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

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The role of the ECP has been questionable, they miserably failed to implement the recommendations given by the 5-member larger bench of the Supreme Court (SC) headed by Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmad relating to the Senate elections. While it directed that polls would be held through secret ballot according to Article 226 of the Constitution, it also said, “It is the duty of the Election Commission of Pakistan to ensure that the election is conducted honestly, justly, fairly, and in accordance with law and that corrupt practices are guarded against”. The apex court directed the ECP to take all available measures, “including utilizing technologies to fulfill the solemn constitutional duty to ensure that the election is ‘conducted honestly, justly, fairly and in accordance with law and that corrupt practices are guarded against’.” The SC also instructed the ECP to work on matters including proportional representation and take measures against corruption in elections. The SC, in essence, had given the ECP an excellent opportunity to conduct elections through secret ballot but have the ballot identifiable. Had this been done, those who had taken money and traded their loyalties would have been identified. By not adhering to any of the SC’s directions, the ECP protected those criminals through the secret ballot. PTI had also urged the ECP to use technology in the form of a bar code or a serial number on the ballot paper which would ensure Senate elections would not become secret in light of the SC observations.

After securing the vote of confidence PM Imran Khan stated in the NA that his govt was aware that money was being collected in the run up to the Senate elections for the buying and selling of candidates, yet the ECP said a “great election” was carried out. He accused the ECP of allegedly protecting those who made money by holding Senate elections through secret ballot and said the ECP’s failure to hold fair and transparent elections had damaged the country’s morality and democracy. The ECP’s ignoring the SC advice and ensuring measures to prevent corruption in the Senate elections has tainted the entire democratic process. Considered to be an honourable person the Chief Election Commissioner must take the honourable way out and resign forthwith. At the end of the day, democracy lost and money won.

A democracy with a modicum of control is far better than a corrupted democracy protecting criminals

The second outfall over the years is even more dangerous. Corruption and disloyalty in the highest elected body of the nation has shown everybody that if those can do it and get away with it, why shouldn’t I have my share? Declaring this corrupt election as being held in ‘good manner’ the ECP has lost all credibility. When the PM offered that the agencies give the ECP a secret briefing, he was wrong. Matters of public interest, in this case particularly so, need to be disclosed publicly. The intelligence agencies must protect and defend Pakistan not only from foreign enemies, but from enemies undermining the very state of Pakistan and its political system from within. National security is not only depending on external threats; in our time internal threats to the system are much more dangerous to Pakistan and any other state and need to be confronted. Why can’t the report be published and action be taken against the perpetrators? Vote buying is a criminal offence, so bring them to justice. Fighting corruption is not only Imran Khan’s responsibility. Nawaz Sharif and Asif Zardari are already convicted offenders, Nawaz Sharif in addition is an absconder; so why is it so difficult to prevent their political activity undermining the state! With forensic evidence available about fake accounts and money-laundering NAB should take more than one day to convict the guilty. By taking months and years NAB has miserably failed.

At one time the terrorists had reached within 60-70 kms of Islamabad as the crow flies, the Army waged a tremendous offensive to rid us of those militants brutalizing the people of Swat by shootings and beheadings. Later the Army Public School massacre in Peshawar when hundred or so innocent children were brutally killed, galvanized the country into making a National Action Plan (NAP). Despite foot-dragging by the Nawaz Sharif regime, the Army under Gen Raheel Sharif launched an extremely effective campaign to successfully eradicate terrorism from FATA and Swat, in particular North Waziristan. His successor Gen Bajwa has continued this offensive very successfully. Thousands of soldiers lost their lives, with tremendous collateral damage for civilians in lives and material cost. This same principle for action stands good against the corrupt threatening the integrity of the State. Without recourse to courts, why not target those clearly corrupt? A democracy with a modicum of control is far better than a corrupted democracy protecting criminals. What can one expect from criminals? Under most circumstances one does not advise killing them but certainly they cannot be allowed to subvert democracy at the peril of the State.

His accommodation in another Senate seat certainly notwithstanding, one felt sad about the loss suffered by personal friend Abdul Hafeez Shaikh whom one also admires professionally. However, this setback effectively exposed the criminality inherent in our present democratic process. Winning the Senate battle in one seat, the PDM lost the war! This will be confirmed today, Friday April 12, when the PTI candidate is elected Speaker. The conduct of the Senate elections clearly indicate that we have the making of a criminal state, despite clear SC instructions, the ECP’s ostrich stance adds to that perception. What is the Army going to do about it?

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