**Dilemmas: old and new**

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The honeymoon ended sooner than expected and confusion has set in. Merit, honesty and a corruption-free Pakistan – this is what was promised to Imran Khan’s voters. But it seems that even before he has taken oath, these promises are not being kept.

Khan does not seem to be meeting the expectations he had set for himself. He has been severely criticised for allying with those he used to call ‘murderers and thieves. And now it looks quite possible that his government will go to the IMF, which he had, many a time, declared would never happen.

In his latest move, he has given up someone considered by most as an honest man, and selected by Khan himself as the new chief minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Former education minister of KP Atif Khan was Khan’s first choice for CM KP. Word is that his candidacy was let go to pacify one member of his party, despite the fact that – both in public and in private meetings – Khan had declared that Atif had his vote.

The only positive thing being said about Mehmood Khan is that at least he isn’t related to Khan – and so the PTI chief is above dynastic politics. Other than that, Mehmood’s experience includes being removed from the provincial ministries of home and irrigation. So how did he get the nomination for CM? By all accounts, the reality is that Mehmood is former CM Pervez Khattak’s choice. By nominating him as CM, the PTI chief has proven that he can be held hostage by his party members. Yes, compromise is important for any leader, to make sure things go smoothly and there is a consensus – but compromising on merit is something PTI supporters do not expect from Imran Khan.

And therein lies the danger. People are willing to forgive Imran Khan for allying with alleged thieves, going to the IMF and traveling with high security protocol. What they may not be willing to forgive is Khan compromising on principles, and not making the decisions they elected him to make. Reportedly, even Atif Khan is not willing to forgive Khan for this transgression, with reports coming in that the idealistic young leader is now ‘thinking’ about his future in the party.

So, how much will Khan lose because of the compromised appointments that he is making? Most likely, he will lose the very people who helped him make the PTI the idealistic flag-bearer of change. They might not leave the party, but they may not work with the same passion. Once sidelined is twice rebuffed.

However, this is hardly new for the PTI, which has alienated idealists before. Remember Justice (r) Wajihuddin, Fauzia Kasuri and others who left the party? Khan is probably thinking that he’s done it before, he can most likely do it again. But he needs to realise that he is no longer chairman of the third largest party in Pakistan. He is by all accounts going to be the next PM and the stakes are much, much higher. If idealistic people stop caring and are sidelined, the PTI and its chief will face unprecedented scrutiny. They will be accused of moral corruption, cronyism and possibly, dynastic politics – accusations faced by their main opponents. By giving in to the desires of others, and sidelining people of merit, Imran Khan is opening himself up to becoming the party of the old rather than the party of the new.

Moreover, Khan will be facing two major problems in the coming week: He has to announce his candidate for CM Punjab, a post that will be scrutinised far more than that of CM KP. And he has to name his federal cabinet. His biggest test is selecting candidates based on three main requirements: merit, honesty, and Imran Khan’s choice. If these requirements are not met, every candidate will crash and burn in the media and discussion will revolve around three points: Khan cannot make his own decisions or is being pushed around by lobbies in his party or doesn’t have enough of the right people for the right job.

Khan needs to choose the CM of Punjab now. The longer he waits, the more the media will attack the names that do emerge. Soon you may even hear that, even though dynastic politics is the worst, at least having a close relation in politics gives you options!

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