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**Down to brass tacks**

Notwithstanding the fact that the pundits had not associated any unwarranted hope with the PDM since its inception, few dared imagine that it would come crashing down without even a whimper. With the internal divisions having surfaced in the open, leading to the postponement of the Long March, the heads are closeted again in the hope of a miracle happening.

It had been palpably clear for some time that the PPP would be an unwilling partner in a venture involving resignations from the assemblies. Within the PDM, it has the largest stakes as being the only component party which also heads a provincial government. The PML-N may have the most numbers, but it has no government while other parties have no appreciable stakes in order to take the movement forward.

It was left to Asif Zardari to fire the damning shots. He said that once Nawaz Sharif returned to the country with Ishaq Dar, resignations would be handed over to him. He contended that if a fight were to be waged, all should be prepared to go to jail. He also doubted Sharif’s credentials to solve people’s problems and said that the battle would not be fought on the mountains, but in parliament. He warned: “we should not take such decisions which may force us to part ways”. What a dampener!

The diatribe elicited a strong rebuke from Maryam Sharif who said that, like Asif Zardari, her father was also present in the meeting through video-link. She said that Sharif was sick and no one had a right to ask him to come back. Instead, she said, they should talk to her.

Earlier, the JUI-F chief had said that the Long March would be a futile exercise without first tendering resignations. He said that there was no purpose of staying in the assemblies after losing the bid for the offices of the chairman and deputy chairman of the Senate.

The divisions within the PDM are clearly drawn out, and do not relate to resignations alone. It runs much deeper. If this movement is to continue, Zardari would want Sharif back in Pakistan together with Ishaq Dar, a prospect Maryam has rubbished. This divide of faith is likely to get deeper with the passage of time. With Sharif staying on in London, Zardari will be an unwilling partner in carrying forth the PDM agenda.

The fact that the PDM was always perceived to be an unnatural union of conflicting objectives has been proven right. While all parties have been engaged secretly in securing reprieve for their respective leaders, it is Sharif who chose the venom of the spoken word to launch a blitzkrieg on the government and security institutions alike, thus eliminating any prospect for reconciliation.

On the contrary, the smart cookie that he is, Zardari knew all too well that he had limited space to nurture an ill-conceived bonhomie with the PML-N. Overall, he played his hand well by giving the impression of espousing the PDM agenda, but never hesitated to dash it if it clashed with his personal game plan.

After his on-now-off-now game, the time finally came for him to show his hand – which he did in a decisive manner, signifying both his disagreement with the operational conditions as well as his disgust for the PML-N leadership for staying away in luxury while expecting others to burn their boats. Although the official position is that the PPP will convene a session of the CEC to deliberate the resignations issue, it is all but certain that the response will again be in the negative. So, if the PPP opts out, what are the options for the rest of them?

It is down to brass tacks. On the face of it, there could be two ways: remain engaged to convince the PPP to come on board, or dump them to proceed further nevertheless. The PDM fully understands that, in the former instance, it would be a sheer waste of time because the PPP will not jeopardise the gains it has painstakingly secured in the last few months. And, in pursuing the latter instance, the PDM would be deprived of the support of its most effective partner in a push for the finish. So, the choice is damning. The PDM is placed between a rock and a hard place with, apparently, no hope of the posts shifting.

While this is happening to the PDM, the PTI has gained in strength and is well poised to launch its reform programme and go for the kill heading to the next elections in about 30 months. It may have gained an upper hand, but it cannot afford to sit back. It must move quickly to introduce legislation to bring about key changes in the way development work is pursued in the country which should not be confined to merely a change of objectives.

A fundamental shift in approach is needed to address challenges of public importance, fully supported by a team of dedicated associates who have the capability, capacity and commitment to understand and deliver.

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