**The Healing Touch**

**The electorate has spoken with remarkable clarity, grit, determination and resilience under extremely trying circumstances.**

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Elections-2024, flawed as they were, have been remarkable for a number of diverse reasons. Most importantly, these elections have her­alded a veritable paradigm shift in the dynamics of the elector­al process in the country. The nation has not been oblivious to the vagaries of the politi­cal environment and elector­al process before, during and after the elections-polling. It has ruefully observed their impact on the results, too.

The nation yearned for free, fair, all-inclusive and transparent elections. It feels terribly let down!

The ECP undertook the onerous task of conducting Elections-2024. It end­ed with a plethora of complaints of ir­regularities encountered before, dur­ing and after the elections. The political environment before the elections ap­peared geared to seek specific results. The ostensibly largest political party of the country was singled out for in­cisive, penetrative scrutiny at the judi­cial, political, bureaucratic, law & order, media/information and social levels. It was reduced to contest the elections without its electoral symbol and party structure. Its members fought the elec­tions as “independents”. This left it se­verely handicapped and the credibility of the entire electoral exercise in ru­ins. The other parties and their lead­ers however, had a free, smooth and uncomplicated run right up to the poll­ing day. During and after the elections there were claims of rigging and manip­ulation of results overnight. The break­down in the communication system of the ECP, mobile networks and internet complicated matters further. Expected­ly, a number of results have been chal­lenged in the courts and with the ECP.

[Thousands in Gaza suffering 'cruelty of hunger and malnutrition': UN](https://www.nation.com.pk/23-Feb-2024/thousands-in-gaza-suffering-cruelty-of-hunger-and-malnutrition-un)

The ECP, the political parties and their leaders, the judiciary, the media etc have all been exposed, rather un­flatteringly, to all and sundry. The elec­torate is the only element to come out with flying colors in these elections. Much contrary to earlier ones, this time it asserted its right, independent judge­ment and choice with knowledge, pas­sion, verve and spirit. (The Carpetbag­gers aka Electable were rightly routed and unceremoniously dumped out of contention!). It was not overawed by the impediments, heartbreaks and hur­dles it faced before, during and after the elections. It remained steadfast, defi­ant, refused to be cowed down and ex­pressed its choices loud and clear. Cru­cially, the youth and female voters came out in droves and decisively swung the elections away from the old, pedantic, voracious, archaic guard. This was per­haps the game changing moment of the entire electoral exercise. The elector­ate has spoken with remarkable clar­ity, grit, determination and resilience under extremely trying circumstanc­es. Its voice has resonated throughout the length and breadth of the country. It must be heard and respected. If stifled, the consequences could be disastrous for the country and its prospects for genuine democracy. The electoral Rubi­con has been crossed and there can be no going back; now or ever!

[18 students held in Punjab University clash](https://www.nation.com.pk/23-Feb-2024/18-students-held-in-punjab-university-clash)

Pakistan finds itself at a crucial cross­roads again. The majority of the elec­torate has spoken for a party that finds itself out of favor with the powers-that-be. That is the crux of the dilemma be­setting Pakistan. This situation has al­ready created a critical predicament which has rapidly evolved into a core political center of gravity of our nation. Left unattended, it will further generate extremely destabilizing, divisive and polarizing effects in the country. This is that cardinal point where all national efforts need to be focused, concentrat­ed and a vital rapprochement arrived at, now. The healing must start from here and then spread out to encompass all political parties, the electorate and eventually the nation. The act of heal­ing, of necessity, must include the in­evitable elements of reconciliation, an unequivocal, unqualified expression of remorse and regret and a show of mag­nanimity in a spirit of forgive and for­get in the larger national interest. The urgency and importance of this effort needs to be recognized as such, han­dled sensitively, selflessly, generous­ly and resolved amicably. Prudence de­mands that it not be ignored or brushed aside, for its implications can be ex­tremely perilous for the country. If it persists then the political environment will remain subverted and Pakistan’s nascent democracy severely stunted. Consequently, the next government will remain hopelessly hamstrung. There is a dire need to heal, pacify and stabilize the political and social environments immediately and restore balance in the national polity.

[Two killed in petrol agency fire incident](https://www.nation.com.pk/23-Feb-2024/two-killed-in-petrol-agency-fire-incident)

The Caretaker Government, in fact the Caretaker PM, can play a vital, his­torical role in resolving this vexing im­broglio. Time however will be of the essence. First, a forum can be created with the leading members of the NSC and the Senate where practical ways and means need to be found to bring about this “singular rapprochement” and make the political and social en­vironments friction free. This bonho­mie will have ripple effects to envelop all political parties as well. Thereafter, in a whole-of-the-nation approach, an all-inclusive APC be called to work out a fresh national Charter of Democracy and Economy and a roadmap for mean­ingful political co-existence, coopera­tion, mutual support and nation-build­ing be determined and agreed upon. If all parties concur, a national govern­ment be formed, else the majority par­ty be given the right to form the govern­ment without much further ado.

A national effort to stabilize, placate, heal and to move forward is the need of the day. If the Caretaker Government could somehow pull this off it could be the best service it could do to the nation. It could provide a stable platform for the next government to take a start from and tackle the ominous, daunting, mul­tifarious challenges it faces, with confi­dence. This nation has the wherewithal and the good sense to move back from the brink of disaster and start afresh. All it takes is a selfless display of patriotism, nationalism and an indomitable polit­ical will to pursue national interests to the exclusion of everything else! Period.