**Bonhomie Starts Crumbling**

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There are no permanent friends or enemies in politics. It is the art of possible, which is why we see strange alliances and
coalitions stitched together as dictated by the permeating situations. It also provides clues as to why such coalitions or alliances, which are formed for specific purposes, are never long-lasting. The coalition government was formed on one point agenda to dislodge the PTI government, which they succeeded through a no-confidence motion when the establishment decided to remain apolitical. What has been happening since the inception of this coalition government up till now is not the subject of this discourse. It relates to visible signs of crumbling of the bonhomie between PML (N) and PPP, the major parties of the coalition government.

Foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto, who is also the chairman of PPP, while addressing a public rally in Swat, shot a salvo at the PML(N) by threatening to oppose the passage of the budget if the funds for the flood-affected areas of Sind were not released. His exact words were “If Muslim League wants PPP to vote for this budget, then it’s not possible without allocating funds for flood reconstruction.” He also claimed that PPP was not consulted on the budget and that the government did not include the input provided by the party.

What Bilawal said publicly tantamounts to hitting below the belt. The first thing is that he should not have broached the subject publicly being the coalition partner and if there were any differences on certain issues, they could have been resolved without making them a controversial issue publicly. The second point is that he should have taken up this subject in the cabinet meeting when the budget was discussed and passed by it. He and four PPP ministers were there in the cabinet meeting. Once the cabinet takes a decision, it becomes a collective responsibility. It is, therefore, a wrong ploy by Bilawal to disown the budget and adopt a threatening posture regarding its passage by the assembly. It is also pertinent to point out that the PPP legislators in the assembly have also been criticising the budgetary proposals and emphasising the allocation of funds for flood-affected areas of Sind. Some PML(N) leaders have also been heard taking a swipe at elections in AJK and Karachi reinforcing the impression of the beginning of the estrangement process between the two parties.

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It had to happen and is not a matter of surprise for those who are savvy about the brand of politics in Pakistan. Yes, the floods last year wreaked havoc in Sind. It is estimated that $ 31 billion were required to rehabilitate all those affected by them. Considering the severity of the financial crunch already faced by the country, it was simply impossible to provide succour to the affected people immediately.

The international community also took notice of this devastation. The government, through the good offices of the UN Secretary-General, was able to win commitments from the donors to extend the required help. I am sure as soon as the funds are received from the donors who made commitments in this regard, they would be released to the Sind government. Bilawal Bhutto and PPP are very much aware of it. It was an extraordinary situation and could not be tagged to the normal budgetary process when the economy of the country is already on the downward curve. The PPP should play a role in the passage of the budget, which is important for the country as well as both the PPP and PML(N).

My considered view on this development is that with the possibility of elections in October, the PPP is trying to build a narrative for itself while seeking a mandate of the people. Ultimately, the PPP and PML(N) would be competing against each other along with other parties vying to clinch their share of the power. With the emergence of a new party comprising former members of PTI, under the leadership of Jahangir Tareen, the possibility of any party emerging as a single majority party in a position to form a government in the provinces and centre does not look promising. They might have to forge new alliances and coalitions. Political rivalries are part of a democratic process but caution needs to be exercised that they are not transformed into enmities like it was done by the PTI government, which has consigned the country to an unending political and economic crisis. It is pertinent to mention that the political confrontation between PPP and PML (N) during the 90s is also an unenviable chapter of crass politics that enormously damaged the Pakistani polity and ultimately paved the way for yet another military rule.

The country needs a new social contract encompassing political and administrative reforms. The only way the country can move forward to realise the objectives of independence is when all political parties get together and forge an alliance against forces inimical to democracy to end their interference in politics forever. Elections under the prevailing system are not going to help in changing the fate of the country. The single constituency system promotes elitist politics fraught with unlimited avenues of corruption. The system of proportional representation provides the solution to the political woes that afflict our polity.

So after the coming elections, all the parties should sit together and adopt a system of proportional representation by making amendments to the constitution unanimously and then go for new elections. In this system people vote for the parties and not the individual candidates. Parties get representation in the legislature based on the percentage of votes achieved by it enabling them to nominate competent people to represent it rather than succumbing to the blackmail of electables.

It forecloses the avenues of rigging and also eliminates the role of the establishment and electables in the make and break of governments which unfortunately has been the norm in this country and the major cause of political instability. Another big advantage of proportional representation is the strengthening of national integration as even the smaller regional parties get a chance to come into the national mainstream thus discouraging fissiparous tendencies.

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