**Political stagnation in Sindh**

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The Pakistan People’s Party has become a political and electoral juggernaut in Sindh. Except on a few occasions, it has remained electorally ascendant in the province since its inception. No political party or alliance has ever had enough popular support to challenge its political and electoral dictatorship. Over the years, the electorates of Sindh have developed a relationship of hate and love with it. They hate it for the corrupt, rapacious and predatory rule, love it as the political heritage of martyred Bhuttos, and consider it the only capable political organization to foil plans to divide their ancestral land into two provinces. The MQM mantra of a separate province fuels Sindhis’ apprehensions and works to the advantage of the PPP.

How to free Sindh from the current political dictatorship of the PPP is the question that has been raging in the minds of the educated middle class of Sindh for some good years now. They want to take Sindh from the clutches of the PPP but have no will to come together to form a political organization to confront it. They are divided in their ranks. Their chronic reluctance has worked to the advantage of Asif Ali Zardari. Purging the party of the close relatives of Bhuttos, he has strengthened his sway over it. Ably assisted by his sister Faryal Talpur and son Bilawal, he has successfully veered the party from its mass-based ideological moorings to constituency politics while maintaining its political ascendance in the province skillfully exploiting the undying charisma of the Bhuttos.

The Sindhi voter will once again fall for the emotional slogans.

He has enlisted in the party ranks the known political dynasties, sardars, clan chiefs and influential landlords – all known players of constituency-based politics. The party has gradually devoured all the influential and electable politicians and activists from other political alliances. By the time the electoral contest is held, the remaining few clan chiefs and politicians of any electoral worth will also jump on the bandwagon of the party. This would leave no political party or alliance of any electoral significance in the field to pose an electoral challenge to it in the forthcoming elections barring Hyderabad and Karachi.

The political opponents and alliance leaders have failed to match the political and electoral skills of Mr Zardari. As already mentioned he has completely veered the party from its original character of mass-based political resistance and driven to expedient conformity politics, euphemistically called political reconciliation, to acquire power.

When in power, the party follows a systematic policy of patronage as happens in centralized autocracies controlling all the provincial resources including jobs of all categories and grades, transfers, postings, promotions, shoulder promotions, deputations, payments, disbursement of funds, contracts, development, town planning, building controlling, policing, anti-corruption establishment through its elected apparatus comprising members of National Assembly, Provincial Assembly, Senate and now local governments. Nothing moves without the party’s consent. The transfers of the officials of the district administrations are made at the behest of the party representatives.

No institution has the leeway to work independently or follow the rules of business. The rules and regulations are tampered with, and competitive examinations, tests and interviews are manipulated to oblige favourites and cronies. The people remain beholden to the PPP leaders in their areas for petty jobs and relief from the oppressive police and revenue systems. The political opposition to the party has been systematically eradicated by inducing influential politicians to join hands and callously dealing with the recalcitrant ones through the registration of concocted criminal cases by the pliant police. This was excessively used during the local body elections.

It is widely believed the PPP administrations have been corrupt to the core plundering the budgetary allocations and developmental funds; auctioning urban lands and plots and mineral-rich scenic mountains of Tharparkar to builders and mining mafias displacing centuries-old villages and settlements of the indigenous people. The Bahria Town initially acquired less than 16000 acres as mentioned in the Supreme Court’s judgement. It is now spread over a sprawling area of over 55000 acres. It is rapidly stretching towards Kirthar National Park and Jamshoro. The private and state lands on both sides of the Super Highway from Karachi to Hyderabad have already been acquired by DHA, PAF, ASF and the builder mafias.

Over two dozen nationalist political parties and factions failed to evolve a united front to confront the PPP during all these years. They have not lived up to the expectations of the Sindhi masses. The Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) is in tatters because of the ineffective leadership of the current Pir of Pagara. Many clan leaders and landlords of political and electoral worth have already deserted it and joined the PPP. The PTI, in political alliance with influential political and spiritual dynasties, would have posed some significant challenges to both PPP and MQM at least in the urban constituencies of Karachi, Hyderabad, Sukkur, Nawabshah and Tharparkar. However, the PTI alarmed its political opponents especially the powers that count by its growing popular ascent in KP and Punjab, and its stubborn inflexibility to guarantee some balance in the current power equation in the event of winning the elections. The events of 9 May only precipitated the oppressive political engineering that was already on the anvil. This political threat to the PPP is altogether over now.

The Sindhi voters have been left with no choice but to vote for the PPP and MQM. They have been let down by the educated middle class, nationalists and political activists who too benefit from the patronage system operated by the PPP and MQM while in power. We would witness the play of the same cat-and-mouse game between PPP and MQM touching the raw nerves of voters in their constituencies. The Sindhi voter will once again fall for the emotional slogans and songs of Bhuttoism and often-repeated fantastic promises of jobs, increased Benazir income support, Sindh’s territorial integrity, freedom from wadera raj and the rights of the progeny of the creators of Pakistan.

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