**Beyond the call**

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In a landmark judgment, a five-member Supreme Court bench has declared, by a majority verdict, that the “vote of any member (including a deemed member) of a parliamentary party in a House that is cast contrary to any direction issued by the latter in terms of Para (b) of Clause (1) of Article 63A cannot be counted and must be disregarded, and this is so regardless of whether the party head, subsequent to such vote, proceeds to take, or refrains from taking, action that would result in a declaration of defection”. The judgment came in response to a reference the president had sent to the SC seeking its opinion on the interpretation of Article 63A of the constitution dealing with disqualification on grounds of defection.

While refraining from quantifying the duration of (subsequent) disqualification, the SC bench, however, said that “while it is for the parliament to enact such legislation, it must be said it is high time that such a law is placed on the statute book. If such legislation is enacted, it should not be a mere slap on the wrist, but must be a robust and proportionate response to the evil that it is designed to thwart and eradicate”.

For someone like me who has for long pleaded for morality to play a key role in national dispensation, the judgment came like a breath of fresh air, and from an institution I had almost lost hope in. It would not be inappropriate to say that it opens a new chapter in the chequered history of Pakistan’s democracy which has always remained hostage in the grip of individuals who sell cheaply by the wayside. This disgusting phenomenon, which has been appropriately referred to as an “evil” by the SC, was amply demonstrated during various phases of the vote of no-confidence that was moved against the government of Imran Khan when parliamentarians were purchased in full public view in exchange for inducements of varying nature and kind.

The irony is that the very same court which has come up with this path-blazing judgement now had failed to respond to the presidential reference in consonance with the urgency that it deserved. Consequently, the matter was relegated to a lower priority as the sordid drama of trading in parliamentarians’ numbers went on unchecked, leading to the unconstitutional dismantling of the government.

Some doubts may linger about the future of the government that was inducted at the centre as a consequence of horse-trading of parliamentarians, but the Punjab government must certainly pack up in the aftermath of this judgment because its existence was made possible owing to the votes of the PTI legislators who defected to the other side in violation of Article 63A. The provincial government no longer enjoys the support of the majority of the House. In spite of that, its removal may yet prove to be difficult owing to the constitutional paralysis in the province and since respect for law and morality are well beyond the operational parameters of the Sharif and Zardari clans as is amply demonstrated by their loot and plunder when in power.

There are people who are talking about things having changed drastically in the last few weeks. There are others who are conjecturing about a shift in the approach of institutions while some ever surmise that such a judgment could not have come without that. Rather than dabbling into any of these projections, I know that there has been a paradigm shift in the ground realities ever since a democratic government was removed through recourse to some gravely unconstitutional methods. This did not go down well with the people of the country who have responded in an unprecedented manner to Imran Khan’s call to resist this foreign-inspired and locally-facilitated regime-change conspiracy. That is the challenge that all institutions are confronted with now.

There is no escaping the stranglehold that is gradually tightening around the necks of the conspirators. People’s passion is seething, and their hopes firmly rooted in the person of Imran Khan. That is not changing. This is going to spread further with time and the unanimous chant shall rise to a crescendo across the length and breadth of the country when the call finally rings out for the march to Islamabad to secure genuine freedom from the clutches of enslavement which succeeding governments have plunged Pakistan into by pursuing servile policies to secure and promote their personal interests.

A sea of people is surging from all directions waiting for the call. As my friend, Salman Ahmad of Junoon fame wrote to me a couple of days back: “I was in IK’s car after the Sialkot rally last night. It took us three hours to get to the airport because there was an ocean of people swarming the roads. It was like a sufi gathering which attracts men, women, young and old – people from across divides and divisions. The feeling is indescribable in words – these vibrations of unity that only IK can attract like a magnet. He is illuminating a path of inner transformation. During these critical and chaotic times, he is the epitome of hope for the millions of his followers who are listening and urging him to break the shackles of fear, apathy and slavery. This is a revolution of hearts and minds, unfolding right here in front of our eyes”.

This is no imagination. This is real. This is happening now. There is Salman and there are millions of others who are watching it and getting inspired by the purpose behind the magic, the substance behind the words, and the genuineness behind the call for freedom. Khan is no ordinary leader. He is on a mission to salvage Pakistan and its people from the chains of slavery which they have worn through decades because of leaders who were receiving a hefty reward for that.

Those times are gone. Light has broken through the dark to show the path to the deprived and the destitute people of the country. For much too long, they have lingered on the fringes surviving on the throw-away morsels of the rich and the powerful. Their tongues were tied, their voices muted and their imagination caged. No more. They are free to bask in the glory of a promising future that is their inalienable right. Nobody can take it away from them.

This is a change that takes generations to happen. We are fortunate to be witnessing it with our own eyes. Beyond the call, there is a new Pakistan taking shape and there is an unending trail of people waiting to join the caravan of hope.

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