**Disadvantage of Incumbency**

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Whether it is a democratic dispensation or any other form of governance, critics, analyst and media relish the pursuit of hurling deserved and undeserved flak at the incumbent government; a phenomenon known as disadvantage of incumbency. It is unfortunately more pronounced in a polarized polity like Pakistan where political rivalry often descends into the realm of enmity with violent fall-out. The collateral damage of this situation manifestly is the influence it exerts on the critics, analysts, media and intellectuals who in certain situations lose their sense of objectivity and start taking sides in the tussle between the incumbent government and the opposition saying adieu to intellectual honesty. The truth is the biggest casualty in a situation like this.

This is exactly what is happening in Pakistan at the moment. In the wake of the announcement of a march on Islamabad announced by PTI and the steps taken by the government to thwart it, the media is awash with disapproval of the arrests of PTI leaders and workers, blockade of roads, closure of internet and suspension of mobile services. The thrust of the critics is on the point that these measures are violation of the fundamental rights and right to protest. Their contention is that these measures were violation of the fundamental rights and the right to protest besides adversely affecting the economy and industry within the country. One such commentator even went to the extent of saying that the present scale of authoritarian actions of the government goes much further than those witnessed under a civilian rule before.

I fully agree with the argument that political turmoil in the country, frequent shutdowns, closure of business, suspension of internet and roads littered with containers badly affect economy and industry within the country. It also conveys the impression of perennial political instability in the country which discourages the foreign investors to choose it as a destination for their investments.

However having agreed to the consequences pointed out by the critics of the government I would like to say that they have given only one side view of the picture and probably deliberately avoided to mention the factors inviting such measures. They have conveniently overlooked the fact that in a democratic model of governance the government and opposition are regarded as two sides of the same coin. Promoting political stability and safeguarding state interests is their collective responsibility.

Politics needs to be done in conformity with the internationally recognized norms of democratic conduct and in line with the laws and constitution of the country. Violence and intimidation of the state institutions has no place in politics. If any party resorts to such tactics and tries to foment instability with ostensible designs to disrupt smooth functioning of the government or attack the capital then it becomes the responsibility of the incumbent government to take effective measures to thwart the development of an ugly situation.

Honestly speaking the unfortunate reality is that the advent of PTI on the political landscape of the country has witnessed the introduction culture of violence in the Pakistani politics, more so since Imran Khan’s ouster from power through a constitutional process. The party leaders without any scruples hurl abusive remarks at the government functionaries. The dignitaries visiting foreign countries are harassed and insulted by the party zealots. As if it is not enough the party orchestrated a rebellion against the state and within the Army on 9th May by attacking military installations and monuments of the martyrs which is an undeniable reality. Even during the protests in the aftermath of general elections the party has resorted to violent tactics. Chief Minister of KPK has led marches on the capital in which personnel of the law enforcing agencies have been shot at by the PTI workers.

The question is that in the light of track record of the party how could the government whose prime responsibility is to maintain law and order and protect civic life allow PTI to march on the capital and stage a sit-in at D-Chowk? In the eyes of the critics the government might have overreacted to the situation but the reality is that in the end their apprehensions about the intentions of the party have been proven right.

The final call for March on the capital to secure the release of Imran Khan has led to the martyrdom of four personnel of rangers and two policemen. The protestors were carrying guns, tear gas shells and slings which they used extensively to attack police and rangers providing a ranting testimony to the fact that they had come fully prepared to create anarchy and chaos. Among those arrested are also some Afghan nationals. The PTI leaders including Chief Minister of KPK and wife of Imran Khan Bushra Bibi are on record to have incited their followers to violence.

As an anodyne observer I would like to ask a few questions from those who are hurling flak at the government for blocking roads, shutting internet and mobile services and having gripes in their stomachs in this regard. Do they honestly feel that PTI has been conducting itself as a political party in line with the recognized norms? Do they approve of the incidents like 9th May and the violent political culture introduced by PTI? Do they by scratching their conscience still feel that the government should not have blocked roads and taken other measures to stop PTI from creating an ugly situation? I think those who do have a little bit of conscience would say no in response to all these questions.

No government would ever desire chaos and violence in the country or allow anybody to create instability that undermines the state interests. Preventing the emergence of such situations also has enormous financial costs. According to the finance minister Muhammad Aurangzeb the permeating situation is causing a daily loss of Rs.190 billion to the federal government. The question again is who has forced this situation on the country? Obviously it is PTI which instead of trying to seek the release of its leader through a judicial process and finding a solution to the contentious issues through debate in the parliament is trying to adopt violating means to push its agenda. I honestly feel that the response of the government to this latest march on the capital was right and fully justified.

I am afraid PTI is treading a wrong and dangerous path. The disheartening saga of violence and political brinkmanship has proved counter-productive. The states cannot be brow-beaten by such violent actions of a few thousand people gathered by using the resources of a province which in itself is a strand of corruption. They way the party has been defeated in its designs by the state--- and rightly so--- it needs to recalibrate its strategies and priorities. The permeating situation also necessitates the need for the intellectuals and media men to evaluate the situation in an objective and honest manner.

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