**[No grand plan](https://www.dawn.com/news/1769192/no-grand-plan)**

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HAVE you ever wondered why we persistently find ourselves stuck in a perpetual rut? How the older you get, the more predictable Pakistan’s crises become, and the more we hope for change, the less attainable it becomes?

When younger, it was difficult to fathom the pessimism, especially of those in their 50s and 60s, as one felt that the possibilities were endless and our determination was boundless. But those senior to us would disagree. They were cynics; frustrated, angry, and resigned to the inevitability of the country not changing for the better. To many, it was the dog chasing its own tail, perpetually.

This was a time of youth and naivety, when we believed that political parties, for all their faults, would stand by democracy for the people, and if not that, their own self-preservation. We believed that if we stood firmly enough, the army would stay apolitical, and that the lawyers’ movement was going to be the harbinger of real change in the judiciary, making it truly independent.

The cynics said we were wrong. In hindsight, we should have probably listened to them. It wasn’t apparent then, but they were speaking as witnesses to history and from the wisdom that such experiences impart. Unlike us, they were well aware of the trappings of our history, the inertia of our system, and the indifference of our power elites. They must have seen that the faces around us were changing, but the fundamentals were not. In our exuberance, we did not see this.

What happens when the Constitution is treated like a book of guidelines or suggestions?

What were and are those fundamentals? Basically, that there can be no accountability without responsibility, and no responsibility without authority. As Imran Khan had [rightly pointed out](https://www.dawn.com/news/1736755), like others before him, the system can’t function where the prime minister has all the responsibility but none of the authority.

This idea goes to the root of everything. In a country where the constitution is followed in letter and spirit, responsibility, authority, and accountability are also clearly identified, demarcated and undertaken. If it’s in your domain, it’s your responsibility, and if it’s your responsibility, you shall be held accountable for it. Simple enough, right?

But what happens when the Constitution is actually treated like a book of guidelines or suggestions, and the ground realities do not mirror the power matrix delineated by those guidelines? You get no responsibility but lots of blame, and there’s little to no accountability.

In such a situation, the prime minister can conveniently assume no liability by simply saying that the actual power lies elsewhere. The establishment can bat away any accountability by saying that it is the responsibility of the government to govern the country and not them. Similarly, the judiciary can easily maintain that it only interprets the law created by parliament and ensures it is in accordance with the Constitution, and that if there is any fault to apportion, it lies with parliament and the laws it makes. Parliament, of course, would point fingers at the judiciary and the establishment for straight-jacketing its mandate and restricting it from fulfilling its responsibilities.

In reality, we all know that the matrix of responsibilities and authorities isn’t as clear cut as any one of these institutions would like us to believe. We also know that most institutions, unfortunately, treat the Constitution like a magazine we read to kill time, as opposed to a document that must be adhered to in letter and spirit. As such, what results is a dereliction of responsibility in which everyone constantly shifts positions and stances without a care in the world. It’s the perfect cover.

Many of us may call this hypocrisy, or the system being two-faced or duplicitous, but it can’t be denied that skewed power structures result in skewed outcomes. The Constitution, being the will of the people, has never been so disconnected from the power dynamics on the ground. And this is from where the current levels of instability and lack of consistency arise. The Constitution is how we would like to see ourselves, not what we are actually doing.

This is why one particular clause of the Charter of Democracy, that is, Clause 13, requires specific attention. If nothing else, it may very well be a starting point in reconciling ground realities with the Constitution itself. Clause 13 was intended for the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission, which was to, inter alia, “acknowledge victims of torture, imprisonment, state-sponsored persecution, targeted legislation, and politically motivated accountability”.

Such a commission is not a novel idea. It was used with some effectiveness in South Africa, albeit with a varied mandate. The concept is not geared towards the prosecution of individuals, but rather acceptance and acknowledgement of responsibility, so that the country can heal and move on with renewed commitment to making things better. In essence, it’s about learning from your past mistakes, owning up to it, and seeking forgiveness. It is supposed to be the bridge between the prevailing power dynamics and those mirrored in the Constitution.

Something along these lines is imperative for Pakistan too. Pakistan’s greatest tragedy isn’t that we have incompetent power structures or ‘elite capture’, so to speak, but that we are way too comfortable making the same mistakes again and again. Clearly, there can be no better future if we refuse to acknowledge our mistakes and transgressions, as well as the severe damage these have caused over the years. We have ignored them for 75 years now, and the result is that we are as confused, unsure of ourselves, and directionless as we were back then, if not more.

As a country, we are on a proverbial roller coaster — without a stop lever. The ride itself may be thrilling, but in the larger scheme of things, it is simply taking us in circles. Perhaps a truth and reconciliation commission, tailored to our current needs, can help break this vicious cycle and allow us to take responsibility, provide accountability, and finally, just move on ahead and beyond all that has been stopping us thus far.

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