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December 10, 2020

**Opposition politics what lies ahead?**

So let's assume the PDM rally takes place as scheduled in Lahore on December 13, without any attempt by the government to block it. Let's assume that after this a long march begins to Islamabad. Even if a gathering in Islamabad can be held for a month or longer, it is unlikely to yield any real results.

The question people ask is: what is to happen even if the opposition succeeds in its desire to oust the government through the use of street power. Even if all opposition members do actually resign from assemblies why would 'selectors' not restore the so-called selected government through a new poll?

It is obviously illegal to oust any elected government no matter how incompetent or how badly it may have performed during its tenure in power. This is something we should think about. But even if the government is somehow forced out of office, or a change in its structure is seen, what can we expect after this? After all, the rule of either the PML-N or the PPP, the two parties who command the vote base that could bring them to power in various parts of the country, is not exactly exemplary.

The recent interview by former finance minister Ishaq Dar to BBC's 'HardTalk' exposed him to a considerable extent, with the host of the show catching out a number of untruths, or attempts at deception. We also know that neither the PPP nor the PML-N government were exactly honest, or well-intentioned. Most importantly, they had no success in putting right all the ills that we see in the country. The building of bridges, of roads, of highways or metro buses may be one thing, but it does not tackle the terrible poverty of people – with 40 percent of our children suffering stunting due to the lack of nutrition that they receive.

We have some of the worst social development figures in the world with the highest maternal mortality rate in South Asia, the highest infant mortality rate in the same region and figures, which in many cases, compare with those or are worse than countries in Sub Saharan Africa the poorest region in the world. There's no evidence that any major party is truly committed to resolving these problems.

So what is to happen from this point on? It is a dilemma, and that we all know. Pakistan's issues with governance have held it back a very long way and prevented it from reaching the developmental milestones crossed long ago by countries such as Malaysia and others in the region, which also started off after the colonial era as impoverished nations with little literacy and poor standards of life. Since then, they've done a great deal to uplift the quality of life of their people and achieving this is after all, the greatest success a nation can hope for. How Pakistan is to reach this landmark is something that is not easy to answer.

It is notable that the opposition alliance in its many speeches and addresses, has not said what it intends to do after it has removed the PTI government. There's no talk of any programme or any scheme, which could better the lives of people and make the country a securer, happier place. Most people expect very little, from leaders they have seen in power before. They also expect little from the parties that they head. It is evident that these parties lack sufficient will to make any real difference.

What then would be the purpose of ousting the present government. The best method, as some politicians have already said, on public television, may be to allow the PTI government to finish its term, work towards electoral reforms till then, ensure the next election is not rigged, work in constituencies and hope that the people themselves decide that they want a better, abler, more competent government.

It is also worth noting that over the last two years and more, members of opposition have spoken of injustice and unfair treatment, complaints which are not entirely invalid, given the manner in which NAB has acted. But they have not gone back to their constituencies and worked amongst their people. If they focused on doing this, there would be a much better chance of re-election when the time comes, for the next round of polling.

The best hope after all lies in the people. But what are people expected to do when they have so little choice in terms of leadership. It is useless to believe that a messiah will arrive from somewhere either wearing uniform of some sort or without uniform or other attire, which is recognizable, and suddenly turn around the country. Instead, this will have to be a long, slow and possibly difficult process. Perhaps democracy for all its flaws, is the best way to move towards this goal.

The opposition must first of all put together a plan that can be put before the people and which is both realistic and believable. Once this has been chalked out, it would be in a better position to convince people that it is truly willing to make a difference in their lives. Corner meetings, addresses at various places and smaller gatherings could all help bring this message home to people. The question of precisely what the plan for the betterment of the country is to be, is of course difficult to decide. It's up to experts brought in by the political leadership to determine what economic methods to follow, what strategies to use and how to turn around a country that has seen too many years of despair.

There is also every possibility that if democracy is allowed to continue, eventually a leader may emerge with the capacity and the commitment to bring in real change. Of course, he or she must also have the qualities of leadership necessary to convince the people of this. The process will not be an easy one, it will also take time. But, at the first stage, the plan for the future must be chalked out. Simply making programmes for long marches, rallies, 'dharnas' or sit-ins serves very little purpose. All it does at the present time is create a degree of unrest and also spread the Covid-19 virus, which is on the rise in the country. It is true that it is also spread through the government rallies and these too must end immediately.

There should be no double standards, same standards must apply to all and rallies, 'dharnas' and gatherings of all kinds should be stopped. If they are to occur at all, strict SOPs must be followed. And as we all know, these will be difficult to enforce in our country. Till then, the best part is to determine what the strategy is to be. There is no point in marching to Islamabad and gathering at D-Chowk or any other designated place. We have seen this happen in the past. In fact, Imran Khan undertook just such a task in 2014. Some years later, Maulana Fazalur Rahman did the same.

Nothing has changed since these gatherings at these grounds, and there's no reason to believe that things will be different this time round, should the long march occur at the end of the PDM's protest strategy.

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