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**The nouveau-riche factor**

“They were new money, without a doubt, so new it shrieked. Their clothes looked as if they had covered themselves in glue, then rolled around in hundred-dollar bills.” – Margaret Atwood

Times of transition enhance the prospect of discordant voices that create a stir to stymie the progress towards what could potentially change the fate of a country. It becomes even more worrisome when these voices wear a deceptive apparel to hide their spots.

There is general consensus that Pakistan has suffered at the hands of bad governance through the decades, but not a shred of thought is given to either evaluating the damage done or seeking a way of rectifying it. Instead, the environment is vitiated with views dictated by respective political considerations and conveniences which hardly suit the requirements of the existing situation. There is also agreement that Pakistan needs serious reforms across multiple sectors, including altering the electoral systems and processes. But when it comes to implementing them, some parties are quick to start talking politics.

Take the case of the Senate polls and the government’s drive to induct a level of transparency in conducting them. Every party has made statements in the past that bags of silver exchange hands for the sale of votes. Such gruesome transactions have been caught on camera and are now part of the archives of national shame. The PML-N and the PPP have even inked the need for open balloting as part of the Charter of Democracy.

Yet, instead of concentrating on the substantive part, the political parties seem caught up in technicalities driven by their respective expediencies. Thus, a step which could initiate a process for cultivating transparency is rendered controversial and the government, determined to eliminate the scourge, is forced to take steps including referring the matter to the Supreme Court for advice and introducing a presidential ordinance for open ballot linked to a positive input from the apex court. A hue and cry is raised that the government is resorting to ‘non-democratic’ means to force its way through.

Such attitudes reflect the inherent flaws in the way we think of politics and how we use it to serve our vested interests. No importance is attached to turning this change into a means for serving the needs of democracy and improving the laws and service delivery systems. This malady emanates from the gulf that separates our pompous claims from our below-par actions.

The very same political parties that are opposing the government’s attempt today to hold the Senate elections through open balloting had protested the dismantling of the Balochistan government, the PPP winning two Senate seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with only three members in the assembly, and the defeat of the vote of no-confidence against the Senate chairman. This is also why some political parties are opposed to tabling a vote of no-confidence against the sitting government.

If all that be so, why do the parties remain unwilling to extend their support to changing a law that is a source of massive electoral malpractices? Is this outrage only a ploy to destabilise the government which remains unwilling to extend them the reprieve they have been desperately seeking? Or is it that these parties want to keep the status-quo intact with an intention to exploit it to their advantage when they get an opportunity? This practice, incidentally, has been rampant through their tenures in power when despotic methods were used ruthlessly to smother the opposition. Whatever be the drivers, the net result is that the system as it exists today will continue to breed corruption, thus helping people gain power by using the lure of money.

I call this the nouveau-riche factor in our politics. Just like the newly rich without a moral code destroy the fabric of society, this breed of politicians, by remaining bereft of the essential requisites, turn politics into a trade of profit by resorting to buying and selling votes for personalised agendas. In the process, they cultivate a whole new generation of people who espouse everything that is rotten. The temptation lingers for others also to join the bands of unprincipled and dishonourable people.

A successive variety of such leaders has been hoisted to rule the country. Consequently, they have reduced it to a virtual skeleton which finds it difficult to even hide its shame. It is scoffed at as the begging bowl of the world. This cannot last. Either the people who have been in seats of power and those dreaming to be there have to change the way they think of things, or some drastic measures will have to be undertaken to alter the system so that the entry of corrupt people is effectively blocked. It is imperative to implement this if we are interested in keeping the country breathing. This is the only choice the vile political gamblers have left us.

For the opposition, this is no occasion to exploit as a supplement to their politics of agitation. It is time to converge to eliminate the spectre of corruption from our midst.

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