Political muse 2018

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Boring and monotonous incarceration for the inmates of Adiala Jail must have come to an end since the addition, over the past weeks, of new members of their community. These new arrivals are a couple of VVIPs, who are enjoying privileges denied to other inmates, fuelling the notion that perhaps those held accountable for abusing high public office and the nation’s mandate, are entitled softer atonement. These privileges include fellow prisoners or ‘mushaqqatis’ detailed to serve them; home cooked delicacies instead of the ‘langar’ food that other prisoners eat; a team of specialists to look after their health; treatment in a high class government medical facility (instead of the jail hospital) while enjoying the luxury of the Presidential Suite and if media reports are correct, the installation of an air conditioner (on doctor’s orders) in the cell, to keep summer heat and perhaps mosquitos at bay.

All these ‘perks’ raise a fundamental question challenging categorization of prison cells into A, B and C (A class having all the comforts of home). This runs contrary to the words of our Founding Father, which unambiguously laid down ‘equality for all in the eyes of the law’, as part of his vision of how the Pakistani State was to function. It is therefore incumbent upon Pakistan’s new dispensation to ensure that Quaid e Azam’s words are translated into implementation. It would be futile to ask the VIP inmates of Adial Jail and those outside its walls if their conscience has ever troubled them, when abusing people’s mandate. I say this because in my reckoning those with a prolonged record of corruption and lust for power develop a mind-set, where such practices cease to appear corrupt.

Our political history is replete with corrupt parties and military dictatorships inhabiting the corridors of power. Although the last decade did witness uninterrupted political rule by two mainstream parties, but their respective terms were marred by economic ruin, rampant corruption and poor governance. Beset by delusions of invincibility, both PPP and PML N committed the singular error of overlooking public pulse and its increasing resonance with PTI. Election results therefore caused many upsets as big names were comprehensively defeated by little known individuals. Overcome by shock the losers adopted the well-known technique of crying foul and finding scapegoats. It is in this scenario that both the PTI and combined Opposition are claiming to hold adequate numbers required to form governments at the Center and Punjab, notwithstanding which it will in all probability be Imran Khan’s party that will soon be making victory speeches - a victory that will sorely test PTI leadership and credibility.

The obstacles likely to be faced by Khan Sahib on assuming the role of Prime Minister will be manifold. The most serious issues (read impediments) will not be our current fiscal situation, law and order nor international threats, but obstructive politics designed to impede the change in direction as promised by the PTI Chairman. A manifestation of this has already begun to take shape in the program of agitation inside and outside the Parliament issued by the Opposition Alliance. This ‘congregation’ of losers has adopted the role of the ‘dog in the manger’, conveniently forgetting that they had once upon a time condemned PTI of taking the same route. From all logical perspectives this alliance is unnatural and no matter what PML N and PPP may say, the gulf between the two main components of the group will never be really bridged and their mutual comfortable levels will remain low. This is reality, reinforced by the absence of both Bilawal and Asif Ali Zardari from Alliance meetings.

Last, but not the least, this piece will remain incomplete without pointing out the incompetence of the Election Commission, which regretfully is the cause of the current uproar. With five years at their disposal to prepare for the polls, this institution faltered in carrying out its mandate in a seamless manner. Perhaps what it needs is a total performance audit followed by a change of faces at all levels.

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