

24 and still counting

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The provincial government in Sindh was formed nearly twenty-four months ago and it is a total mystery as to what the initial government that was formed or the one that replaced it eight months ago were expected to do. The first, headed by a Chief Minister who was a good, honest man but suffered from severe inertia, partly of his own making and partly because of an over aggressive Governor who represents a domineering coalition partner, was a perfect example of serious inactivity and lacked direction completely. The present, headed by a Chief Minister who can best be described as no more than a windbag, offers little hope and is devoid of all ability.

After an initial flurry of bluster, bravado, babble and misdirected aggression the present CM, too, recognised the unassailable writ of the "favoured" and has submitted timidly, leaving the administration and operation of the province seriously lacking in vision and commitment. At the behest of a handful, Islamabad has turned a blind eye to this non-governance and complete breakdown in Sindh. It is bewildering because nobody can benefit from the prevalent situation. Not the government, nor the people nor the province; only the disruptive and corrupt element. So to consider permitting this situation to continue even for a day longer is asking for trouble - pure political suicide.

The province's state of development demands immediate attention. Fair and unbiased attention, delivered under a developed and regulated plan based on generating economic activity and creation of employment. The present configuration is not equal to the task. It does not possess the elementary tools required to take even step one. Yet Islamabad continues to persist with this mockery and the results are evident for all to see. *Wadera Shahi* is rampant and, in the interior, their political will is bludgeoned into acceptance. Karo kari, jirgas and the like are acceptable forms of governance. In the cities of Karachi and Hyderabad, the coalition partners run amok. It is a known fact that until this situation is dismantled nothing will ever evolve for Sindh.

The Sindh government is totally incommunicative. There is no interaction with the population, nor any delivery resulting in despondency and complete loss of faith. There is neither rule of law nor governance of any sort! Law and order is in shambles. The provincial cabinet has not met in two and a half months! One may well ask how the government is functioning. For is it not the Cabinet that deliberates upon the issues facing the province? There are subjects that can only be approved by this body. Is everything then at a standstill? An absolutely unacceptable state of affairs. Inept handling of issues has caused massive unrest. For the first time in more than 21 years there have been street battles between the people and the police in the interior of the province. The threat of turmoil looms large.

A vicious circle has been created by selecting people unfit to govern and permitting them to get away with blue murder. When their supporters begin to do the same, the government is in no position to stop

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them and therefore a new band is unleashed on society. What is good for the goose becomes good for the gander. In this good governance is quickly relinquished to the trash can. This is not to say that there are not a handful of good people in government who wish to do good things for the province and the city but they are the ones who are under fire from those that are more "powerful". The Nazim of Karachi is personally popular but disliked by the opposition, which is strong in the provincial government and is getting ready to have him out. Things are happening in Karachi, perhaps in not the planned and streamlined manner that is essential in this 21st century but the fact that they are very important. Just two days ago one of the two or three good ministers in the provincial cabinet resigned and the enlightened CM instead of ensuring that he remained in government issued contradictory and accusatory statements in fact acknowledging that he succumbed to family pressures in making the change.

But this is so typical of this CM. His passion for hearing his voice overrides his well nigh non-existent intellect. Whether it was the cock-up of the sugar situation or the mishandling of the Qambar, Shahdadkot fiasco, he had plenty to say that was totally unnecessary. As he did at Zardari's release earning plenty of negative publicity. When the matter had been settled with the sugar manufacturers for mills to start on October 15th, he insisted on threatening and brow beating them into accepting October 1st which he should have known was not possible. After being insulting towards them, the net result was that only the general managers and not the owners attended subsequent meetings, he tried to rough ride them. What happened is common knowledge, he had to eat crow. The mills did not start until after Eid or around November 15th.

The situation in Qambar has been terrible. If you saw the live footage on KTN of the police brutality and firing on the crowd you are, I am sure, as devastated as I am that this could happen in this day and age. All created by taking decisions without sufficient application of thought. Now that is the point. Where is that "thought" to come from? The police is a law unto itself but in this case, one must realise that when illiterate and untrained personnel is armed with sophisticated weapons they can only react with a natural instinct when faced with a dangerous situ-

ation. The instant reflex is to save themselves. No amount of orders of "hawai fire" can prevail because at the specific moment they can only think "kill or be killed". The task to organise them is massive. However without a government committed to do so, it cannot be, leave alone undertaken, even started.

Mumtaz Bhutto, in a recent TV interview said that he had interacted with the President, PM and other significant government officials and that he had found them very receptive to ideas. The President, he said had listened to him without interruption for twenty minutes while he outlined the problems being faced by the province. According to him the President not only agreed with him on this issue but that subsequently they had discussed and agreed on what needs to be done to begin to correct the situation. They apparently parted on the premise that necessary action would be initiated by Islamabad. Months later nothing had happened, giving Mumtaz reason to believe that while intentions were good, the delivery fell short by a distance. He could not understand why or what had caused the change of heart.

This question irks the mind of every person thinking for Sindh. Not for a moment is anyone prepared to believe that Islamabad is not aware of the prevalent situation. Nor do they believe that the President and PM are unaware of the caliber of those selected to run the government in the province. Therefore there is the need to know when this rot will be stemmed. To perpetrate this lack of a chain of command and to deviate from the principle of unity of command is detrimental to the interests of the province. It can give rise to dissension amongst the populace and result in issues that we as a nation need to avoid at present.

There are very important issues concerning the province that need to be resolved and they require a vast amount of finesse and understanding, without which they can simply blow up. The NFC award is not being resolved in accordance with the aspirations of the province. The issue of the reservoir is one that triggers serious emotions and must be handled with kids' gloves if, as Islamabad has indicated, this is definitely going through. The shortage of water for agriculture and the non-availability of potable water for even the major cities of the province is another crucial factor.

All this is being put under wraps at this point. The provincial government is uselessly involved in low level politicking and establishing the pecking order without achieving the desired results. But for how long can this continue? These issues have to be dealt with and further delays will only cause more dissatisfaction. The longer Islamabad takes to address them the more the people of the province are convinced that they are not being heard. These issues and the province's lack of progress have overshadowed the mega projects that are supposed to be either under planning or under implementation. Where we don't know. There is a cry being raised throughout the province, "Does anyone care?"

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