**What does Sanjrani`s win mean?**

BY FA H D H U S A I N 2021-03-13

THE PTI government has won Friday`s Senate cliffhanger but there could yet be some twists and turns in the saga. Here are 10 key takeaways from the closely contested election that produced victories for Sadiq Sanjrani and Mirza Afridi.  
  
1. Government candidate Sadiq Sanjrani got 48 votes. The strength of the treasury benches was 47.  
  
PDM`s Yousuf Raza Gilani bagged 42 votes. The opposition`s strength was 53. Ishaq Dar and the Jamaat-i-Islami senator were absent so Gilani should have got 51. The one extra vote that Sanjrani got meant that Gilani was lef t with 50. Eight votes were rejected. Seven of them are under dispute, even though they were in Gilani`s f avour. Had those seven votes not been rejected, Gilani would have bagged 49 votes and would have been elected chairman of the Senate defeating Sanjrani by one vote.  
  
2. Government candidate for deputy chairman Mirza Af ridi bagged 54 votes while the opposition`s candidate Maulana Ghafoor Haideri got 44 votes.  
  
Remember government`s strength was 47. So Afridi got seven more votes. Ah! That seven number again.  
  
The logic may apply that those seven people from the opposition whose votes got rejected because they were not marked right according to the presiding officer, were the same seven people who then voted again for the government candidate thereby enabling him to get 54 votes. If this be the case, there were seven `Brutuses` sharpening their knives in the opposition camp and on Friday plunged it in their own candidates` backs.  
  
3. These seven people may have wanted to waste their vote in favour of the opposite camp, but did they do their job properly? There is a difference between intent and execution. These seven ballots according to the presiding officer were rejected because the senators had stamped the name of Yousuf Raza Gilani whereas they should have stamped in the box. Not so, says the opposition. There is no separate box. The ballot is divided into two halves with a line separating the halves.  
  
Each half has the name of the candidate written.  
  
The seven senators stamped the name whereas the name is inside the box. There is no indication they voted for Sanjrani whose name was in the otherbox. The PDM is taking the matter to court. Given court rulings that give priority to the `intent of the voter`, there is a likelihood that the court could rule in favour of the opposition. However there is a debate over whether the courts can have jurisdiction over Senate elections. The devilis in the detail.  
  
If the courts do take up the opposition`s petition, there could be consequences. If not, Sanjrani is safe.  
  
4. If the seven intended to mark their ballots wrongly in order for them to be rejected, why did they not mark them so that there was no scope for any doubt? The eighth senator stamped his vote onthe line dividing the two halves thereby leaving no doubt that it would be rejected. It was. Did the seven opposition senators display acute incompetence in their betrayal? If so, their intent may have been to favour Sanjrani but they may end up helping Gilani win by allowing the opposition a fairly strong case for the court. Or did they leave this space deliberately, for some strange Machiavellian reason? In either case, their incompetence or some form of reverse complicity may end up producing unintended results. These seven `corrected` their mistake in the deputy chairman election.  
  
5. Similar incompetence was displayed by whoever installed secret cameras in the polling booth.  
  
These cameras were discovered by hawk-eyed PDM senators Dr Musadik Malik and Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar who then proceeded to raise a furore over this travesty. It is obvious that the person(s)installing the cameras walked into the Senate hall at some point when there was no one around (presumably at night). This means either he was someone whoworked in the Senate and therefore could move around freely without raising any suspicion, or he was let in. If he was let in, there would be a record.  
  
Then there`s the other obvious thing: surveillance cameras. They are everywhere. The person could not walk into the main Senate hall, drill in wires, hammer in nails etc and not be recorded on the cameras. Conclusion: If the Senate chairman really wants to find out who violated the sanctity of parliament by installing these cameras, he can. Period.  
  
6. For now, the government can celebrate. Today, it has safety in numbers. Prime Minister Imran Khan has proved his majority in the National Assembly and Mirza Afridi`s victory has shown that a majority in a secret ballot has sided with the government. There is negligible chance of a vote of noconfidence against Sanjrani as of today. This means the PDM will now go back to the streets in its bid to dislodge the government.  
  
7. The PTI has won the election and lost the moral high ground. The narrative it peddled af ter Gilani`s victory over Hafeez Sheikh that a person with less seats could win only through corruption now lies buried somewhere in the plush confines of the Senate hall. The presence of hidden cameras has further degraded the image of the PTI as a party that believed in, and practised, clean politics. It too is now wrestling in the mud.  
  
8. The long march by the PDM has acquired greater relevance and urgency. The PPP will now likely be more partial to the street option than the parliamentary one which means that Maulana Fazlur Rehman may re-acquire centre stage in the movement.  
  
9. The Senate secretariat and its staff is reeking of incompetence. The sanctity of parliament has suf fered grievous blows. Our ability to hold f air and transparent elections Daska and then Friday`s Senate elections stands further compromised.  
  
The system is creaking at the hinges.  
  
Dysfunctionalityisfastbecomingthe defaultmode.  
  
10. Neutrality is overrated.  The writer is Dawn`s resident editor in Islamabad.  
  
Twitter:@fahdhusain