

Senates and Other Upper Houses Ensure that the Interests of the Ruling Elite Are Never Compromised

News:

Pakistan's Supreme Court on Wednesday, 17th February 2021, voiced concern that if proportional representation of actual voting strength of the political parties was not reflected in the 3rd March 2021 Senate elections, a collapse of the entire system may result.

Comment:

Since the leak of a video of some members of KPK provincial assembly taking bribes to vote for a candidate from other than their party, a debate has erupted in Pakistan about the importance of holding elections, without any malpractice. Debate is intense as Senate elections are due on 3rd March 2021. Its results may change the party to party balance, which will most probably favor the regime, whilst the opposition may lose its grip. The opposition so far has been able to block government bills and amendments in the constitution, because of their majority in the Senate.

Regarding the National Assembly and the Senate, for National Assembly seats, people elect their representatives for the lower house directly. The seats of the National Assembly are assigned to each province in proportion to their population. As Punjab has the largest population, it has 183 seats in the National Assembly which is just above 50 percent. So every party focuses on Punjab as it has the largest number of seats, more than the combined seats of remaining provinces. So in order to balance this imbalance, the Senate was created in which every province has the same number of seats. Despite this balancing act, most of the time the people of the smaller provinces complain that Punjab has always been given more attention, than other provinces. So this balancing mechanism has failed in its stated purpose.

However, there is another purpose behind creating an upper house. Members of Senate are not elected directly by the people. They are chosen by the members of the National Assembly and members of the four provincial assemblies. Fifty percent of its members end their term at a time that usually does not coincide with the general elections, ensuring that it is relatively unaffected by the general wave of popularity for any particular party. So, for the ruling elite it becomes easy to control a government which has the majority in the National Assembly, but not in the Senate. Most of the time governments do not have majority in the Senate and therefore remain under pressure from the opposition, unable to fulfill their promises.

The creation of the Senate also enables selection of those who are basically representatives of the ruling elite, but poor electoral prospects. So we see former World Bank and IMF employees, bankers, business tycoons, retired military officers and retired judges become Senators, who otherwise would be hard pushed to win general elections. Therefore, through the Senate, they get the chance to become part of the system and ensure that the system does not stray far from the wishes of the ruling elite. So the upper house is like a safety valve created by the ruling elite to ensure its interests, despite the popular vote. It is a similar phenomenon to that observed in the US Senate, the British House of Lords and India's Rajya Sabha.

Although Democracy claims to be the rule of the people, it is designed to ensure the rule of the elite, in the name of the people. Salvation of the Muslims of Pakistan and humanity in general only lies in the ruling system of the Khilafah (Caliphate) where no matter who becomes the ruler, he is bound to rule according to the Quran and the Sunnah. Allah (swt) described the Quran as, ﴿هُدًى لِلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَىٰ وَالْفُرْقَانِ﴾ **“A Guidance to the people with Clear Signs of the true Guidance and as the Criterion (between right and wrong).”** [Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:185].

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