**A warped attempt at governance**

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When the new government took charge, we expected that under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif it would make some attempts to put things on the right track in the country.

Only if the government takes the right steps can we hope for an escape from our current miseries, including inflation and the high rates of bills and other crucial items, in say two years or so. This is the minimum time period laid out by several economists for things to get better.

But, of course, they can get better only if the right steps are taken right now. Otherwise, we will continue to live in a state of chaos, uncertainty and inability to govern a country which has abundant resources but not enough will to pull itself together.

There is evidence of this everywhere. The government, of course, comes first in some ways given that it has been elected or put in place with the purpose of serving the people. The manner in which this has been done is problematic.

The appointment of Ishaq Dar as the deputy prime minister further strengthens the hand of Mian Nawaz Sharif, but what this brings to the country is difficult to say. There is no reason to believe that Mr Dar as deputy prime minister will serve any useful purpose. The position of deputy prime minister has existed before in our history, but essentially it has little value.

We can also see it as one part of the continued game of power being played within the House of Sharif, as the story unfolds and the next generation begins to take over some posts with many tales of discord between the brothers who had in the past worked together on essentially good terms.

There is also complete chaos in other areas: for example, the failure to collect wheat which has been cut and lies sodden in fields after recent rains at an unexpected time of the year. The reason for this, we are told, is the import of millions of metric tonnes of wheat from other countries by the caretaker government.

This import was carried out at a point when it was already known there would be a bumper crop in the country. Much of the wheat imported is said to be of low quality and has resulted in a state of agitation in the agriculture sector as well as colossal gains for those involved in organizing the imports. Without sufficient storage to house the wheat grown in the country – because existing warehouses have been taken over by the imported crop – there is nothing that farmers, and particularly smaller farmers, can do to salvage the situation.

Today they are in real danger of losing the crop and the money that should have come to them as payment for the produce. The problem is enormous, and protests by farmers have been handled in the same clumsy manner that we have witnessed in the past.

We also see problems in other spheres. The withdrawal of NAB charges against former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, former finance minister Miftah Ismail and former CEO Imranul Haq – who had been accused of wrongdoing in setting up LNG power plants – exposes all that was wrong with accountability in the country.

It also demonstrates that NAB is simply a body used to pressurize political opponents and place them in difficulty. The torture inflicted on those arrested on charges, which it is now quite clear were essentially completely concocted, is immensely disturbing. Miftah Ismail has appeared on television to describe the way he was treated and how his family was affected. His emotion seems at least to be genuine.

It is not a pleasant sight to see and the lack of action against the NAB officials responsible for this as well as those who harassed and tortured the other persons in the past raises the question of what kind of accountability we have in the country and where we are headed in the future.

There seems to be no answer and no action from those who should be taking on NAB and replacing it with a body which is truly capable of ensuring accountability and doing so in the right manner when it is needed, rather than allowing political bias and a desire for revenge to come into the picture.

We also have multitude of other issues which badly affect society. As we mark Labour Day on May 1, it is obvious that the number of people on the streets to mark the occasion has been sinking through the decades. The mass demonstrations of the 60s, 70s and even the 80s appear to have dwindled possibly as a result of actions against labour unions and a lack of interest in the fate of workers.

There are many examples, but one is simply the reality of children working in dangerous sectors, and the fact that we do not even know how many children are at work, endangering their health by making bangles in Hyderabad or engaged in the work of putting together hand-made shoes in places such as Lodhran since no survey has been conducted since 1996.

In the absence of such a survey, we cannot take any meaningful actions, and there has been no action even when we know that problems exist, such as in the notorious brick kiln sector and on large farms in Sindh and southern Punjab. A lack of action essentially remains the hallmark of a country which seems to have lost momentum and appears to be willing to remain where it is today with no efforts to push it out of the trench into which it has dug itself.

Things must change. Politicians alone will not bring this about. Some movements have to come from society and from forums that work for various groups. This effort is barely visible today.

There are many other issues that could be highlighted. We all know what they are, but no one seems willing to take any kind of measures which could create a better future for Pakistan and its young people.

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