

Scenario 279

ELECTIONS 2024-III

CRISIS OVER DELAYED ELECTION RESULTS:

On Election-Day eve, the COUNTING process remained at a standstill as candidates for Imran Khan's PTI alleged seats they won were declared for Nawaz Sharif's PMLN.

Referring to Hannah Ellis-Petersen's analysis in UK's daily '**the guardian**' dated 9th February 2024:

"Pakistan was thrown into a state of crisis on Friday with its election results still undeclared more than 24 hours after polling closed and the vote marred by widespread allegations of rigging.

Analysts and candidates widely questioned the integrity of the polls that took place on 8th February 2024, raising concerns that there was an attempt to rig the vote to bring back the former PM Nawaz Sharif, and his PMLN to power. Sharif was seen to have the backing of Pakistan's powerful military....."

Voters across the country, however, came out in unprecedented numbers to support Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Imran Khan's party. With more than half the votes counted for the 265 seats, PTI-backed candidates had won 88 seats, PMLN 60 and the PPP 46. However, the PTI leadership alleged that the true number of seats the party had won was much higher, and there were widespread allegations of ***rigging as the vote count was delayed***. Protests against the outcome erupted in Khyber PK and Baluchistan provinces, where police retaliated with violence, and PTI supporters also came out on to the streets in major cities like Lahore.

As the day went on, both PMLN and PTI declared victory and there was a growing sense of frustration at the lack of clear results across the country, which was sailing through the worst economic crisis in its history. The lead for Khan's party came as a shock to many. The PDM and the interim governments had since led a sustained attack on Khan and his PTI, making it clear

they would not tolerate his return to power. Khan was arrested in August, and during ONE week before elections received three separate jail sentences that could keep him behind bars for more than a decade.

Just after the vote counting began on Thursday evening, it looked like a landslide for Khan's party. PTI-backed candidates across the country, even in the Sharif's stronghold of Punjab and those who were fighting from jail, surged ahead in over 100 constituencies. At his party headquarters in Lahore, Sharif – who a few hours earlier had given a confident assurance of a simple majority for the PMLN – was forced to cancel plans to give his victory speech, which had been pre-written.

The surge in support for Khan on Election Day was evident at polling stations across Islamabad's NA-47 district **visited by 'the Guardian'**. From first-time voters to elderly women born before Pakistan was established, and from labourers to tech workers and lawyers, the overwhelming majority said they were voting for PTI, or as many put it, giving their full backing to Khan.

At a gathering in Islamabad as results began to break, one independent candidate running against PTI and the PMLN spoke of a ***PTI whitewash***, evident not only in the constituency he was fighting in but being reported by candidates across the country. But the excitement and delight at the apparent triumph of the people's vote was short-lived. Declarations of results began to slow down and then stopped altogether. Polling agents started saying they were unable to collect results and then there was a reported ***'technical error' in counting***. TV stations were said to have received instructions to stop reporting the results.

On Friday morning, about 18 hours after the polls had closed, constituencies began to declare for the Sharifs and their allies in quick succession in their stronghold of Punjab; Nawaz Sharif in his Lahore constituency, as well as his brother Shehbaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam Nawaz and other PMLN heavyweights.

But allegations of inconsistencies and rigging also started emerging. ***More votes were said to have been counted than registered in Lahore, while the officer overseeing the count was transferred abruptly on Friday morning, allegedly for medical reasons.*** In another Lahore constituency, the PTI candidate Salman Akram Raja was declared defeated despite having a significant majority on Thursday night. He alleged that he and his wife were removed from the polling office as they tried to observe the counting.

In NA-47, the central Islamabad constituency, *visited by **the Guardian** on polling day*, the PTI candidate Shoaib Shaheen said officials had declared him a clear winner on Thursday night with a majority of more than 50,000 votes. By Friday afternoon, however, the seat had been awarded to PMLN. Standing outside the office of the ECP in protest, Shaheen accused it, the judiciary and the military of colluding to rig the election. He said: **'We can see clearly how corrupt and broken the system is. My constituency is in the heart of the capital; the Supreme Court, the high court, parliament house, the election commission, all are located here. If they can change and rig the elections here, think what they are doing in the rest of the country.'**

See the world-fame weekly '**the ECONOMIST**' of 12th February 2024 – an article titled as ****Pakistan's voters tell the*** * (Imran Khan's candidates won the most seats despite heavy-handed attempts to totter them):

"The delay was unusual even by the standards of Pakistan's messy politics. Late on February 11th, nearly three days after a legal deadline, the country's election commission at last released provisional results of general elections held on February 8th. No party obtained a majority, but the vote nonetheless produced a clear winner: Imran Khan, the imprisoned former prime minister who was barred from standing and whose party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), was subject to a de facto ban.

Voters disregarded the hints to shun Mr Khan, casting their ballots for Mr Khan's candidates anyway. Members of the PTI, standing as independents, bagged 92 of 264 parliamentary seats. The Pakistan Muslim League (PMLN) of Nawaz Sharif, Mr Khan's chief rival and a three-time former prime minister, was widely expected to win. It limped in second with 75 seats.

....the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), which won 54 seats.... PMLN has also approached winning candidates loyal to Mr Khan to switch sides. At least one has already jumped.

*Mr Khan's party claims to have evidence that it would have won a majority of seats if the election had not been rigged by its rivals.... ***Yet signs of tampering are plentiful.*** The election commission, which had been instrumental in obstructing Mr Khan and the PTI in the run-up to the election, blamed the days-long delay in releasing results **on unspecified 'internet issues'**. **Over the week-***

end it initially barred returning officers from certifying results in multiple constituencies and ordered a repeat of the vote in dozens of polling stations...

In at least 24 constituencies, 13 of which were won by PMLN, the number of rejected ballots was higher than the margin of victory.....

The dubious electoral process was preceded by a systematic campaign against Mr Khan and the PTI. It was stripped of its electoral symbol, a cricket bat, in effect dissolving the party. The Supreme Court sealed the deal by overturning a successful challenge to this in a lower court. Many PTI leaders were imprisoned or disqualified. Those who stood as independents were prevented from campaigning openly.

A week before the election, Mr Khan, already in prison on a separate charge, was sentenced to three long prison terms in quick succession on counts of corruption, disclosing state secrets and getting married illegally. On Election Day, a shutdown of mobile phone and data networks hampered voters' ability to find and access polling stations.

....Yet the PTI will probably remain confined to the opposition benches. Mr Sharif looks set to cobble together a coalition similar to one that governed the country for 16 months after Mr Khan was ousted in a vote of no confidence in April 2022. Pakistanis voted for a change...."

Non-PTI candidates also alleged irregularities. Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar, who was standing as an independent in Islamabad and had already voiced fears of vote manipulation, said the PTI candidate in his constituency was clearly winning but that the seat had been declared for the PMLN. ***'This is the worst kind of rigging and playing with fire,'*** said Khokhar.

Among voters who had come out in droves to support PTI, there was anger on the streets. In Islamabad, section 144 was imposed, which banned large gatherings. *'Our votes have been stolen and people will not accept the result. We wanted to trust the system with our votes but they failed us, our trust is completely gone. We see now that we are living under martial law.'*

On the other hand, see the event of setback for **Nawaz Sharif in Mansehra's NA-15** constituency:

MANSEHRA (Dunya News) – Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN) supremo Nawaz Sharif has faced defeat in NA- 15, Mansehra; PTI-backed independent candidate Prince Gastasab Khan secured the seat bagging 105,249 votes while Nawaz Sharif clinched 80,382 votes.

Performance of religious parties remained the WORST: *In an editorial column in a daily newspaper, a security analyst Amir Rana explained that how the performance of religious parties in this election (2024) remained the worst compared to their previous runs. The parties struggled to create significant impact of their own in an environment that was dominated by pro-versus anti-establishment discussions. Right-wing Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F), for instance, only secured three seats in the National Assembly, similar to the 1977 elections. 'Several factors contributed to JUI-F's electoral defeat. These included internal differences, flawed candidate selection influenced by the leadership's favouritism (as tickets were mostly given to sons / brothers), and allegedly 'ticket selling'; wrote Rana.*

The far-right *Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan* (TLP), on the other hand, embarked on a pursuit of becoming a mainstream party, damaging their support base of Bareilvi Muslim parties in Punjab and Sindh, he added.

ECP DEGRADED PAKISTAN...WHY SO:

See an **Editorial in daily DAWN** dated 12th Feb 2024:

"FRANTIC negotiations have started behind closed doors over the possible configurations of power, and some quarters will be eager to see the election chapter closed, with results accepted as fait accompli. However, the citizenry — of which many braved a long campaign of intimidation and navigated several hurdles to exercise their vote — seems in no mood to meekly move on. It has good reason not to.

*There were **significant irregularities** in this election that voters must be given answers for, and it is important that their concerns are promptly addressed by the ECP. The most pressing issue is what seems to be the outright theft of the public mandate in some parts of the country, as evidenced by the large discrepancies between various reported results.*

There are growing voices of concern, including in the international community, over why some of the ECP's announced results differ so

widely from the personal tallies kept by the candidates as well as the unofficial, parallel counts maintained by TV channels through their independent sources.

Observers' suspicions have been further strengthened by some obvious anomalies in the Form 47s released by ROs for certain constituencies, as well as the inordinately long time it has taken to 'finalise' results. in many major urban constituencies, where media presence and resources are, in fact, the strongest, the divergence is extremely large. Clearly, something went awry during the results tabulation process in these constituencies, which needs to be promptly investigated and addressed.

Though investigations will get tricky in places where candidates were never given Form 45 — a serious irregularity that has been highlighted by several poll observers — there seem to be quite a few candidates who are in a position to mount a strong challenge.

These include, among others, several PTI-backed independents in Karachi, Lahore, Multan and Islamabad, some of whom saw comfortable victories turn into overnight defeats. At least one, Salman Akram Raja in Lahore, has already contested his RO's result in court, and others will likely follow suit.

Moreover, wherever the rules call for it, the ECP must allow a recount. It should also release any information that can help auditors' cross-check its results. This is an opportunity for the institution to restore its credibility. With international pressure growing, it must act quickly."

Referring to **daily DAWN** dated 09th February 2024 under head ***Rising IR-REGULARITIES:*** (Karachi Report); 'the expected accusations and statements of rigging by political parties started within the initial hours of voting on Thursday, with multiple videos of "malpractice" also flooding social media' - videos circulating on social media showed masked men entering polling stations in the whole city. While mobile internet remained shut across the country during polling, these videos were viewed and shared by overseas Pakistanis on social media and WhatsApp groups.

One of the videos, shared by journalist Naimat Khan on his official X account, showed Qadir Khan Mandokhail, PPP candidate for NA-242, kicking down the door and storming into a polling station while holding a ballot paper. Surrounded by a group of supporters, Mr Mandokhail went straight to a polling

booth and smashed ballot boxes on the ground in presence of the police and polling officers; the ECP said it had taken notice of it.

In yet another video shared on social media, from a polling station in the NA-248 constituency, around five men dismantled the polling booth. From Balochistan, Akhtar Mengal wrote to the ECP, complaining about the '**Quetta SHO who had taken away 900 votes**'. The DAWN wrote further:

"....then, also, comes the fact of who the people actually voted for — a persecuted party, its jailed leader, thousands of detained workers, scores of criminal cases, rolling blackouts in the media, and police raids without end. In voting for Imran Khan and the PTI, the public chose defiance."

See another scenario in the same context....

Fact Check By iVerify Published on 10th February 2024:

- *This fact check has been published in partnership with **iVerify Pakistan** — a project of CEJ and UNDP (<https://pak.i-verify.org>).*

Videos and posts circulating on social media platform X on the Elections-Day quoted foreign media outlets as reporting that the PTI had won over 150 seats in the general elections. No proof was found, however, for such reports having been aired.

On 9th February 2024, an X user, who appeared to be a PTI supporter based on their profile history, shared a post with the video of a foreign journalist, captioned: '**The international media has reported this news after seeing it with its own eyes [...] that PTI has won more than 150 seats. Spread this news as widely as possible.**' The post garnered over 300,000 views and was shared 18,000 times. The official X account of PTI Lahore also shared the same claim which garnered another 14,000 views.

The **iVerify Pakistan** platform sought to determine the veracity of the claim since it is directly related to election results, which had already become controversial due to the delay in their announcement. The video attached to the circulated posts was of **Cordelia Lynch**, *Asia correspondent of British news outlet Sky News*. **Lynch was one of 37 British journalists issued visas to cover the general elections.**

- She posted this video on her official X account on 9th February (2024) at 12:44pm with the caption: ***"Fascinating dynamics in the Pakistan elections with Imran Khan's independents leading. They say it's a landslide victory. Official results though show a tighter race (with) there complaints of vote tampering."***

The video's transcript is reproduced below: "Well, they say that Pakistan is full of surprises. And this morning (8th February 2024 – the Election-Day), the people of Pakistan are waking up to exactly that. The PTI, the party of Imran Khan, who remains in jail, his candidates forced to run as independents, are claiming what they say is a clear victory."

"But they are also concerned about what they claim is election rigging. Now, behind me, you can see the official results. So far, 53 seats in the National Assembly have been returned. Official results say that the independents are ahead at 18 that the party of Nawaz Sharif, the man that many believe, is at 17, and the Peoples Party of Pakistan, led by Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, is at 16.

So this is all very interesting because people thought it was a foregone conclusion. But the PTI says that there was a big turnout, particularly amongst youth, amongst women, and that they came out in their droves to support Imran Khan, who won't be able to lead the party, who remains behind bars. And yet you're seeing this groundswell of enthusiasm now.

What does it mean for an actual result? Well, potentially, we could be looking by the end of the day at a hung parliament. I think what this board behind us does show is that Sharif is very unlikely to get a clear majority. "But lots of complaints coming in here to the election commission about tampering with results..... So, lots to play for, (and) fascinating dynamics here. And Khan still appears to have maintained that popularity."

Notably, at no point Lynch claimed that the PTI had won 150 seats. In fact, according to her voiceover, this particular report was aired when the results of only 53 National Assembly had come in on the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) official results portal. ***'As of now, the provisional results of 253 out of 266 NA seats have been announced by the ECP, with independent candidates in the lead with 100 seats, followed by the PMLN and the PPP with 71 and 54 seats, respectively'.***

- According to media reports till then, out of the 99 independent winning candidates, 92 were PTI-backed. Meanwhile, the PTI claimed to have won 170 seats as per the tally of Form 45s — statement of count shared with polling agents and candidates present at polling stations — they might have collected from across the country BUT NO INDEPENDENT SOURCE CONFIRMED THAT.

REJECTED BALLOTS EXCEED VICTORY MARGIN:

Referring to ***Iftikhar A. Khan***'s Report published in **daily DAWN** of 12th February 2024:

*"In at least 24 National Assembly constituencies, the number of rejected ballots was found to be greater than the margin of victory, an analysis of provisional results reveals. Twenty-two of these constituencies fall in Punjab, with one each in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh. PMLN won the electoral race in 13 of these constituencies, five were claimed by PPP, four by the PTI-backed independents and two by other independents. **Around 2m ballot papers excluded from the count in all 265 NA seats contested.**"*

- In NA-11 (Shangla), PMLN provincial president Engineer Ameer Muqam secured 59,863 votes to defeat the PTI-backed candidate with a margin of 5,552 votes. The number of rejected ballots in the contest was 5,743.
- In NA-50 (Attock), Malik Sohail Khan of PMLN got 119,075 votes, defeating Ch Parvez Elahi's niece Emaan Waseem with a margin of 9,886 votes. The number of rejected votes in this constituency was 9,938.
- In NA-59 (Talagang-cum-Chakwal), Sardar Ghulam Abbas of PMLN secured 141,680 votes against his closest rival PTI-backed Muhammad Ruman Ahmad, who got 129,716 votes. The margin of victory was 11,964 while the number of ballot papers rejected was 24,547, which was the highest number of rejected votes in a single NA constituency.
- In NA-61 (Jhelum), Ch Farrukh Altaf of PMLN beat Shaukat Iqbal Mirza (PTI). They secured 88,038 and 84,584 votes, respectively. The difference was 3,454 against 9,659 votes rejected.
- In NA-65 (Gujrat), Ch Naseer Ahmad Abbas of PMLN secured 90,982 votes to defeat Wajahat Hasnain Shah of PTI, who

got 82,411 votes. The margin of victory and rejected ballots were 8,571 and 9,092, respectively.

- In NA-69 (Mandi Bahauddin), Nasir Iqbal Bosal of PMLN secured 113,285 votes to defeat Kausar Parveen of PTI, who could manage to obtain 108,768 votes, reflecting a margin of 4,517. However, the number of rejected ballots in the constituency was 11,609.
- In NA-79 (Gujranwala), Ahsan Ullah Virk of PTI obtained 104,023 votes to defeat Zulfiqar Ahmed of PMLN, who secured 99,635 votes. The margin was 4,388 against 9,300 ballots rejected.
- In NA-80 (Gujranwala), Shahid Usman of PMLN defeated Lala Asadullah of PTI. They secured 98,160 and 95,007 votes, respectively. The difference was 3,153 while the rejected votes numbered 5,267.
- In NA-86 (Sargodha), Muhammad Miqdad Ali Khan of PTI obtained 105,868 votes defeating Syed Javaid Hussain of PMLN, who got 94,479 votes. The margin of victory comes to 11,389 against 13,237 ballots rejected.
- In NA-92 (Bhakkar), Rasheed Akbar, an independent candidate, defeated Muhammad Afzal Khan, another independent. They secured 142,761 and 131,176 votes, respectively. The difference is 11,585, close to the number of rejected votes that came to 11,750.
- In NA-94 (Chiniot), Qaisar Amjad Sheikh of PMLN got 79,546 votes against his closest rival Muhammad Khalid of PTI, who bagged 72,274 votes. The difference is 7,272 while the rejected votes are 7,802.
- In NA-97 (Faisalabad), Muhammad Saadullah (PTI) defeated Ali Gohar Khan of PMLN. They secured 72,614 and 70,311 votes, respectively. The difference came to 2,303 against 9,474 ballots rejected.
- In NA-106 (Toba Tek Singh), Muhammad Junaid Anwaar of PMLN got 137,629 votes to beat Khalid Nawaz (PTI), who secured 136,924, reflecting a difference of just 705 votes. The number of rejected votes numbered 7,524 votes — 10 times higher than the margin of victory.
- In NA-118 (Lahore), former Punjab chief minister Hamza Shehbaz defeated Aliya Hamza of PTI. They got 105,960 and 100,803 votes, respectively. Against the victory margin of 5,157, the number of rejected votes was 5,324.
- In NA-148 (Multan), former prime minister and PPP leader Yousaf Raza Gilani defeated Taimoor Altaf Malik of PTI with a difference of just 293 votes. The number of rejected votes was 12,665.

- In another constituency of the city of saints, NA-151, Mr Gilani's son Ali Musa Gilani beat PTI-backed Mehar Bano Qureshi with a margin of 7,431 votes. The number of rejected votes in the constituency was, however, as high as 16,555.
- In NA-154 (Lodhran), Rana Muhammad Faraz Noon secured 134,937 votes defeating former minister of state Abdul Rahman Kanju (PMLN), who got 128,438 votes, reflecting a margin of 6,499 votes. The number of rejected votes here was 7,803.
- In NA-164 (Bahawalpur), Riaz Hussain Pirzada of PMLN got 123,360 votes to defeat Ejaz Ahmad Gudan of PTI with a margin of 6,220 votes. As many as 6,636 ballots were excluded from the count as rejected in this constituency.
- In NA-169 (Rahim Yar Khan), Syed Murtaza of PPP defeated Syed Mobeen Ahmad of PMLN with a margin of 7,109 votes against 9,843 votes rejected.
- In NA-173 (Rahim Yar Khan), Syed Mustafa Mehmood of PPP beat Muhammad Nabeel Dhar of PTI with a margin of 2,816 votes. In this constituency, 7,945 votes were rejected.
- The other constituencies where number of rejected votes is higher than the margin of victory include NA-184 and NA-186 (D.G. Khan), NA-189 (Rajanpur) and NA-231 (Malir).

As many as four constituencies had more than 15,000 excluded ballots each. Another 21 constituencies excluded 10,000 to 15,000 ballots. A large number of constituencies (137) reported excluded votes in the range of 5,000 to 10,000. A total of 67 constituencies reported fewer than 5,000 but greater than 1,000 excluded ballots. Only six constituencies reported fewer than 1,000 excluded ballots each. The highest number of ballots excluded from the voter count have been reported from NA-59 Talagang-cum-Chakwal (24,547 ballots), followed by NA-213 Umerkot (17,571 ballots). The lowest number of ballots excluded were reported from NA-236 Karachi East-II (51 ballots).

Abbas Nasir, a former editor of the daily DAWN commented on 11th February 2024 that:

"...it was a remarkable victory; it was, after all, almost a century scored without a bat; it appeared an all-encompassing comment as the snail-paced trickle of the Feb 8 election results started to paint a picture of the PTI voters' anger and defiance at all that the party and its leadership has had to face. The most comprehensive plan appeared in place.

*The voters turned out in enough numbers to have given the 'independents' (read: mostly PTI) almost a century of seats, despite all obstacles in the run-up to polling day; and issues in tabulation and announcement of the results. **The past may be another country as the election demonstrated.** But we aren't known to learn from our mistakes. It is true that you can '**manage the electoral process**' — but only to a point.*

*The PMLN abandoned its '**vote ko izzat do**' slogan; that strategy blew up in the PMLN's face. As he made his 'victory speech', Mr Sharif looked frail, tired, even defeated, despite using brave words. It also marked a sad departure from the Charter of Democracy. The failure to contain the PTI and the influence of its leader may well mean that the apparent media freedom turns out to be temporary and it could well be business as usual before long. Election year 2024 will also mark the point where the majority or at least the largest single entity was excluded from the process by brutal force.*

The only thing I do have the power to do is to tip my hat to those whose bat was taken away and yet they scored, more or less, a century."

PTI / SIC DENIED SPECIAL SEATS:

On 4th March 2024: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) rejected a petition filed by the **Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC)** — the new face of the PTI for that time — seeking the allocation of reserved seats. The 4-1 majority verdict was issued by a five-member bench headed by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja. ECP member Babar Hassan Bharwana dissented from the judgment in an additional note.

The SIC was joined by PTI-backed lawmakers after winning elections without their poll symbol (the Cricket BAT), and the SIC had written to the ECP seeking allocation of reserved seats in the national as well as three provincial assemblies, excluding Balochistan. The ECP, however, did not consider the plea till applications piled up opposing the allocation of SIC's quota ***on the grounds that it was not a parliamentary party and had not submitted a priority list of candidates for the reserved seats.***

The applications against the allocation of reserved seats to SIC were heard for two days before SIC's applications were

clubbed with the lately filed but sooner heard petitions opposing its quota, and notices were issued to some other parliamentary parties.

The ECP had kept on hold the allocation of 78 out of the total 226 reserved seats for women in the national and provincial assemblies — all of which were to go to SIC, under the formula. Out of the total 60 reserved seats for women in the NA, the ECP allocated 40 seats to different political parties. These included 20 of the total 32 for Punjab, two out of 10 for KP, all 14 from Sindh and all four from Balochistan. Likewise, it allocated seven out of 10 seats reserved for minorities in the NA.

Of the total 66 reserved seats for women in the Punjab Assembly, it had allocated 42 seats and five out of eight reserved for minorities. In the Sindh Assembly, it had allocated 27 of the total 29 seats reserved for women and eight out of nine reserved for minorities. It allocated five out of total 26 reserved seats for women in the KP assembly and one out of four reserved for minorities.

All the 11 reserved seats for women and three for minorities in the Balochistan Assembly had already been allocated to respective parties – PTI didn't merit any in Balochistan.

After hearing arguments from all sides, the commission had reserved its verdict a week earlier, a day before the maiden session of the 16th National Assembly, allowing the controversy to simmer. Subsequently, the ECP earned condemnation for delaying the decision as it paved the way for an incomplete assembly to meet. In the ECP's order issued, the electoral watchdog said it had given a deadline of 22nd December 2023 for the submission of nomination papers by political parties for reserved seats. It said the deadline was later extended till 24th December 2023.

"The records revealed that the SIC did not submit priority list for the reserved seats for women and non-Muslims," the ECP noted; also, highlighting that the party requested the commission for the allocation of seats via four letters after PTI-backed independents joined it. The ECP further stated ***that the SIC didn't contest elections for any seat in the national or provincial assemblies and even the party chairman, Sahibzada Hamid Raza, contested the polls as an independent candidate.*** The ECP further quoted:

"In Article 51 of the Constitution it is clear that political parties that have representation in the National Assembly by way of winning

seats would be eligible for the allocation of reserved seats for women and non-Muslims through proportional representation system."

ECP also cited Section 104 of the Elections Act, 2017 which says:

"For the purpose of election to seats reserved for women and non-Muslims in an Assembly, the political parties contesting election for such seats shall, within the period fixed by the Commission for submission of nomination papers, file separate lists of their candidates in order of priority for seats reserved for women and non-Muslims with the Commission or, as it may direct, with the Provincial Election Commissioner or other authorized officer of the Commission, who shall forthwith cause such lists to be published for information of the public."

In view of above, the ECP's order said:

"Therefore, the commission is of the view that in light of clear provisions of Article 51(6) of the Constitution read with Section 104 of the Elections Act, 2017 [...] SIC is not entitled to claim quota for reserved seats due to having non curable legal defects and violation of a mandatory provision of submission of party list for reserved seats which is the requirement of law.

It rejected the SIC's petition and accepted pleas against the allocation of reserved seats to the council. The seats in the National Assembly shall not remain vacant and will be allotted by proportional representation process of political parties on the basis of seats won by political parties."

The Commission office was directed to calculate the quota of reserved seats accordingly for onward allocation to other parties.

Meanwhile, in his **DISSENT NOTE**, ECP member Babar Hassan Bharwana said that he **partially agreed** with the other members of the bench that reserved seats cannot be allotted to the SIC as the party had failed to submit priority lists in time. Further that:

"However, I have dissenting views with regard to the allocation of seats by way of proportional representation to the other political parties. In my opinion, Article 51(6-d) and Article 106(3-c) of the Constitution clearly state that reserved seats will be allocated to the political parties on the basis of total number of general seats secured

by each political party from the province concerned in the National Assembly or such reserved seats secured by each political party in the Provincial Assembly.

(Thus) the seats should therefore remain vacant till the time any such amendment in Article 51 or 106 of the Constitution was made by the Parliament.”

However, the PTI rejected the ECP’s verdict and termed the election commission’s judgment **‘the last dagger in the heart of democracy’**. The party held that if their share i being given to other parties then that could be is a constitutional mistake that the ECP committed. Also, the said verdict had proven that the electoral watchdog failed to fulfil its responsibility of holding free and fair elections. The party subsequently demanded the immediate resignation of the ECP and sought proceedings against the Chief Election Commissioner under Article 6 (treason) of the Constitution.

Separately, in a post on social media platform X, the PTI said the electoral watchdog **‘continues to disrespect the public mandate’** and called that day’s verdict another step **‘to completely destroy democracy and electoral process in Pakistan’**.