**Our game of thrones**

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“Politics is not a game but a serious business,” said Winston Churchill. However, in Pakistan, we routinely understand and usually practice politics as a game, or should I say, a “game of thrones”. Just like the American fictional drama, we also have few seemingly noble families wage war against each other to gain control over the government governing the land of pure. Just like the HBO drama, the game we play has got kings and knights, crowns, and assassinations. However, instead of dragons or ghosts, we have intimidating corruption watchdogs, aggressive top courts, and an always watching invisible establishment. Although the American drama is available on Home Box Office (HBO) and selective streaming services only, while our version of “game of thrones” is premiered each day throughout the year on all television channels round the clock. The plot and storyline of our version of the drama covered even in the news bulletins revolve around blame-games, corruption scams, APCs (all parties’ conferences), PDMs, and their anti-government agitations. The compelling characters make the drama interesting for a normal Pakistani who goes all his way even during the pandemic scare, just to see these characters in action in live public gatherings. To summarize, the game of politics in our country is aggressive to the very edge of bloody violence, packed with ambitious male and few female characters fighting for power where the money goes a long way to serve their purpose. In this game nothing stops them, even the worst of pandemics, to pursue their objective.

While the PDMs activities continue attracting huge public gatherings against the PTI led government, Corona and its terror seems far from diminishing. The government has somehow failed to persuade the opposition to end the agitation or at least scale it down to stop the pandemic from playing havoc. At the same time PTI and government were seen sponsoring similar gatherings and festivities in the recent weeks thus losing the moral ground to stop the opposition from doing so. However, the government, on the pretext of the pandemic situation, is pretending to be thoughtful in stopping the PDM public gatherings. At least it is trying to intimidate PDM by arresting opposition activists and lodging FIRs against them. However, these might not be sufficient to discourage the opposition. With the JUI-F hardline chauvinists ready to respond to any use of force as already ordered by Maulana Fazal Ur Rehman, the situation could become ugly. PTI government realizes the same thus using considered actions without escalating the situation. On the face of it, PPP is considered to be a bit calculative in its participation in PDM activities, yet is poised to introduce Asifa Bhutto Zardari to national politics. After all, in Pakistan, the process of becoming a leader never starts from the bottom but begins from the top.

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The government faces challenges on two fronts in this regard. On one end, it faces uncertainty with regards to the pandemic as no predictive tools seem to be working at the moment which may calculate how far this would go in claiming lives and disrupting social order. Thus the government has a burden of responsibility to look into additional preparedness and response efforts against COVID-19 including; generation and mobilization of additional resources, attract funds and investments in existing humanitarian response by all organizations, and establish light and fast track procedures for all government, non-government, civil-society and humanitarian organizations to immediately organize their resources. On the other hand, the government has to deal with the PDM onslaught which may bring thousands of anti-government protestors loitering on the roads of the federal capital.

Justifiably, the present economic situation in the country is not in favor of the common citizens. If it is not the reality as government professes, the perception is unfortunately as such. Thus, the common people, compressed due to economic factors due to instability, show a higher level of fervor, desire, and motivation to involve themselves in anarchist activities rather than creative and economically productive activities. This fact may force the government to take all necessary actions to not allow such a gathering, particularly in the federal capital.

Politics of agitation has harmed the country in a big way since it triggers a vicious cycle which remains the main cause for the country’s under-development. Since agitations create an uncertain political environment, thus nobody expects the nation to develop, prosper, or progress. The reckoning of political instability is very simple at least it is easily comprehensible in our case. With uncertainty in the political atmosphere, the level of foreign and domestic investments drastically falls; the speed of development progression slows down, inflation shoots up, and the indicators of the economic growth engine start to stall. This failure of the economy to take-off again in turn creates political turbulence. It disrupts the productivity of a country by limiting its exports, disturbs the tax system, and threatens the interests of investors who leave the country. Thus the cycle  
continues forever.

Every citizen understands that political stability is imperative for economic growth. It is an essential ingredient for social cohesion since it avoids disharmony between different institutions, promotes pluralistic norms, and addresses resentments among different segments in the society. But, with such stable and predictable politics, the political game would become a mundane affair. For us, the “Game of Thrones” should remain captivating. Therefore issues related to the sharing of powers between various players (such as opposing parties, between institutions, and federal and provincial governments) erupt from time to time increase people&#39;s interest in politics. For Pakistanis as a nation, conflicts developed between various players are an interesting affair to watch. Military interventions, dictatorships, political deinstitutionalization, displaced leadership, dynastical politics, secessionist movements, all of these make the drama more exciting for the average Pakistani.

Pakistan for a long time has been under a dictatorship that is blamed a great deal for political instability. But in reality, democracy also could not work to assure political stability in Pakistan. For most of Pakistan’s history, political leadership and dictators worked together through compromise and consultations. How can this be denied as every dictator was supported by some political party? I believe, as a nation, we need to look for a plot in the political game where we could experience true democracy, a political system free from heredity family politics, military dictators, leaders installed from above and above all without the influence of money on politics. We must agree that as a nation we need political players to enter into alliances not merely for the power-sharing but to strive for the revival of true democracy and assure political stability.

*The writer is a versatile analyst and speaker on contemporary issues.*