**What matters is delivery**

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After the much-awaited elections in Pakistan, a weak, indecisive and vulnerable central government is near formation. With no single party bagging enough seats to win a simple majority, the emergence of a hung parliament is most likely – one where power will be shared among the allied parties.

In the 40-year civilian democratic history of Pakistan, almost all governments have been formed on the basis of coalition among small and big parties. In theory, a hung parliament is most desirable for an ethnically diverse country, such as Pakistan. With regional parties, representing the marginalized factions of the country, in coalition with the government, a lot can be achieved to sort out grievances.

A government thus formed can be beneficial for smaller provinces. Law-making can become more inclusive. In this way, the regional parties that represent culturally backward and deprived communities can have a say in policymaking. A hope for national integration, though dimly lit, remains. Such a hung parliament can also subdue the authoritarian tendencies of a single party.

However, in practice, a stable government in Pakistan is possible with a majority of one party, or at least with a consistent or strong alliance. Still, a lot of hurdles lay in the fulfilment of a complete term. In any case, the threat of external intervention always remains.

Moreover, the debut of a successful no-trust motion, as observed in the hung parliament of 2018, adds to the impediments of a coalition government.

The February 8 general elections have turned out to be quite scandalous. As expected, the PML-N and the PPP, along with other parties, are considering an alliance. They apparently have the necessary support of the powerful quarters.

But even with such feasible circumstances of forming a government, the participants appear to be hesitant. Not one party is particularly thrilled about taking the reins by getting a majority vote in the coming days. At the heart of politics, these parties are, in fact, rivals. Megalomaniacs. They have anticipated worsening state affairs in the coming years.

Governance by the ruling party will definitely affect its already diminishing popularity. The fear of accountability is also in the air. But accountability from what? This must be a signal of an alarmingly grim future.

Political instability and the leadership void in recent years have left the country’s affairs in ruins. The economy faces numerous challenges, including high inflation at around 30 per cent, with nearly 40 per cent of the population living below the poverty line, and a significant debt-to-GDP ratio of 72 per cent.

Ageing public infrastructure, frequent power outages, and vulnerability to natural disasters further hinder economic stability and growth. Heavy reliance on low-value exports, coupled with large trade deficits and declining foreign exchange reserves, exacerbates additional burden on the future government.

These are the results of the wretched PTI governance combined with the equally terrible stint of the PDM government in the last five years. It will take more than one term to fix it. In such hard times, no one wants to take the onus of the terrible affairs upon themselves, for public criticism is packaged with political power.

Besides, a government constantly remains prone to upheaval. Who will provide the assurance of a complete term if the coalition parties do devise an administration?

A hung parliament can turn out to be a positive development for Pakistan. But we have reached such a low pit where only good governance can bring good fortune. So, hung or not, independent or puppet, the government needs to deliver. But with the same government setup as the previous one, hopelessness pervades.

All in all, governments formed in Pakistan have been dangling from the strings of the powers that be. Vulnerable to internal and external pressures alike, the government is akin to a house of cards. No matter who is actually responsible for the rubble of this house, in the end, it is the head of government who faces the legal music. Indeed, the prime ministership of Pakistan is the world’s worst job.

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