**The Pawri has just begun**

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The recent decision of the Election Commission of Pakistan to annul the entire election in the Daska constituency (NA75) and the Supreme Court’s verdict to leave the secret balloting in the Senate elections intact as laid down in the relevant constitutional articles directing the ECP to take all necessary precautionary measures to ensure honesty, fairness and transparency in the electoral process, are a giant leap forward that would, one hopes, herald a new era in the country’s constitutional and democratic journey.

The ECP decision in NA 75 was assertive, bold and swift reflecting the constitutional powers the institution enjoys for holding free, fair and transparent elections. It is also unprecedented in the sense that the previous Chief Election Commissioners remained shy of exercising their authority to maintain the sanctity of the electoral process by providing a conducive atmosphere for free and peaceful voting, protecting the presiding officers from intimidation, threats and gross interference in their official responsibilities by the political parties and the government machinery. The politicized administration has been vulnerable to pressure and temptations brought on it by the contesting political parties and candidates.

The bold action of the ECP needs to be appreciated. The aggrieved candidate has the legal right to challenge the decision in the superior courts. But the provincial and the central governments are constitutionally bound to cooperate with the ECP to take to task the officials found liable for the dereliction of duty after due diligence. This would go long way in restoring the confidence of the electorate in the fairness of elections and consolidating democracy in the country. The PTI had streamed to power by championing free and fair elections. What transpired in NA75 is, by all means, an indefensible failure on the part of the Punjab provincial administration. The ECP decision must have jolted it out of its stupor and complacency.

The Senate election has exposed the hypocrisy of the opposition and the bankruptcy of the political, constitutional and legal advisors of Prime Minister

Prime Minister Imran Khan was ill advised to seek the opinion of the Supreme Court of Pakistan for open balloting in the propinquity of the Senate elections. He has been in power for over two years. The necessary legislation for electoral reforms could have been done in collaboration with the opposition. Though the opposition has been very adamant in their self-seeking demands to the peril of legislation for electoral and economic reforms, the PTI government at least should have been seen making efforts in the Parliament. The PTI legislators’ tit-for-tat response to the nonsensical, noisy and accusatory harangues of the opposition in the Parliament were bound to keep the cauldron of political polarization boiling killing all hopes for political cooperation.

The reference to the Supreme Court portrayed a sort of nervousness in the highest ranks of the PTI regime. It seemed as if it had suddenly dawned on them that there would be massive horse trading in the Senate elections. There was absurd talk of mind boggling treasures exchanging hands. It is a fact that the PTI had a bitter and shocking experience of the dishonesty and disloyalty of its unscrupulous 20 MPAs in Khairber Pakhtun Khwa in the Senate elections of 2018. That apart, it was all the more imperative for the regime to have the constitutional clauses pertaining to the Senate election amended soon after assuming power.

The sudden plunge into this constitutional and legal battle involving main stakeholders portrayed the regime in bad light. It reflected its knee-jerk reaction to the issue and the classic lack of ability to put its act together and draw an effective strategy to ensure the loyalty of their elected representatives and coalition partners. The regime’s recourse to the Apex Court resuscitated the sagging morale of the PDM leaders deluding them into a self-gratifying certainty that the PTI battle front is in disarray and crumbling. With this ammunition going into their blasting gun, they quickened their propaganda to crack the electoral battle lines of the regime making exaggerated claims of electoral support from the treasury members. This was a grievous mistake on the part of Prime Minister Khan.

The Senate election has exposed the hypocrisy of the opposition and the bankruptcy of the political, constitutional and legal advisors of Prime Minister Imran Khan. It is the task of the opposition to take advantage of the mistakes of the ruling party and discredit the regime in the eyes of the electorate. However, the regime is bound to learn lessons from its mistakes, clear the haze and blur created by the opponents about national issues or any move of the government. This makes it essential for the leader of the government and the cabinet members to attend the Parliament for a question-answer session. Their answers to the opposition should always be measured and composed with a tinge of humour to keep the atmosphere in the august House calm and free of friction, bitterness and name calling. This is the standard practice in all the parliamentary democracies.

Mr. Prime Minister, the norms and practices of a parliamentary democracy should not be unknown to you. It needs a different style of governing – inclusive, tolerant, accommodative, forthcoming and responsive. No two opinions about it that the corruption at the highest level in government destroys societies. We have had suffered enormously from this scourge. But the financial corruption is not the only problem confronting our society. It is the curse of poverty, ignorance, disease, social injustice, economic inequity and moral improbity that is causing more distress in the vast majority of the population. These are bigger and more challenging crusades to be waged to fulfill the nation’s dream of good governance.

No need to remind you that we have to put our economy on the right track, reform and free the state institutions to work in accordance with their constitutional mandates, alleviate poverty, educate our people to live simply and honestly, eradicate moral turpitude from our society that manifests in heinous crimes, profiteering, hoarding, swindling state resources, tax evading, land grabbing etc. – just to count a few. Only a leader can do this – not a politician.

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