**The making of a criminal state (Part I)**

[Ikram Sehgal](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/ikram-sehgal/)

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Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM’s) Yusuf Raza Gilani bagged 169 votes against Finance Minister Hafeez Shaikh’s 164in the Senate Elections held on March 3, 2021 with one vote not being cast. At least 7 votes were rejected being wrongly marked, a clear indication that some ruling party lawmakers changed their loyalty. PTI’s Fauzia Arshad who contested on the woman seat for Islamabad secured 174 votes, though to win she secured 6 less votes than the reciprocal strength of the party and allies i.e. 180. This winning margin is sufficient evidence to indicate there was clear horse-trading on the men’s seats. That money changed hands is shown in the damning video showing Gilani’s son Ali Haider Gilani giving pointers to someone on how to waste a Senate vote is case in point. Corruption did take place and if anyone thinks otherwise, he or she qualifies as a moron. PDM quickly demanded that Prime Minister Imran Khan resign.

Imran Khan reacted with courage, calling a special session of the National Assembly (NA) on March 6 to seek a vote of confidence. Imran Khan duly secured the trust vote by getting 178 votes, six more votes than what he needed and 2 more than what he got in his election as PM, thereby ending the political uncertainty in the country. Since this was on “open” vote those who had taken money to sell their “Zameer” (conscience) showed that besides being greedy they were also cowards. Not surprisingly the Opposition had boycotted the Assembly proceedings. The PDM should have attended the session and recorded its protest. However, doing the right thing is certainly not their forte. Incidentally Nawaz Sharif had gone through this ‘voluntary’ vote of confidence process after his reinstatement by the Supreme Court (SC) in 1993.

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To quote my article “Blindly following the Constitution,” of Nov 13, 2014, “Indirect elections for our ‘democratic’ version of the British House of Lords, is a shameful disgrace.  The ‘auction’ for Senate seats is an insult to the name of democracy. Majority vote and proportional representation are the basic requisites of any democracy and secret ballot based on Article 59 (2) of the Constitution. Proportional representation means that the number of seats of political parties in the Senate should be according to the number of their seats in the Provincial Assemblies. Unfortunately, that secrecy of the ballot has in the past been misused by “horse trading” with bags of money changing hands to buy votes. Some very rich and influential individuals who otherwise would never have been elected in an exercise of adult franchise entered the Senate because of their money and/or power. Our Upper House does not have the reputation should because of blatant “horse trading” for votes by a number of individuals of bad repute” unquote. Senate elections are a standing reminder for democracy being hypocrisy. The Senate must be credible in any federal Republic like Pakistan, all posts being truly representative of the people.

The govt failed, unfortunately, to get from the SC an open voting process to prevent vote purchasing and to maintain the proportionality of parties in the National Assembly in the Senate as well. Both these demands – proportionality and secret vote – are equally part of the Constitution, both need to be observed. With hindsight, both demands together don’t make sense because any vote buying during the secret voting process by one party will and has destroyed the second condition. Since 1973 this illogical combination of conditions has resulted in loads of money and favours changing hands and consequently, proportionality was abused and democracy undermined. Political parties are a major part of the democratic political system and voting along party lines on fundamental issues is as much democratic as sticking to the party from which one has been elected is. While floor crossing has been eradicated, somehow vote buying is regarded by many as a ‘fundamental right’, incidentally and most shockingly so does the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), at least by public perception.

*The writer is a defence and security analyst*