**The cost of instability**

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Politics determines the rules of governance. These rules identify what kind of economic institutions a country embraces. A state whose political system is unstable inevitably ends up in a state of chaos. Pakistan is facing a plethora of challenges: the absence of good governance, stunted economic growth, and rising resentment among the populace. Poverty, socio-economic inequality, and extremism have reached new heights. The country has lagged miles behind in many social-economic sectors. One of the main major reasons for this pitiable situation is the perennial political instability. Democracy essentially requires pluralism, consensus, and the recognition of others’ fair rights. This, in turn, gives birth to tolerance and the peaceful co-existence of different groups in a given society.
At present, polarisation in the country is at its peak. As major political parties are sharply divided into hostile groups, no one is ready to listen to others’ points of view, let alone resolve the insurmountable challenges faced by the country. There is an aggressive blame game, particularly between the government and the opposition, which is broadcasted in the media every day and ironically also serves as entertainment for many. The country is deeply divided along regional and ethnolinguistic lines. That’s why we are unable to develop consensus on issues of national importance.
In Pakistan like other countries, the different segments of the society are represented by elite groups—be it the judiciary, media, politics, or any other group. These clusters of power are highly influential in every society and are responsible for most of the decision-making and policy implementation. Over the decades, these agents of rule propagation have effectively maneuvered the system only to their advantage. They have divided the nation and destabilized the country. Our national issues only surround high politics that has nothing to do with the everyday life of the ordinary citizen. Our elite is apparently totally oblivious to the challenges faced by the country in general and problems faced by the ordinary people in particular.
Economic management is the principal causality of lingering political uncertainty. The country has witnessed one financial crisis after another in the last few years. The current tax-to-GDP ratio is among the lowest in the region, what to speak of global comparison. Unsustainable fiscal deficit has become a norm. The current account deficit and fiscal deficit, along with debt servicing, are putting unbearable pressure on the economy. The victims of such poor management are the ordinary citizens. This practice has formed a broken relationship between the state and its citizens.
In countries affected by political instability, there is little investment in human resource development. Governments do not pay attention to this important factor. Issues of education and health are usually swept under the carpet. If any project of national well-being is initiated by one government, the succeeding government will leave them in a lurch.
Political uncertainty seems to be a deliberate construct. More than thirty-eight years of extended direct military rule thwarted both the growth of political institutions and the evolution of political parties. No country can resolve its complex problems without a dedicated leadership. There is an acute leadership crisis in the country. To be truthful, after the founding father, there is none who has a tidy performance record. Much of current problems emanate from the decisions taken by the early leadership. Currently, Pakistan is passing through a critical phase of history. It needs a selfless and visionary leadership which can forge the political forces to rescue the nation out of the quagmire. The prospects do not seem very promising.
It is rightly said that a house divided against itself cannot stand. Unity is of great importance for the survival of a nation. Therefore, frequent protests, so-called marches leading towards Islamabad, and the campaign of no-confidence do not bode well for the nascent political system of the country. Reaching the corridors of power by creating political instability is no way service to the country. It is incumbent on all stakeholders in the system to reflect on this behaviour for the betterment of all.