**[Wither accountability?](https://nation.com.pk/03-Feb-2020/wither-accountability%22%20%5Ct%20%22_new)**

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Transparency International (TI), in its recent global report on the 2019 Corruption Perception Index (CPI), has revealed that the perceived corruption in Pakistan just worsened during the last year. According to the global anti-corruption watchdog, Pakistan slipped three spots in the worldwide ranking from the previous 117th to 120th position among 180 countries in 2019. So Pakistan, which was previously standing at the 63rd place, is now the 60th most corrupt country in the world.

For many years, the PTI’s core politics has been centring on the single issue of corruption in the country. Aimed at “bringing accountability to the core of government”, introducing an independent accountability regime was the primary point of the PTI’s manifesto for the 2018 elections. Therefore, having come into power, PM Imran khan readily renewed his resolve to initiate rigorous accountability derive in Pakistan.

We have, however, yet not witnessed any ‘rigorous’ accountability drive as such in our country. Nor has the PTI-led government devised any significant counter-corruption strategy to curb this menace effectively. So, far, there could only be introduced a simple amendment to the National Accountably Ordinance-1999 whereby the businessmen and bureaucrats have gotten some immunity from the NAB’s actions. Nevertheless, the PTI government looks in no mood of abandoning its corruption-related rhetoric against the opposition political parties, especially the PML-N.

In my last week’s column, I referred to a so-called two-prong accountability policy which has long been pursued by the successive regimes in the country in the name of countering corruption. Firstly, the process of accountability has been a political tool employed by those in power to pursue a typical witch-hunting exercise against their political opponents. Secondly, such accountability policy has just given rise to an anti-graft body, which is focused on recovering, retrieving and repatriating the stolen or misappropriated money and assets rather than eliminating corruption from the country. So, the NAB somehow became more an assets recovery agency than an anti-graft body.

The PTI-led government, noticeably, has preferred to adhere to the accountability policy aforementioned. It focused on repatriating the ‘plundered’ and ‘looted’ money to Pakistan. For this specific purpose, the federal government set up Assets Recovery Unit (ARU). Headed by the Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Accountability, this multi-agency body is empowered to get any information from any federal or provincial department. It is great that the incumbent government is seriously trying to retrieve and repatriate hidden offshore assets to the country. However, these measures can’t absolve PTI of its moral and legal responsibility of evolving and enforcing a stringent accountability regime in the country as promised by it. Such a move is hardly a substitute for a rigorous anti-corruption drive. The ARU, despite tall claims made by it, has yet nor succeeded in repatriating any significant stolen assets from abroad.

A large number of politicos complain that they have been politically victimised in the name of accountability. Unfortunately enough, over a period of time, the very political tool of accountability has given rise to a more sophisticated phenomenon what has been dubbed “political engineering”. Such phenomenon has, noticeably, been aiming at helping a particular political party inhabit the corridors of power at the cost of another political party. It also involved dislodging or discrediting a specific regime after rendering it politically inactive and irrelevant.

There is a perception that it is not a political regime, but the power that be, which is steering the process of such engineering. In addition to the NAB, the country’s judicial and electoral authorities have also been part of it. Many think that the embattled PML-N and its various leaders, especially its supremo Nawaz Sharif, have been the primary victims of it. Former CJP Justice Asif Saeed Khosa has publically referred to a growing perception in the country that the accountability process is part of political engineering. He also advised taking some remedial steps to retain the credibility of the ongoing accountability drive in Pakistan.

For the last few months, the NAB has also been seen arresting and probing the top leaders of the PPP, namely its co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari. Luckily, PPP, the country’s second-largest opposition party, has been somehow managing to get away with the accountability drive during the time the troubled PML-N was being fixed in the name of accountability. Asif Zardari, who is known for his pragmatic politics, probably considered it expedient to become part of the ‘political engineering’ against PML-N. By so doing, he not only managed to save his skin but also weakened his principal political rival, Nawaz Sharif. We saw that he didn’t join PML-N to form any coalition either at the centre or in Punjab following the 2018 General Elections. Thus he indirectly helped or supported PTI to make its governments at both levels. PPP also voted in favour of PTI-backed candidate for the chairman senate. Since such ‘parliamentary support’ from the PPP was no longer required after achieving the desired political objectives, the NAB just decided to take this ‘corrupt’ political party to task too. Our premier anti-graft body knows very well as to when, where, and who should be nabbed.

The PTI-led government’s popularity is currently at a low ebb since it has yet not succeeded in delivering anything significant. It has utterly failed to stabilise the country’s troubled economy. It has also failed in implementing its promised reforms agenda in the country. Nevertheless, the diehard party will not let the issue of corruption get diluted. It will continue with its corruption rhetoric against the opposition leaders. The party is committed not to let Pakistanis revert to the “state of nature” where the ‘corrupt mafia would again exploit them’.