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DAWN

### **Defining the caretakers' role**

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A significant issue in the emerging political situation at the moment is the masses' attitude towards the interim government and their assessment as to what are the targets before it. One possibility and perhaps the simpler one is that the interim government would work for a period of 3 or 4 months and pave way for elections and emergence of new national and provincial assemblies which would, under, the fresh mandate, run the country in the future.

Prima facie, the prospect of this scenario is very limited. People's support or identification with any interim government which lacks popular mandate, would not be in the best interest of the country. The names that are coming include a number of people who have a very dubious past and whose linkage with external forces has always given rise to serious suspicion.

The People of Pakistan deserve compliments for their sustained efforts to end corrupt rule in the country. However, they should not rest content with their half-win. Masses have achieved only one part of their objective. The struggle must continue for the fulfilment of the real national objectives, i.e. bringing up a leadership loyal to Islam, and one that is competent to deliver and does not belong to the class of vested interests. In this context, next few months are critical to sustain the tempo built to overthrow the former regime. For this, an elaborate programme is needed.

On the other hand, the interim government should not be given the task of setting the whole house in order, which is a long-term objective. They have no mandate to initiate long-term reforms. What is of immediate concern to the interim government is that accountability process must start immediately and without delay. A high-powered judicial commission must be formed with the exclusive task of prosecuting those who have abused power, embezzled public resources and plundered the economy of the country. This commission should have an independent prosecuting wing with persons of unblemished character. Any government, opposition or any citizen should be entitled to file complaints to the prosecutor who, prima facie, on evidence should start investigation and prosecution where necessary. Those who complain should be fully protected but malicious or mollified complaints should be made punishable. Key political appointments in financial institutions must be replaced and not only the political leaders but also the bureaucrats and their other accomplices must be brought to book. There should not be any political victimization. This process must start immediately, and those found guilty must not be allowed to participate in elections. The punishment for those found guilty must be deterrent in nature i.e. barring them from participation in politics or public service for life, confiscation of property and recovery of loss inflicted on the country and imprisonment and fines which are commensurate with their crime.

Election Commission needs to be reconstituted. It should be made independent and should be given all those powers, which are essential not only to ensure fair and impartial elections but also effective

scrutiny of the candidates according to the criteria prescribed in Articles 62 and 63 of the Constitution. In this respect, the following suggestions may be considered:

i) Whoever offers himself for any public office, national or provincial must make a public declaration of his and his family's assets and liabilities. The onus of proof of acquiring these assets and maintaining his or her life style should rest with the person concerned. However as this is made public, it would be the responsibility of the Election Commission to publicly announce his candidature and his assets and invite objections from the public by widely publicizing Articles 62 and 63 of the Constitution. The Election Commission should have at the divisional level judicial mechanism to summarily investigate the charges, if any, and declare the fitness or otherwise of the candidates. Only those candidates who pass through this filter should be allowed to contest in elections.

ii) The limit for financial expenses must be fixed and strictly adhered to. Any violation should invite disqualification of the candidate and even penalty by the party sponsoring such candidates.

iii) TV and Press advertisements and mass rallies, processions, should be forbidden. Instead, it should be the responsibility of the Election Commission to arrange public meetings at appropriate places in every constituency where candidates should be provided with an opportunity to present their message and programme. Candidates should be permitted to have door-to-door work to issue leaflets and posters, but nothing more. The party should be given an opportunity to present their message from TV and radio. The polling station should be at such distance as could be easily covered on foot. Use of transport by the candidates on the polling day should be forbidden, but facilities of public transport should be provided from appropriate points. This would eliminate a number of malpractices and promote democratic culture instead of the 'wealth-culture' that characterizes contemporary elections in Pakistan.

iv) Independent candidacy should be eliminated. If it is not possible to eliminate the concept altogether, it must be laid down that independents can be elected only if the candidate gets 51 per cent of the votes cast in a constituency.

v) Elections to national and provincial assemblies should be held on the same date.

vi) Effort should be made to switch over to proportional representation. This would also take care of the seats for women and the issue of joint or separate electorate. Such system has the potential to completely outclass independent candidates. Party would become responsible for the whole process and it can be laid down that only those parties would be able to retain their seats in the parliament or provincial assembly which are able to get at least 5 per cent of the national or provincial vote, as the case may be. In case of national assembly, it may also be provided that a national party must also obtain at least 2- 1/2 per cent of the votes cast in all the provinces of the country.

<p>The caretakers should not be given the task of setting the whole house in order, which is a long-term objective. They have no mandate to initiate long-term reforms. What is of immediate concern is that the accountability process must start immediately and without delay. A high-powered judicial commission must be formed with the exclusive task of prosecuting those who have abused power.</p>
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In addition to these basic reforms, the interim government should ensure:

Exposition of electorates' fiscal means: Campaign should be launched to insist that whoever wins the elections and forms the government, should declare all economic and financial interests and political

and NGO relationships in an official register of the Parliament or the provincial assembly, as the case may be. The prime minister, the chief minister and all the ministers, advisors and special assistants should not be allowed to remain connected with any private business or activity involving monetary gain. This would be over and above the declaration of assets provided earlier.

Confiscation of discretionary powers: Discretion about allotment of land, licenses, development, assistants' appointment, transfers

DS etc., should be made by law and anyone found involved in them should be punished, not only by disqualification from holding public office but also appropriate punishment, including imprisonment and fine.

At grassroots level, the nation should continue building popular tempo on major issues. These issues are

- a) Serious betrayal of the ideology and objectives of Pakistan by its successive leadership, particularly the secular West-oriented elite.
- b) Exploitative class structure institution aliased in the form of elite control over the society through 'jageerdari', 'zamindari', 'brotheri', tribal, sectarian or wealth-based groupings. Unless this structural arrangement is liquidated and the middle-class and the common person are inducted into the political process, change would remain superficial and decorative.
- c) A basic challenge that Pakistan faces comes from gross mismanagement in the economy, distorted developmental priorities, inequitable distribution of wealth and income, neglect of education, health, justice, security of life and property for the common person. Unless the whole thrust of policy-making is changed and flow of resources directed towards new priorities, a new chapter could not begin in our national life.
- d) The constitutional provisions for the enforcement of Islam and the rights of the people remain by and large inoperative. Selective enforcement of the constitution should be replaced by sincere implementation of all provisions of the constitution. For this, it would be required to make article 2(a) and article 4, the whole chapter on human rights and Islamic provisions effectively operational. Election would remain futile lest basic requirements are met to not only make them fair and impartial but also to ensure that a new political leadership emerges which approximate the qualifications and conditions spelled out in articles 62 and 63.
- e) The political independence and economic stability of the country are at stake. Dependence on outside world, particularly the USA and its sponsored and controlled financial institutions, has reached totally intolerable limits. Foreign policy as well as international economic and financial policies would have to be re-cast to ensure our political and economic independence.

Consolidation and maintenance of nuclear deterrence is vital for Pakistan's security. Seeking the liberation of Kashmir from Indian occupation and its integration with Pakistan and working towards unity and peace in Afghanistan are amongst Pakistan's strategic interests, which would have been seriously compromised by the former regime. Both must come back on our priority list and a national consensus be created on policies that ensure achievement of our strategic objectives in respect of these.

These are the six key issues on which Pakistani people as a nation must concentrate. And this is the time to further mobilize public opinion at all levels, so that the new arrangement does not bring people betraying issues of national interest.