**Ultimately, truth prevails**

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Finally, Under Section 57 (1) of the Elections Act, 2017 (Act), President Dr Arif Alvi performed his constitutional and statutory duty and announced April 9, 2023 as the date for the holding of Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa assemblies’ general elections unilaterally. By invoking the power and authority vested in him under Section 57 (1) of the Act, the President announced the election date and further asked the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to issue the election programme in accordance with Section 57(2) ibid.

Section 57(1) of the Act reads: “The President shall announce the date or dates of the general elections after consultation with the Commission.” The words “date or dates of the general elections” imply the announcement of dates for “National Assembly” or “national and provincial assemblies” elections but the PML-N is adamant that the president could announce only NA polls. Criticizing the poll announcement, Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar said that President Arif violated the Constitution by doing so, arguing that the president is authorised only to announce the date for the National Assembly’s elections and not that of the provincial assemblies. Now, ECP Under Section 57(2) ibid is legally bound to call upon the voters of the Punjab and KP assemblies’ constituencies to elect their representatives in accordance with an election programme. The President had to make the poll announcement to avoid the infringement and breach of the constitutional and legal provision as elections should be held within 90 days of the assemblies’ dissolution. The power was invoked after the Punjab and KP governors failed to perform their constitutional duties for setting a date for the purpose. Earlier, Mr Alvi had invited Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja for an ‘urgent meeting’ on February 20 to ensure the announcement of poll date but ECP declined a day earlier (Sunday) to hold the consultation with the former. The President had to write a letter to CEC despite the order of the Lahore High Court (LHC) directing ECP to announce the date for elections in Punjab without delay and the remarks of the Supreme Court in this respect. This letter shows the President’s displeasure over the apathetic attitude on part of the electoral watchdog which could not realize its constitutional duties to proceed and act accordingly. Also on February 8, 2023, President Alvi urged ECP to “immediately announce” the date for elections in the provinces.

[Civil society delegation meets MQM leadership, calls for election framework](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Mar-2023/civil-society-delegation-meets-mqm-leadership-calls-for-election-framework)

It is pertinent to mention that on February 15, 2023, a citizen namely Munir Ahmad wrote a letter to President Alvi against ECP as well as the governors’ failure to fulfil their ‘constitutional obligations’ as per Article 105 read with Article 218 (3) of the Constitution and Section 57 of the Act as well as the order dated 10-02-2023 passed in the Writ Petition No 6118/23 for fixing the poll date. By allowing this petition LHC had directed ECP “to immediately announce the date of election…with the Notification specifying reasons, after consultation with the Governor of Punjab…to ensure that the elections are held not later than ninety days as per the mandate of the Constitution. Also, a contempt petition was filed over non-compliance with the LHC judgment passed in this writ petition for the announcement of the poll date. Now, the case is fixed for hearing on February 27, 2023, before a division bench of the Lahore High Court.

As ECP should be conscious of its responsibility of preserving, protecting, and defending the Constitution, the CEC was repeatedly invited by the President for an urgent meeting on the issue. Meanwhile, the Pakistan Tehreek I Insaf (PTI) had to move to the relevant courts of law as even after passing more than a month, no date for elections was announced by the two provincial governors, who are constitutionally and legally bound to do so. The poll announcement came amidst dangerous speculative propaganda about provincial and federal elections from the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) as they continue to make an all-out effort to postpone the provincial elections. Their unconstitutional and unlawful designs vindicated PTI’s claim that there is writing on the wall for the ruling political alliance whenever the country goes for elections. In violation of their oath under Article 214 and the Third Schedule of the Constitution, CEC and other ECP members failed to discharge their duties faithfully and in accordance with the constitutional provisions. But the people amidst the country’s aggravating economic and political situation are not in a position to have a course to a new experience regarding the elections of the federation and provinces.

[JI chief writes to CJP, calls for suo motu notice on Karachi local body elections](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Mar-2023/ji-chief-writes-to-cjp-calls-for-suo-motu-notice-on-karachi-local-body-elections)

The governors’ refusal to announce a schedule for the provincial elections strengthened PTI’s fears that PDM is deliberately delaying not only provincial but also federal elections thereby further worsening the sorry state of national affairs. Since the dissolution of the provincial assemblies, the PDM government has been doing what it can to delay the elections in the provinces as they cited an “alarming law and order situation” in KP and a “dire economic situation” in Punjab. In this respect, the PDM government has also written to ECP to consult relevant stakeholders before announcing the dates for elections. PDM rightly fears their defeat in the upcoming general elections due to their sole agenda of saving their vested interests and devising anti-people policies. Furthermore, a solution to the people’s unending woes such as countrywide flour shortage, protracted load shedding, skyrocketing petroleum products’ prices, etc. is nowhere in sight. Moreover, a World Bank report reveals that Pakistan’s economy is now South Asia’s weakest one, saying that its economic output was not only falling but also bringing down the regional growth rate too.

[CTD Islamabad summons Imran Khan, 17 other PTI leaders on Monday](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Mar-2023/ctd-islamabad-summons-imran-khan-17-other-pti-leaders-on-monday)

Exposing the current government’s flawed economic policies and its inability to handle national affairs, the World Bank’s Global Economic Prospects report says that Pakistan’s economic growth to slow further to two percent during the current year. This will mark a drop of two percentage points from its June 2022 estimates. “This pace reflects still robust growth in India, Maldives, and Nepal, offsetting the effects of the floods in Pakistan and the economic and political crises in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. The deteriorating global environment, however, will weigh on investment in the region,” the report says. Likewise, six million Pakistanis are suffering acute food insecurity while the number of those experiencing food insecurity is projected to further increase. Food prices drastically increased in the last few months because of the depreciation of the local currency and the historic fall in foreign exchange reserves. For most people, essential food items are becoming less and less affordable. Nevertheless, the situation in Pakistan is not as precarious as in Turkey where bodies continue to be retrieved from the rubble while the death toll from the natural catastrophe has crossed the 45,000 mark. Even then, the leader of the Turkish opposition has rejected the idea of postponing the polls scheduled for June.

[Asif Ali Zardari's health improving after eye surgery in Dubai](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Mar-2023/asif-ali-zardari-s-health-improving-after-eye-surgery-in-dubai)

Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the chairman of the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP), states that the constitution only allows delay or postponement of elections during a state of war. He believes that the constitution of his country must be followed and the electoral process should not be delayed. The scale of destruction in cities such as Antakya, Kahramanmaraş and Adiyaman is beyond imagination as officials fear thousands of victims are yet to be found from the destroyed buildings. Even during the national grief and pain, there is no large-scale talk of a delay in elections in Turkey but PDM in Pakistan being sure of their electoral defeat made an all-out effort to delay elections. With the connivance of ECP, PDM’s unconstitutional endeavours such as adopting some technicalities and raising delimitation matters bore no fruit as there was no way to stop the election process in the country.

Elections could only be delayed for a few days when there are cogent and substantial reasons to do so. And in the prevailing situation, there is no provision relating to emergency as the country is not in a war-like situation. So, the question of halting the process of elections was irrelevant as there is no constitutional provision to restrain provinces from moving towards elections. Also, PTI chairman Imran Khan announced Jail Bharo Tehreek (court arrest drive) from Lahore against a delay in elections beyond the stipulated 90-day period as the PML-N-led government had flatly refused to hold elections in the two provinces. The opposition alliance’s strenuous effort for infringement and breach of the constitutional and legal provisions has suffered a humiliating defeat as the general elections in the two provinces could have only been delayed in an extremely adverse law and order condition, internal or external disturbance, or a war-like situation. Now, the only option for the political parties is to join their heads for the sake of national prosperity by devising a consensus mechanism for holding free and fair elections across the country.