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**Disorderly manifestations**

“Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad.” – Sophocles: ‘Antigone’ The dismantling of the PDM is playing out in multiple ways across the national arena with mixed feelings of remorse and deja vu, but the way the Sharif clan has been impacted by the fallout is a challenge to capture in words.

In one of his latest video clips, the convict-absconder Nawaz Sharif alleges that NAB has no right to summon Maryam to answer questions relating to allegations of money-laundering. He terms the move an affront and exhorts the PML-N’s supporters to resist it by all means and methods. Then he goes on to allege that people are transferring looted money out of the country, but conveniently forgets to mention the billions that he and his family members had siphoned off through his numerous stints in power, or the billions allegedly being showered on Fazlur Rehman to lead the charge against the incumbent government. In his abuse and invective stoking rebellion against the state, one can see the making of another Altaf Hussain circa 2021.

This usually happens when one loses the plot which, undoubtedly, is the case in the current instance. Formation of the PDM by the original 11-party conglomerate had only one motive: to see the back of Prime Minister Khan and restore the errant ways of their previous sojourns in power. After the initial promise, disagreements accumulated which were both strategic and tactical in nature.

While the PPP was also interested in having the corruption cases written off against their leaders for which the ouster of the regime was desirable, it was Sharif who opted for taking on the establishment in a highly vitriolic manner, blaming it for everything adverse that had happened to him. One knew all along that they were quite desperate for concluding an understanding for provision of relief. The pressure came when the expected reprieve did not come and any futuristic hope in the matter had also been dashed.

The PPP, on the other hand, preferred playing a more pragmatic game. While its messengers were also engaged with the powers to secure relief, it meticulously avoided a confrontation to keep the avenues open. Simultaneously, it refused to sacrifice its power base in Sindh for the sake of agitation politics and promoted the idea of in-house efforts against the government.

This did not sink in well with the Sharifs who unilaterally manoeuvred to have the act of tendering resignations from the assemblies embedded as a prerequisite with the holding of the Long March. This broke the proverbial camel’s back and the two leaderships, along with their retinue of party stalwarts, were seen blaming each other in public for the debacle that struck the PDM. Slander and sarcasm were heaped in abundance in an effort to put the other on the mat, but it effectively worked to the detriment of the PDM which was administered a premature burial.

With the virtual exit of the PPP as an active component of the PDM, the battle is now between the PML-N and the government with Fazlur Rehman acting as the facilitator for gathering the requisite crowd ala the seminaries which are allegedly fed on illicit funds from multiple sources. If the sources also include foreign countries, this would be an act of great unkindness on their part and the matter may be taken up at appropriate fora.

The respective positions that the two warring parties have taken including the PPP’s demand that Nawaz Sharif should return to the country to take part in the agitation are likely to drive them further apart. Whether there is a formal PPP exit remains to be seen, but new battle lines are being drawn regarding whose nominee should be the leader of the opposition in the Senate.

Quite obviously, the government would be the beneficiary of the division which it will use against the very coinage of the coalition which is now headed for the burial grounds.

While the PPP may live to smile another day, it is the end of the road for the PML-N and its other coalition partners. It also appears that the NAB has taken a not-so-friendly view of the Sharif activities and has decided to use the options that it has within its repertoire which may not exclude the possibility of getting Maryam Sharif behind bars again. That is where she should have been in the first place. She is a convict and had sought temporary bail to look after her ailing father who was then admitted in hospital in Pakistan. He has since departed from the country and was later declared an absconder because of his persistent refusal to appear before the court. There is, therefore, no rationale for her bail not being called to question.

Two things can happen in such an event: Maryam will lose her freedom and, more importantly, the leadership of the party may pass on to Hamza Shahbaz in settlement of a lingering feud. This would be a great setback for the Nawaz Sharif faction within the PML-N as Shahbaz Sharif and his cohorts never quite agreed with the former’s confrontational brand of politics.

For the senior Sharifs, the coming days may combine increasing frustration with the pain of losing grip over the party reins also: whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad.

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