leaders would not sit with either of the above parties. The PTI’s whole political struggle has been against the status quo and dynastic politics which these parties epitomize. Therefore, it is out of the question that the PTI would be part of any coalition government. Rather, it would prefer to sit in opposition.

The above outcome suits those who have always been averse to a clear majority for any political party or a strong government in the centre to defy supremacy in governance. They experienced this dilemma in the first PPP government with Bhutto at the steering. They had conflicts with the young and assertive Benazir Bhutto and Mian Nawaz Sharif as chief executives from 1988-1999. Coalition governments are easy to manage particularly those in which stooges have a strong presence. Even, Mian Nawaz Sharif, despite all his humiliating compromises, proved a bitter pill. He has since been discarded in favour of his younger brother. MQM, with a renewed sense of gratitude for the massive patronage, will serve the purpose of controlling any assertive exercise of power by the coalition government.

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Political games have been implemented through the ever-loyal interim administrations, Returning officers and Presiding officers from the bureaucracy and education department notwithstanding the people’s verdict. The nationalists in Balochistan, the Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) of Pir Pagara along with its nationalist allies in Sindh have been completely wiped out. The main stakeholders in Karachi – the Jamaat Islami and PTI – figure nowhere. The KPK was an exception where the turnout of the voters was so overwhelming that the outcome of polls could not be tampered with or the Returning Officers showed the temerity to stand their ground allowing no one to violate the sanctity of the vote. The PTI won over 42 of the 44 National Assembly and almost 100 of the 112 Provincial seats. This is a spectacular success.

Protests have spontaneously erupted in Balochistan and Sindh. The protesters have blocked the main arteries of roads and highways connecting different parts of the country. The Pir of Pagara, in an unusual move, has given a call for a peaceful sit-in in Hyderabad on 16 February. He has termed the polls as anti-state elections. The joint demonstrations of Jamaat Islami and PTI in Karachi are gathering mass support. Ignoring the public uproar, the PMLN and PPP are thrashing out power-sharing formulas in Islamabad. The PMLN is also busy pouching the PTI-supported Independents to increase its tally in the Punjab Provincial Assembly and the National Assembly. All this has increased the despair of patriotic citizens.

The people of Pakistan have sent a clear and loud message that they would not compromise on their disenfranchisement or their right to choose their leaders. They voted massively for the party whose main leadership is incarcerated in jail on various counts. They stood by Imran Khan despite all odds with the PTI deprived of its election symbol – bat – on technical grounds. Its candidates went into the electoral battle as Independents with various election symbols without any proper election campaign. Senior journalists of the country and the international media agree that had the election results been left unaltered, the PMLN and its allies would not have won more than 30 out of the 140 National Assembly seats in the Punjab. The Provincial Assembly seats would also have followed the same trend. Therefore, there is a loud murmur in the important world capitals about the stealth of the PTI’s public mandate stressing the need for the settlement of electoral controversies according to law.

The sole purpose of the holding of the general elections was to give the country a representative and stable government to steer it out of the political and economic crises. With the results of the general elections before us, and the federal government to be formed based on the minority mandate, the hope for the political and economic stability we have been entertaining since April 2022 seems to be more elusive than ever before. What we are going to have in the centre is exactly the PDM-2, without the presence of the maverick Moulana who has refused to give his shoulder to the shaky coalition. The PPP is also playing smart. It would have all the Constitutional positions without sharing the baggage of PDM-2. This coalition or the hybrid government would be one of the weakest regimes in the chequered history of this dear land. The coercion would continue with a speeded-up process of prosecution and persecution to break the will of the PTI leadership. This would not be less than a battle against our nation.

With the PPP consolidating its position in Sindh, the PMLN in Punjab, the PTI in KPK, and Balochistan given up to the tribal chiefs, the federation of Pakistan would remain on weak crutches. The newly baptized MQM-P would masquerade as the owner of Karachi and blackmail the weak federal coalition for more power. Under these circumstances, would there be any political peace and stability to attend to the monumental problems the country has been facing for over two years? It is doubted wide and large. We are destined to live with another spell of deep political polarisation and conflict, and worsening economic woes.

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