**Convoluted minds**

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Much has been happening in the last few days which may leave a lasting impact on how things would shape up in the near to distant future, beginning almost immediately.

The affidavit and the accompanying leaked video involving former CJ Saqib Nisar regarding his alleged remarks about the pressure from quarters not to grant bail to Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz. Repeated demands were made after that by their leaders that the Supreme Court should take suo-motu notice of the ‘evidence’ and exonerate Nawaz Sharif and Maryam from what was referred as ‘fabricated allegations’. It must, however, be noted that they are not interested in submitting it before court as evidence of their ‘innocence’.

In the last few days, the tables seem to have turned on the accusers. First, a series of leaked audio tapes have vividly exposed Maryam as a Machiavellian manipulator of the media through blatant use of her illicit billions and also the pressure that she generated on media owners to tailor their stories to suit Nawaz Sharif’s narrative alone. This was accompanied by the stated claim that they agreed to play ball, understandably in exchange for huge sums of money in the garb of advertising revenue.

At a hearing at the Islamabad High Court on Tuesday, the judge who is alleged to have furnished the affidavit categorically stated that he had not seen the affidavit that was being discussed. The court has given him four days to submit a written response together with the original affidavit which he stated was “sealed and kept in a locker in the UK”. The key of the locker is in the possession of his grandson.

The CJ went on to state that “in case the original document on the basis of which the news report was published is not produced before the court on the date fixed, it would raise a presumption of its non-existence”. All relevant state institutions have been instructed to facilitate him in the delivery of the ‘affidavit’ for submission before the court. From the proceedings so far, it is evident that judge Rana Shamim is trying to distance himself from the ‘affidavit’ which is with the court while the existence of another such document resides in the domain of conjecture.

The next hearing of the case has been fixed for December 7. It is then that one would know whether the ‘affidavit’ the Sharif family is talking about is genuine or, like so many others deposited earlier, this is also dubious, thus further stamping the deep perception that the family comprises a bunch of liars and frauds. That would be a huge setback not just to the tiny shreds of credibility they may still be left with, but the tottering prospect of their political survival in the future.

One is also reminded of the Qatari letter that was submitted as a proof of the sources of the income of the Sharifs. This turned out to be a fake document and was thrown out by the court as were dozens of other similar ones produced before it in a desperate attempt to legitimise their limitless assets, both within and outside the country. There was also the Calibri font scam which could not deter the judges from pronouncing a guilty injunction.

The trail of attempted frauds which the Sharif family has practised is long and humiliating. Any self-respecting person would have given up the charade by now, but that would be an acknowledgement of the lowly brand of politics they have been practising throughout their tenures in power. What is absolutely bewildering is their unabashed infatuation with their stated and unstated frauds. It is as if they live by this art, constantly inventing newer tricks, methods and mechanisms to continue playing their sordid game. There may be no end to this sickening drama till the courts have decisively thrown out their cases and consigned them to the prison cells where they deservedly belong. But, then, the justice system is exceedingly vagrant and, in certain cases, the cause for infliction of a surfeit of fake and fraudulent practices in the country.

It is also unfortunate that the media plants itself on the side of members of corrupt family fiefdoms, convicted criminals and absconders. Rather than attempting to sift right from wrong and stand on the side of the former, it appears that media houses are wedded to pre-ordained positions supporting the Sharifs’ version even if it comprised a pack of lies. This does not behove the media’s attempt to be recognised as the fourth pillar of the state. To claim that laudatory position, it would have to divorce its partisan approach and start playing a truthful and professional role to promote a culture of transparency and accountability, even under the most daunting circumstances. An all-consuming penchant to be standing on the side of crime and corruption, so blatantly unleashed and so unashamedly perpetrated during the tenures of the Sharif and the Bhutto/Zardari rules, is extremely detrimental to the higher pedestal that the media clamours for.

There are a number of institutions whose credibility is on the line. The guilty ones who never had any respect are immune to the outcome, but the alleged contemnor Rana Shamim, the judiciary and the media are under the scanner. The manner in which the court conducts itself in bringing this sordid matter to a speedy end will determine the stature that the court and other parties which are involved in the case shall build upon – or be left with. Like so many other things in the recent past, this also appears to be a case of purported fraud that the Sharifs and their cohorts have tried to inflict. But, like so much else, the heinous act appears to be losing its ground and will soon be consigned to the bin, thus exposing the evil methods which the Sharifs don’t ever tire of employing to hoodwink every institution and individual they deal with.

Will a nail in the political coffin of these convoluted minds deter them from using these sinister methods to advance their political goals in the future, or will this be just another incident that shall pass, like so many others have in the past, leaving them tarnished, but unrepentant? If I were asked, I would say without a shadow of doubt that crime and corruption are part of the Sharif dynasty which they will find utterly impossible to divorce – now or in the future. Given the state of the judiciary, we are in for this masquerade for a while yet.

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