**Win or lose, I will fight till the last ball**

[Hafeez Khan](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/hafeez-khan/" \o "More Articles by Hafeez Khan)

March 9, 2021

“A picture is worth a thousand words”. In a video gone viral it is interesting to watch the Returning Officer in Senate elections get up and kowtow to PML(N)’s Ayaz Sadiq and Shahbaz Sharif. He could only offer a sideways move while sitting for PM Imran Khan. Shows who EC officials consider the boss. That seems to be the flavor of Election Commission (EC) with its team of ageing “baboos”. Out of touch with the reality, the recent events demonstrate their failure to act in an impartial manner.

PPP and PML(N) had made open voting a part of Charter of Democracy. PTI had supported it all along. Pursuing that goal PTI approached the highest judicial forum through a reference. The Honorable Judges in their comments clearly acknowledged that Senate elections were a “snake pit” that had to be eliminated. Supreme Court did not intervene as they can only interpret the law; they cannot change the Constitution. However they determined that it is the responsibility of the EC to ensure clean and transparent elections. During these proceedings EC opposed open voting unwilling to confront horse trading.

The Election Commission brushed the Supreme Court recommendations aside claiming paucity of time. All they had to do was to barcode the votes for subsequent verification if the need arose. True or not, it gives the appearance that they maybe complicit in facilitating the bribery and deceit. Thus far they turned a blind eye towards the video of Ali Gilani bribing his way to Dad’s victory.

Ali in a press conference after the exposé admitted the authenticity of the video. We saw open bargaining and instructions how to deface votes by Ali Gilani and confirmation by PPP “dirty tricks maestro” Nasir Shah of bribe amounts as seen by millions. Further, inducement by PML(N) to award tickets to defectors was proudly claimed by Maryam and others. Despite these incontrovertible evidences the Election Commission is silent so far.

In order to wrest control from the corrupt mafias he should proactively follow through on his offer to NAB and judiciary to conclude corruption cases

Nefarious deals made in the shadows prevailed over truth, principals and loyalty. The surreptitious and shameless buying of souls by the roadside in cell phone light is material for a Hollywood flick. What a travesty of justice! Shame or self-respect was never an issue for the Gilani family. The necklace theft incident, the refusal to retrieve $60 million of stolen money, the kidnapping of Ali for not delivering after taking bribe from tribals and multiple incidents taint his tenure as Prime Minister. Gilani’s sons and family members used to be in a bidding war amongst themselves to obtain PM’s approval for shadowy deals. Suddenly he is respectable.

These are sad times for the nation. The corrupt are rejoicing. “Ek Zardari sab pay bhari” translates as “Corruption rules”. Shutting down accountability and uprooting PM Imran Khan is their sole objective so they can return to their evil days of loot and plunder. Corrupt mafia had their day, buying greedy and characterless MNA’s seeking short term benefits. It was a day to mourn.

PM IK may have fallen short of expectations on multiple fronts. There is room to improve all around but he stands fully redeemed in these Senate elections. He and his team had raised full throated apprehensions and reservations against secret ballots that lead to corruption and bribery. The depth of decay was exposed in a 2018 video. The practices adopted in 2021 elections are a severe slap to the nation’s dignity. Yet it is being touted as a victory by the shameless proponents of corruption. Their main pillars, Asif Zardari and Nawaz Sharif, are being credited for dismantling PTI’s power structure by their minions. What a crying shame.

PM IK refuses to be cowed down by this onslaught. He has come out swinging. Rather than going on the defensive he boldly called for a vote of confidence. He won, adding more votes to his 2018 victory. His speech in National Assembly after the vote exuded determination. As long as he is around, the battle will continue to convict and lock away criminals masquerading as leaders.

In this entire din I find few voices elaborating the contributions made by Hafeez Sheikh towards betterment of Pakistan’s economy. A technocrat to the hilt, he is not a political operator. I recollect meeting him with PM IK in early days of PTI. He came across as a pure professional wearing a wry smile. He is not a part of the team for his friendliness, but as a pure professional endeavoring to put the economy on the right footing. He has kick started the industrial base, participated in re-negotiating local and international deals, saving the country billions of dollars. Pakistan’s ranking on Ease of Doing Business improved from 130th to 72nd. He has provided financial instruments through which overseas Pakistanis can invest in the motherland. The list goes on. Nonetheless, a polarized nation blinded by partisanship has no time to consider merit.

This is the sobering moment for PM IK. In order to wrest control from the corrupt mafias he should proactively follow through on his offer to NAB and judiciary to conclude corruption cases. For the remaining term he needs to focus on controlling inflation, introduce police and administrative reforms, increasing agricultural production, improve governance in Punjab, and challenge his team to produce deliverables continuously. The nation is willing to face hardships including inflation if they see the corrupt criminals incarcerated. PM IK you need to deliver. That is the only hope, all the alternatives stink.

*The writer is the director of CERF, a non-profit, charitable organisation in Canada*