**Pakistan: Facing uncertainties**

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Making Almighty Allah his witness, the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan has denied signing the Official Secrets Amendment Bill 2023 and Pakistan Army Amendment Bill 2023. As he disagreed with these laws, as per his tweet, he had instructed his Staff to have these bills returned unsigned. Question: What is the present status of these two bills? Passed or kept in abeyance?
The discussion on issuing verbal instructions and related procedural follow-up actions presumably not taken by the President’s Staff aside, why did these bills keep lying in the Aiwan-e-Sadr for so long? A suitcase full of bills was disposed of not-so-long-ago….!! Why only these two bills were delayed knowing full well that such procrastination might hang them in the air until the new Parliament was in place? If the Hon. President ‘disagreed’ with these proposed amendments, which factors restricted him to timely express his disagreement, in writing? Seemingly, the Presidency was faced with the dilemma of choosing between the devil and the deep blue sea. Otherwise, a simple one-liner from the Principal Secretary could have done the trick. ‘The President is pleased to have the bills returned as unsigned.’ As for the Hon. President, perhaps, this was his way of fighting for the Haqiqi Azadi…!!!
The ‘Command and Control’ system at the Presidency has been exposed. The inherent flaws in administering the HOS’s Office have left a lot to be desired. Whereas handling or mishandling of one cypher message had cast aspersions on the security of secret documents, the rift within the Presidency over handling important documents has made matters even worse. On the other hand, absolving one’s own self of any wrongdoing seems to be the foremost objective. While the Hon. President seeks forgiveness from Almighty Allah, the Principal Secretary’s ‘confidential’ explanatory note is taking rounds in social media. What is going on? Neither the Hon. President nor his ‘defiant’ Principal Secretary waited for a proper inquiry to explain their respective positions. Perhaps, they knew the ‘obvious’ outcome of this ‘futile’ exercise.
The Principal Secretary’s proposed replacement has reportedly declined the honour. What next? Whatever move the Hon. President deems appropriate to take now, one factor needs his consideration. The treatment meted out to Waqar Ahmad, at the peak of his career, is not fair. Question: Why change only one Officer when the Aiwan-e Sadr boasts about having the loyal services of several other ‘concerned’ senior Officers, both from civil and military bureaucracies, to assist the President in the smooth running of the State’s affairs? Ideally speaking, looking at the sheer enormity of ‘disobedience’, the entire set of Officers and support staff should have been sent back to their respective Departments. After all, all of them hold their official positions ‘during the pleasure of the President.’
And then the Chief Election Commissioner turned down the invitation to meet the President….!!! However, he was pleased to meet and discuss ‘matters of mutual concern’ with the American Ambassador. Any idea what is going on in this country?
The scenario depicted above is only a façade. The real chessboard is seemingly being managed somewhere else. Without floating yet another conspiracy theory, let us see how the ongoing political uncertainty has been addressed so far. The ‘image building’ strategy and the plan to bring political ‘certainty’ to subsequently improve the economic situation, has so far achieved certain objectives. The ‘undesirable’ political figure is incarcerated with his party apparently in disarray. The myth has been broken if not the backbone. Secondly, the other political parties, particularly those which enjoyed around sixteen months of forgettable rule, have been quietly marginalized. At present, the country is devoid of any opposition. Thirdly, after the dissolution of the National Assembly, days before completing its time, a caretaker setup has been put in place to first ‘pave the way’ for and then hold ‘free and fair’ general elections.
Confirmation of the dates of the general elections is crucial for all diplomatic, economic and trade related forces both within and outside the country. This is where the ‘uncertainties’ hurt the most. Presumably, the accruing monetary and diplomatic losses have been accepted as collateral damage. The constitutional and legal locale is also in a tight spot. The Supreme Court is displaying section 224 of the Constitution that calls for a general election to the Assembly within ninety days whereas the ECP is adamant to follow section 17 (2) of the Election Act 2017 that requires delimitations after every census. With ECP’s announcement to conduct the delimitation exercise following the new digital census, the general elections will not take place in November this year. No one knows if these ninety days will last for six months or eleven years.
Creating chaos or raising controversies are obvious tactical moves. From ‘double jeopardy’ of the cypher message to surprising the enemy by an in-house revolt in the highest Constitutional Office, the pieces placed at the political chessboard look quite comfortable. As the incumbent President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan belongs (or previously belonged) to an ‘undesirable’ political party, he is clearly a pebble in the shoe if not an outright ‘threat’.
He seems to be the proverbial last straw…!! Hence, the voices emanating from all corners, demanding his resignation, make sense. Impeachment is not possible as there is no National Assembly. If he doesn’t resign and stays until the completion of his constitutional term, there might be some ‘resistance’ or ‘reluctance’ on his part, making the caretakers unbale to take care properly. That also makes sense. However, facing the unbearable adverse effects of inflation, the people of Pakistan may not be able to withstand these ‘uncertainties’ for long. To top it all, instead of deciding to change the direction of the wind, they are compelled to keep solving some inconsequential political riddles. Notwithstanding other uncertainties, in all fairness, the cat that knows the election dates must come out of the bag now.