**The Friday Column: Time to divorce delusion**

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The induction of a new government that is not equipped with the legitimacy to come up with any medium- or long-term strategy to rid the country of its nagging problems is likely to add to the challenges that Pakistan is faced with at this critical juncture. The recent proclamations of the new incumbents in power reflect an utterly jaundiced understanding to go about attaining the purported objectives.

Destitute of the people’s mandate, they refuse to understand that they don’t carry their trust to take steps that impact their destiny. The crude and naked manner the midnight assault was conducted to steal people’s mandate and anoint a criminal gang as the new rulers of the country has left behind an unpalatable taste. Furthermore, no one is willing to accept the outcome as people have seen with their own eyes how the results were tampered with which was amply evidenced when the ECP uploaded the relevant forms on the website but were forced to remove them within a couple of hours.

It is not just that people are unwilling to accept the results. They are also angry and determined to carry forth their struggle to win their mandate back and put in power those they had voted for in the first place. This carries portents of violence which can be averted at this stage but, with the passage of time and further hardening of stances, may become impossible to deal with. On the face of it, parties that are partners in fabricating an unconstitutional and illegal government, as also their mentors, appear unwilling to concede that the elections were stolen; this needs to be remedied before proceeding further.

Simultaneously, not only the presence of Imran Khan but also his inherent ability to lead every narrative even from his prison cell is growing extremely disconcerting for the power-wielders. Having long banned the appearance of his photograph and spoken word in the media, they have now resorted to imposing a blanket two-week ban on his meetings with everyone including his lawyers. This is virtually pushing him into solitary confinement which speaks of an inordinate fear that afflicts them by the person of Khan even as he remains illegally incarcerated.

This is not taking the country towards a possible resolution of the conflicts that it is riddled with. It is pushing it in the opposite direction which is only going to aggravate the crisis and put it beyond the realm of any possibility of repair. Once it has crossed the red line and entered the land of violence, there will be no possibility of initiating remedial measures to find a solution to the brewing crisis. So, the time, if any, is here and now. False egos need to be buried and sanity summoned to guide the errant individuals towards understanding the grave situation the country currently faces.

Foremost is the crisis of legitimacy of the new government. Those who have been hoisted in seats of power are those who lost the election, encompassing the entire PML-N leadership clan including Nawaz Sharif, Shahbaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz and Hamza Shahbaz. They did not win even a single seat, yet they have been handed over the reins of power to the bewilderment of not only the people of Pakistan but the entire world. Understandably, the Commonwealth and the EU teams that visited Pakistan to ascertain the conditions before the elections have scripted extremely critical reports citing examples of gross irregularities. These reports, if and when made public, will open a can of worms.

What were the compulsions that propelled the power-wielders to install certified corrupt people to rule the country? This is a puzzle that rankles me often as I am unable to find a clue to such thinking which is bent upon accepting corruption as a means of advancing in life for power and profit. But it must not be forgotten that an edifice raised on pillars made of piles of pelf is likely to crumble even before it rises to full height.

Whatever may have been the reasons, the leading problem is that a grave mistake has been committed and is being forced upon people who are not only unwilling to accept any such fait accompli; they are also resisting it with their full passion and might. The entire social media speaks of the powerful drift the country is caught up in with no avenue for escape. There is a deafening clamour that elections have been stolen as the demand grows for this to be reversed and power passed to those who had won at the hustings.

But there appears to be no apparent chance of reversal of results as the perpetrators of this heinous crime remain adamant in implementing their intentions. Will the election results be written off and a fresh referral made to the people? This is even less likely to happen as those who scripted the horrid show believe that they can still make it work. So where do we go from here onward?

Let me be candid. This fabrication has not worked so far and is not going to work in the future either. With time, this weight is going to become heavier, and the perpetrators will not be able to carry it. It is going to be an albatross around their necks which they will neither be able to cast off, nor bear along. It is going to transform into a situation laced with portents of severe unrest, even violence. The situation is grave. The people’s mood is turning ugly. Their restraining ability is stretched. They are readying themselves for the plunge which will land us with grave challenges. This must be averted.

What is the way to go about doing that? First and foremost is the need to come down from the artificially elevated platforms the perpetrators have placed themselves on in the hope that they will remain safe. They need to face reality as it exists on the ground. This reality is ugly. This reality reflects the resurrection of the combined will of the people who have suffered through generations.

It is time to look at reality through the lens of people who have been wronged by looters and dacoits. They deserve their day. And that day will be when they are rid of them, not suffer them any further. The only option the power-wielders have is to bury their egos and join the people in securing their future as they proclaimed through the power of their vote. Nothing less will do.

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