**Lahore will show the way**

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This government learned once again the hard way in Multan, like it does just about everything, that all forms of threats and intimidation are useless when the people decide to take things in their own hands. It shamelessly used the apparatus to do what it could to paralyse the opposition, hurled threats, even arrested scores if not hundreds of our workers so the preparations for the landmark jalsa could never be properly completed, yet eventually it just fell all over itself when it saw the power of the people at play on the streets of the historic city. In doing so, it has only itself to blame for stretching the impact of the event from the scheduled one-day to a whole week. And in all the talk show debates that dominated prime time discussion on television, PTI representatives were the very picture of embarrassment and humiliation. How the mighty have fallen.

What is more, this pitiful fall from grace, of the Punjab and central governments, was orchestrated on the ground by the sheer will of two strong women; the charismatic PML-N Vice President Maryam Nawaz, who is the focal point the protest movement and an enigma that the government is simply unable to understand, much less handle, and PPP’s rising start Asifa Bhutto. How these two ladies, whose families have been so blatantly victimised by the ruling party, were able to command the presence of such large, charged crowds, that too in complete defiance of all sorts of official chest thumping and sabre rattling by the state, is a very important chapter in rewriting the political history of this country.

All eyes are now on Lahore as the PDM movement is all set to snowball into the heart of the Punjab government and all you have to do to see how the government is feeling is read news reports about the disarray in the federal as well as Punjab cabinets over the gross mishandling of the Multan procession. They locked up everybody who could have helped mobilised our workers and put containers around almost all street corners, yet they were forced into a hasty retreat when our leadership just showed up in the city and ordinary people poured out onto the streets and connected with them.

If that happened in Multan, you can only imagine how they must be feeling about what is about to happen in Lahore. They can mobilise their mouthpieces to discredit our leadership all they want, but the simple, undeniable fact of the matter is that when former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, and now especially PML-N Vice President Maryam Nawaz, speak to the people they not only listen but also rejoice and celebrate the connection with their real leaders, who have proven records of service to them.

Now the people can see Maryam Nawaz leading the preparatory drive ahead of the jalsa herself.

Ordinary people of Lahore, as well as the press corpse that follows her, are reminded of the way she tirelessly campaigned for her late mother. That was, after all, when she first connected so deeply and directly with the people, and they discovered her natural charisma for the first time.

Since then, despite all the fake cases, jail sentences and harassment she has faced from those that supposedly run the state these days, she has only gone from strength to strength. For whenever she steps out of her house, she is followed by very large crowds – ordinary Pakistanis like you and me who are desperate for a sense of order to return to our country and our lives.

In Lahore, once again former PM Nawaz Sharif will address what is sure to be a huge gathering of the Pakistani people. They have seen all sorts of politicians and political leaders come and go, and they know that only Nawaz Sharif has so far had the courage and strength to confront the so-called establishment and tell it like it is. Single-handedly, he turned Pakistan’s political discourse on its head. That is the biggest reason for such strong public support before and since then. As Maryam Nawaz correctly put it not long after her father’s address by video link in Gujranwala, “He has set the people free; they are no longer speaking in hushed tones but are bravely naming, blaming and shaming (those responsible for this mess).”

Stung by the shock the ruling party tried everything in its power to discredit Nawaz Sharif, including branding him a traitor and an agent of India, but at the end of the day it is only the people’s verdict that matters, which is why we in the opposition are not surprised at all that most people have rejected the state’s narrative and accepted the opposition’s.

If crowds that throng to PDM rallies are larger and bigger every time, despite more intimidatory tactics employed by the government, it only goes to show how fed up people are with everyday problems like out-of-control prices, especially in food items, rising unemployment and a complete breakdown of public works programs, all of which have come with the puppet government that was selected by just a few for all of us.

Lahore is where the ruling party draws its organisational strength from. It is once again trying to use its muscle as well as the threat of the coronavirus to keep people from joining the procession on 13 December 2020. Yet its entire machinery is already humbled by the efforts and energy of just one strong woman, Maryam Nawaz, and everybody can see the axe fall on this over-eager government as PDM takes Lahore by storm and then marches onto Islamabad.

As so often in the long history of this subcontinent, Lahore is going to show the way.

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