**Polarising politics**

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The early death of Quaid-i-Azam and the assassination of the first prime minister Liaqat Ali Khan, led Pakistan to political instability. There were no political forces from among the masses as the assemblies were dominated by feudals and industrialists. Pakistan Army was the only important institution as it existed before the partition and had played an important role during floods, the refugee settlement and the 1948 war. Therefore, the army at that time was considered to be the only dependable institution in the country. The country failed to have an early constitution and Pakistan saw short-lived governments in the absence of the constitution. The first martial law was declared by the civil government in 1953 during anti-Ahmadi riots in Lahore. Pakistan drew up its first constitution in 1956. On October 7, 1958 Iskandar Mirza abrogated the constitution, declared Martial Law throughout Pakistan, dismissed the central and provincial governments, the National Assembly, the provincial assemblies and appointed General Ayub Khan as Chief Martial law Administrator.

Within some weeks General Ayub Khan removed Iskandar Mirza and became president on the pretext of political confrontation between East and West Pakistan. In 1968/69 Pakistan witnessed unrest and agitation against president Ayub, therefore under-pressure Ayub relinquished power to General Yahya Khan, the then army chief. Yahya Khan promised to hold free and fair elections in December 1970. In the elections, the Awami League won a majority of seats followed by the Peoples Party. Bhutto declared that he would not sit in opposition and this led to a display of the map of Bangladesh by the Awami League in Dhaka. Yahya Khan, under pressure, dissolved the cabinet and postponed the meeting of the national assembly. There was no political will on both sides to address the power sharing issue; we could have avoided the debacle. After the debacle, General Yahya Khan handed over powers to Bhutto, who became President and Chief Martial Law Administrator. In 1977, Bhutto was overthrown by General Zia-ul-Haq on the pretext of political instability, violence and agitation by the Pakistan National Alliance.

Afterwards Nawaz Sharif became prime minister three times and Benazir Bhutto became prime minister two times. Pakistan remained under martial law regimes in 1958, 1969, 1977 and followed by the 1999 coup. In 2018, Imran Khan formed a coalition government and he too was removed from power after a vote of no confidence which Imran Khan accused foreign involvement in his removal. Unfortunately, none of the prime ministers in Pakistan has completed his tenure of 5 years in the 75-year-history of Pakistan. Today, politicians blame the army for their failures but at the same time always try to persuade the army for political interference. According to a former army chief General Aslam Beg as mentioned in the book ‘Crossed Swords’, “They (politicians) invited the army to settle political differences amongst themselves”. Before taking over as president in 1958 General Ayub Khan mentioned in his book, ‘Friends Not Masters’ “Politicians started making contacts with certain members of the armed forces. They were spreading all kinds of rumours to isolate senior officers and to create a group of army officers to support them in the pursuit of their ambitions”.

With the recent political development, a segment of society, social media brigades of political parties, paid bloggers and pseudo-intellectuals are spewing venom against the army’s top brass and its institutions. The Pakistan army has made it clear several times that it is an apolitical institution. Tens of hundreds of fake websites are active in and outside Pakistan to malign the armed forces and the top brass, holding them responsible for the recent developments in the country. Concocted stories are being forward and voice messages are also in circulation to instigate public and lower ranks against the top brass. Some groups of politicians and journalists are using insulting narratives which have provided space to their followers to sow the seeds of hatred. Polarisation is a threat to the security of Pakistan, which may lead to destabilisation of the country and may result in a civil war. Politicians are not ready to accept each other as they carry mutual hatred towards each other. At the same time, mainstream media with biased reporting, followed by inflammatory stories of YouTubers, are fuelling the already polarised society. Instead of setting personal examples, politicians accuse each other with undignified words and inappropriate language which is unbecoming of them. Politicians are involved in levelling baseless allegations against each other—even families are not spared. Those hatching conspiracies against the institutions and the country are not well-wishers of the country. Politicians must sit together to sort out their differences and should not allow enemies to disturb our hard-earned peace.

The writer is a retired brigadier and freelance columnist.

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