**Solution lies in convictions not accusations**

[Hafeez Khan](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/hafeez-khan/%22%20%5Co%20%22More%20Articles%20by%20Hafeez%20Khan)

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Living in Lahore is a unique experience. We have two competing elements in our airspace; pollution in our air and accusations on our airwaves. I wonder which one is more harmful. One damages the body, the other hurts the mind. Yet Lahoris go about life in their merry ways crowding food outlets and luxurious shopping malls.

I got dragged to Packages Mall by my wife the other day to buy some gifts prior to our travel. What I witnessed was mind boggling. Crowded to the hilt from entry to exitand everything in between. Allcorridors were congested despite the onset of the deadliest 3rd wave of COVID. Masks were worn by faint hearted like me, otherwise most of the shoppers couldn’t give a damn. I chose a secluded corner to watch the activities. Products were flying off the shelves, sometimes at outrageous prices. I wondered is it the same country where everyone is complaining about inflation.

The economist in me wondered where all this money is coming from.Given our narrow tax base of 1% supporting the country,this free flow of such large amounts of liquidity originates from dubious sources. It comes from heavy duty leakages in revenue collection and black economyrunning rampant. Unreported income is making individuals richer while the State gets poorer. Large holes exist in revenue collection due to corruption prevailing in every segment, department, and sector. The worst part is it is so widely accepted.

Corruption is a runaway train without controls flourishing all around us. A friend of mine strickenby love for motherland chose to make some heavy-duty investments in a prime location nearly a decade ago in real estate. While his gorgeous building towers over the skyline of Lahore beautifying it, it remains only half occupied because he has been denied electricity for the full project. Why? Because my unbending, principled friend refuses to grease the palms of the utility company officials. Be it LESCO, PHA or any department that deals with public, despite the tall claims by PTI, nothing moves without bribes.

It’s time the Establishment comprising of the Executive, Judiciary, Armed Forces and the Bureaucracy grows a spine and starts calling a spade a spade

This culture of bribery became the norm under Sharifs and Zardaris and continues to grow exponentially unchecked anduncontrolled. The only difference under Prime Minister Imran Khan is that extortion has ended at the very top. Stories about the misdeeds of those that occupy exalted positions in his Government. The ruthless hyena of corruption flourishes unfettered. Can it ever be stopped? I am getting convinced by the day that this self-inflicted wound of Westminster style democracy is unworkable and incapable of delivering in our society.

Parliamentary Democracy has been replaced by “Gowalmandi” style of plutocracy. It is controlled by the elite for the elite, as defined by my friend Haider Mehdi the “elite capture”. Both PML(N) and PPP are masquerading as champions of democracy. Both are lying. Bilawal’s reference to “blood in his veins” is ridiculous. Grandpa Bhutto, the founder of this clan, called Ayub Khan “Daddy” and flourished in his lap for a decade. Maryam’sPapa would still be selling steel had he not been adopted by Dictator Zia and nurtured in the establishment’s nursery. Her championing “vote ko izzat” is farcical and a deception.

Maulana Fazal is entirely consumed by hatred of PM IK. Hisvenom came across when he callously ridiculed PM IK’s COVID infection. Nawaz Sharif is being projected as the “Pope” who can do no wrong and claimed aschampion of Kashmir. His subservience to Modi is well documented when for years he couldn’t even name Kulbhushan publicly. He refused to meet Kashmiri leaders fearful of annoying his lord and master Modi and instead consorted with businessmen to build his personal empire.

Maryam’s papal defense has led her to threaten “pulling tongues” and “breaking faces” Gowalmandi style.Her invasion of NAB has been temporarily deflected. Her actingas damsel in distress, the “nahati larki” is a fraudulent effort to portray her family’s criminal acts as a struggle for freedom. What she seeks is freedom from prosecution and accountability. NAB seeks answers about her blatant corruptionin cahoots with Papa and brothers. She pretends it is political victimization. What nonsense!

Why is all this happening? It is being perceived as a breakdown, writ of the State in case of these two families and their hangers-on. For God’s sake, Sharifs are destroying sanctity of every institution with total immunity, insulting everyone that comes in their way. Their minions are threatening government functionaries of dire consequences as if they are about to come in power. What a diabolical strategy!

It’s time the Establishment comprisingof the Executive, Judiciary, Armed Forces and the Bureaucracy grows a spine and starts calling a spade a spade. This stupidity needs to end. The accountability process has dragged on forever. About 20 accused in various corruption cases with tons of evidence against them, after serving short jail terms, are out on bail acting as martyrs making venomous attacks. Are all the pillars of State so helpless or so drastically compromised that they can’t read the writings on the wall?

Nawaz and Maryam are the only convictions. Nawaz Sharif tricked everyone and slithered out of his jail cell into the comfort of Avonfield apartments spewing poison against the Establishment. His priceless heir Maryam goes around abusing everyone with absolute immunity. To free up Pakistan to focus onreal and serious challenges,the managers of accountability need to clear the debrisand replace accusations with convictions now!

*The writer is Director CERF, a non profit, charitable organization Canada. President Punjab University Alumni Association*