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**Animated suspension**

The path to a productive political discourse in the country has all but stalled. There are multiple factors which have contributed to this state, the most contentious being that both sides are convinced of their righteousness: one on account of the sheer merit of its cause that success of the process of reform will bring good for the state and its people, while the other knows that losing here will leave them with nothing to fight for.

For one side, its success would signify the path to deliverance from a past smitten with the marauding lust of its rulers and, for the other, it would ignite their passage to obliteration from the political arena altogether. The most daunting question that looms is whether the two sides will slug it out to the weakening – even elimination – of one, or there may still be a way for agreeing on some common ground and then refining it further over time to improve the state of mutual working relations. If such a rapprochement is enacted after all, what is the cost the state and the people may have to bear for its implementation?

Alternating between military and civil rules, Pakistan has suffered much because of a lack of continuity of policies, with each new contraption coming with its own ideas to put it on track. In the process, the country continued to suffer because of the absence of transparent and accountable governance which cultivated the twin scourge of corruption and crime. With the state abnegating on fulfilling its core responsibilities towards its people, and with those in seats of power feeding themselves lustfully on its assets, the malady assumed the form of pestilence which adversely impacted every facet of life – be it absence of dispassionate appraisal of the ills that stalk the country or the methods and mechanisms to address them, question of transparency and accountability or the absence of commitment to long-term objectives. Consequently, over the years, the tentacles of inequity and inequality have dug in deep.

Improvement of governance has been high on the agenda of the ruling party. In fact, this is an integral component of their core philosophy. From this cardinal undertaking stems the belief that all those who have deprived the state of its assets must bear the consequences and return the loot to the national exchequer. However, there is a disdainful denial of any wrongdoing by the other side. These are the opposite ends of the spectrum where the two sides are currently perched leaving the accountability institution and the courts to have a field day. What should have been decided within a minimum timeframe has dragged on month after month, with little hope that the cases would be dispensed anytime soon.

Part of the problem lies in the institutions rendered dysfunctional during past regimes because empowering them and enhancing their capacity were never the preferred options. This principally emanated from the sordid belief that politics was a game of money and that, to succeed, the rulers had a right to indulge in this penchant. They not only did it themselves, but allowed cronies and sycophants to do so as well, thus raising the horrid spectre of criminal mafias. The menace trickled from the top to the bottom with succeeding ruling elites guilty of espousing it with boundless passion.

A test case for the entire political leadership is just a few weeks away. The government has proposed to hold the Senate elections through open balloting. It has sent a reference to the Supreme Court for advice and has also moved a constitutional amendment in parliament. This comes in the wake of widespread allegations from all quarters that Senate seats are sold for huge sums of money. The PTI is not the only party demanding this. This is also part of the Charter of Democracy signed between the PPP and PML-N, clause 23 of which states that “to prevent corruption and floor crossing, all votes for the Senate and indirect seats will be by open identifiable ballot”. Despite the fact that it is part of the agenda of the three leading political parties, two of them have opted to oppose it. This is gross political opportunism and rank expediency.

Greatness that is thrust upon someone does not make for greatness. It is earned through relentless struggle and suffering which is always based on a set of unimpeachable principles. Greatness garnered through legitimate means earns respect. Changing goal posts by compromising priorities cannot win acclaim for anyone.

Pakistan needs healing, but this healing cannot come about by compromising its core interests and priorities, accountability being a principal consideration. This process is also not to be equated with political victimisation.

The PDM balloon having busted midcourse, its constituent parties are in a state of animated suspension. Retreat perceived as tantamount to political demise, the way forward remains blocked due to lack of clarity as well as increasing divisions within. So, the state of animated suspension may, after all, be a permanent.

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