

PAKISTAN AND THE SECURITY OF THE BALLOT BOX

1. Let us, first of all, state the importance of politics in social and economic development. It should be remembered that politics is not a thing to be discussed in drawing rooms; it is played in the streets and in the hearts and minds of people.

2. Any general election offers the electorate (i.e., the people) an opportunity to choose its rulers i.e. managers of the State and government.

3. Pakistan needs the essence of democracy i.e., the right of the people to a free choice, rather than the form of an election that will not change the establishment's control over the country.

4. The central point of reference in the whole political wrangle about the electoral process is that any system of election should evolve around the true democratic concept that the people are the sovereign authority, and the final arbiters of all difference of opinion in matters of statecraft. This authority and arbitrament is exercised through the validly elected representatives of the people. No non-elected person, whether belonging to the civil or military personnel, possesses the right to exercise such powers even in an infinitesimal manner.

5. Private ownership of property is known as feudalism. Since large and excessive properties are alien to the true concept of Islam, feudals may be barred from taking part in elections. Similarly, ban should be imposed on loan defaulters, those who have bank accounts in foreign countries and persons who have been convicted of a criminal offence.

6. The reason why we have had bad politicians is because the military intervenes every now and then, undermining the political process each time, and depriving the people of a chance to assess the leader's performance. In reality it is the military's domination that prevents other institutions from evolving and developing effectively. It is not, because of bad performance of the politicians that the military comes in, as is being claimed by the exponents of the desirability of military interference in politics.

7. The pre-requisites of fair, free and transparent elections are:

- (a) The people, especially the voters, should be free from any kind of extraneous pressures for exercising their votes according to the dictates of his/her conscience.

(b) The educational, behavioral and moral capabilities rather than financial status of a candidate should determine his/her preferability for the voters.

(c) The elections should be least costly for a candidate. Electioneering methods involving wasteful expenditure should be totally banned. This will enable more suitable candidates, though with little financial resources, to run for elections thus adding to the wealth of knowledge and expertise of the assembly members. Selfish candidates with bad reputation, habitual criminals and amassers of ill-gotten wealth should not enter the assemblies/

8. The five pillars on which a good and fruitful state structure and good governance can be based are: (a) A free, fair and transparent electoral system (b) A political leadership that is honest, capable and possesses a clear objective (c) Voters who are ideologically and politically aware, and (d) Political parties that strictly abide by democratic principles.

9. The system of governance, human rights, basic freedoms and consultation are the main themes of democracy. Dictation by any agency or by a civil or military dictator negates democracy.

10. In order to provide a good government machinery, and for making rightful policies, the Election Commission must take the following steps:-

(a) A total ban be imposed on all election posters, billboards, neon-signs, banners, wall chalking, press, radio and TV advertisements as well as loudspeakers fitted on vehicles for election propaganda and private transport for carrying voters to the polling stations. Only pamphlets and handbills should be allowed to introduce candidates in their constituencies.

(b) Provision of food and soft drinks at polling camps be disallowed.

(c) Maximum limit of election expenses be fixed at Rs. 20,000/- only.

(d) An intensive election campaign be launched for two months in the press, television and radio in order to bring about deep awareness amongst the voters and the general public about the importance of elections for the country.

- (e) Dramas relating to the election process be played on TV and radio.
- (f) People be made aware about the necessity of changing the existing status quo, and the need for good governance.
- (g) Men and women voters should be motivated to go to the polling booth to cast their votes in large numbers. Vote percentage should exceed 50 per cent of polled votes.
- (h) Only those political parties be allowed to participate in elections at the national level that have their branches in all the four provinces. Provincial level political parties should only be allowed to participate in provincial assembly elections.
- (i) The category of "independent candidates" be abolished. Political parties should be developed as the sole political institutions.
- (j) Religious and sectarian parties should not be given the status of political parties. They should not be allowed to participate in elections as a separate "class" entity.
- (k) The period of assemblies be reduced from 5 years to 3 years.
- (l) Direct elections be arranged for the Senate. Seats be reserved in the Senate for industrial workers, peasants, teachers, intellectuals, university graduates, scientists, engineers and other technocrats, traders and industrialists. They should be represented in the Senate through their associations.
- (m) Elections to be held in two phases. Those political parties that do not secure 5 % of the polled votes in the first phase be debarred from taking part in the second phase of elections. Those candidates who do not secure more than 50% of the total number of votes polled should not be declared elected. In the second phase, election should be held between the two candidates securing the highest number of votes.