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**A litany of abuse**

There is much debate raging regarding why Shahbaz Sharif is not being allowed to leave the country on medical grounds. In fact, like in so many other cases, unnecessary and unwarranted criticism is being heaped upon the government for its short-sightedness and lack of tolerance for the opposition leader.

Let’s first go over the facts relating to what Shahbaz reminds us of at this juncture in time. His older brother, a three-time former prime minister Nawaz, is a convict and a proclaimed offender (PO) whose two sons (Hassan and Hussain) are also POs. Shahbaz Sharif, accused of massive money-laundering, is facing trial in the courts, and was granted bail only a few weeks ago which is now being challenged. One of his sons (Salman Shahbaz) and his son-in-law, are both POs while his other son (Hamza Shahbaz), who is being tried in a number of cases, has only recently secured bail. One of his wives has refused to attend the court proceedings initiated against her; and their everlasting finance minister, Ishaq Dar, is a PO.

It can, therefore, be convincingly stated that Shahbaz Sharif comes from a long line of convicts, POs and alleged criminals. How would a person with such a lurid background be perceived in the annals of the law? Would he inspire confidence worthy of treatment not even accorded to the most honourable members of society who don’t enjoy an elevated status owed to billions stolen from the state?

That is not all. It was Shahbaz Sharif’s undertaking that was used as security by the court to allow relief to Nawaz Sharif to leave the country. It is a different story that the original plea of sickness also turned out to be fabricated. The undertaking stated that Nawaz would be back after four weeks. That has not happened even after more than one year having elapsed.

Going by the dictates of the law, he should be questioned for submitting a false undertaking for winning relief for his brother and should either be made to ensure his return, or appropriately punished. Instead, he is being rewarded by being allowed a one-time, eight-week relief to travel abroad. And all this was done on a day when the courts were closed for ordinary people.

In fact, they to date remain the only people who physically assaulted the Supreme Court when it refused to give in to their dictates. They then moved on to trading sacks of the loot in their bid to topple the then chief justice, Sajjad Ali Shah. They not only succeeded in doing it then, they have also made this into a routine practice. Over time, they have become used to dictating their decisions to the judiciary. When faced with resistance, they treacherously resort to a mix of conceit, cunning and a surfeit of the silver coins changing hands.

The judiciary has not been half as generous to any other political family in the country. As a matter of fact, in some cases, it has been downright callous, including what is generally referred to as the ‘judicial murder’ of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. There is hardly any precedent of handing down capital punishment by a split decision to a person who had himself not committed the alleged act and was only accused of having ‘ordered’ it by an Approver.

The corruption of the Sharif family has been an established reality. Why is it then that they have this everlasting romance with the judiciary? Maybe, this is because of the judiciary’s own history, including the proclivity of saving fellow judges. As the original architect of the term ‘doctrine of necessity’, it has been guilty of legitimising dictatorships in the country. Since that first time, it has been used for every military takeover which, according to pundits, has been the rationale for so many coup d’états having been staged in Pakistan.

Nawaz Sharif’s political conduct has been that of a spoilt brat who cannot take no for an answer. More than any other leader, the Sharifs are the product of institutional largesse and, on many an occasion, their grievous transgressions have been overlooked. According to some insiders, a soft corner still lingers for them which the younger brother may be trying to nurture.

The closing down of the Hudaibiya Paper Mills case has always been controversial. Despite incontrovertible evidence implicating the Sharifs, complete with transaction-wise details and the tell-tale confessional statement of Ishaq Dar, the case was not pursued diligently because of the complicity of the then-chairman NAB with the Sharifs. The government’s decision to have the case reinvestigated is a welcome initiative as, instead of delving into petty technicalities, it is its substance which should be evaluated for a decision.

Keeping the family’s history in perspective, granting bail to a person who faces innumerable grievous charges of corruption which are being prosecuted in the courts is not justifiable within the parameters of the law. The government is well within its right to make him stay back and face the charges as levelled. It is only if he is acquitted from the same and has also brought his brother back to Pakistan as undertaken by him that he should be considered for relief by the court. Creating an unnecessary fuss over the issue appears to be part of a well-planned, ill-intentioned, pre-orchestrated agenda which does not serve the cause of justice.

The Sharifs’ conduct has been an unending litany of abuse – both of the powers vested in their persons and subverting the process of the law. Here is an opportunity to bring this to an end to restore some trust in the judiciary.

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