**Electoral Reforms**

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December 4, 2021

Everything in this pious country has become so impious that one cannot expect anything to be what it ought to be according to its strictest definition – neither democracy nor parliament or legislation.

Last month, the government called a joint sitting of the parliament to pass several bills. One of them was regarding electoral reforms. Wow, the most charming and desired thing to do in our oligarchy, named democracy.

What came in the final conclusion was the bill regarding the controversial introduction of electronic voting machines (EVM), which has not only been outrightly rejected by the opposition parties, but even the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has aired serious reservations over it.

In this background – and also by looking into the other bills in the package – this whole exercise appeared a manipulation to undermine the opposition and the ECP.

Without any surprise, the deep state vividly hobnobbed with the civil government in this exercise – the latter, purportedly needing the support of the Treasury Benches in legislation on Kulbhushan Jadhav, the detained Indian spy.

This fingering by the powers-behind-the-scene became more visible when Aamir Liaquat Hussain openly said when questioned by media, that he did not come for the legislation but “was brought for it.”

The invisible power was also discernable in the Senate voting where the government succeeded to get the legislation bulldozed even though it did not have a majority in the Upper House.

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As regards electoral reforms, EVM is not an issue at all. It is rather tantamount to making an issue out of a non-issue. The electronic voting system has already failed in other countries, particularly neighbouring India.

Secondly, when the ECP is openly opposing its introduction, it means the system is not workable. After all, the ECP is the technical organisation responsible for operating the system.

Critics have already spoken a lot about the demerits of the system. Practical demonstrations are appearing on social media to show flaws in the system. Even if misuse by those working in ‘fog’ is ruled out of happening, the level of education in our society is the more viable reason for incompatibility of the system.

Previously, the opposition and the media believed that the government was using the ploy to discredit the ECP and prevail itself. But the latest reports draw rather a horrible picture of the events inside.

A tug-of-war is raging between the PTI Government and the ECP for quite some time. Even ministers like Fawad Chaudhry and Azam Swati have been using harsh language against this constitutional body.

More alarming is, however, the hanging sword of the PTI Funding Case, which has the potential to even get the ruling party banned, let alone discomforting the government.

There are also fresh buzzes in corridors along the Constitution Avenue that after nosediving of Imran Khal Government in all spheres of economy, foreign affairs, and governance, there is a certain narrowing down on Minus One formula.

That looks plausible as, under the prevailing circumstances, the deeper state might not venture to take the risk of mid-term elections, particularly when Nawaz Sharif appears to be a hard nut to crack. These gimmickries will continue to erode what remains of the state and its institutions only to the benefit of a few in the higher strata as long as genuine democracy is not given a chance, like all countries in our surrounding – not to speak of big powers and the West.

But is real democracy possible in this country without stopping power-brokering by the powers-that-be?

They say our politicians are not mature enough to promote a healthy democratic culture. There are also serious allegations of corruption against politicians.

Both these charges are correct. But have we given a free hand to political parties and the Pakistani masses to learn from their experiences?

World democracies have sailed through similarly troubled waters. The example of India is vivid in our memories where snap polls were held every two years and even a less popular politician, Deve Gowda, had to be inducted as Prime Minister. But as there was no interference from anywhere, the system finally took off after several hitch backs.

One of the foremost things to do for putting our democracy on the right track and ridding our political parties and legislature of corruption is to introduce the system of Proportional Representation.

Besides other specifications, this system empowers political parties to get rid of corrupt parliamentarians.

Under the present system, political parties are under compulsion to award tickets to electables, who in most cases are wealthy and influential figures, winning elections at the dint of their personal aggrandizement. On reaching assemblies, these corrupt elements blackmail the party leaderships and connive with the secret powers to the detriment of their party interests.

Proportional representation is a good tool to rid the system of the black sheep among politicians. In this system, every party contests elections on the basis of its ideology and manifesto, and after winning the election, it awards seats to the most deserving of its candidates. So people have to vote for parties, not individuals.

Though like every system, there are potential drawbacks in this system too as it vests absolute powers in the hands of the top leadership of a political party. But as the element of wealth and personal aggrandizement disappears, every low-ranking leader of the party vies to be fittest in party discipline and loyalist to the party ideology.

Secondly, when such parliamentarians and assembly members are elected on merit and the basis of their ideology, not social, political, and financial power, they contribute to a gradual improvement of the whole system and elimination of totalitarian and despotic leadership in political parties.

It is high time for PML-N, PPP, JUI, JI, PTI, ANP, PMAP, MQM-Pakistan, and all other political parties of the country to seriously consider the introduction of a Proportional Representation system as it is the only panacea to all ills of democracy in Pakistan.

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