**[Extra baggage](https://www.dawn.com/news/1831997/extra-baggage)**

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UNDISPUTEDLY, the most important, most versatile and most indispensable person in a government office is the naib qasid, often the only moving component of an inert piece of machinery. He is the critical hub, an integral element of a governance system designed for a colonial era. He not only knows the location but also the contents of files and papers that drive and define a government. Naib qasids carry files from one office to another, perform housekeeping, ask visitors to wait, serve tea to their masters, and search, shelve, lose, find, misplace or retrieve files and records — depending upon their mood and motivation.

Using the ‘right to information’ law, our research, which is spread over a sample of 15 well-known and highly esteemed government organisations, such as National Savings, the Benazir Income Support Programme, the Employees’ Old-Age Benefits Institution (EOBI), the Supreme Court and the Wafaqi Mohtasib, yields startling results. First, 23 per cent of the entire government of Pakistan consists of just one category of individuals — often called ‘qasids’, ‘naib qasids’ or ‘daftaris’. As per the data provided under the right to information law, the Supreme Court (SC) tops this list with 283 (34pc) qasids and naib qasids, out of a total of 833 regular and contingent employees. Another prominent mention is BISP, that employs 473 qasids out of a total of 2,356 employees. Such governance through naib qasids would be inconceivable in any developed country, where officials must perform their own chores.

The study gets yet more overwhelming as it reveals that the employees designated as upper division clerks, lower division clerks or steno typists constitute 26.8pc of the entire government of Pakistan. Although most offices have acquired computers and most senior officers have obtained laptops (at taxpayers’ expense), there is no let-up in the demand or number of UDCs and LDCs. One wonders why emails, used by the rest of the world for the last 30 years, are still not an accepted form of official correspondence. Have low skills and high status become our biggest hindrance to progress? Should the conditions of employment not specify that every bureaucrat must carry his own briefcase, drive his own (private) car, clean his own table, receive, respond and file his own mail electronically, make his own tea, etc?

The next mind-boggling segment of employees — 22.7pc of government— sadly comprises chowkidars and private security guards. National Savings, with 1,270 security guards, champions this class, followed by Pakistan Post’s 754 guards and BISP’s 386 chowkidars. There is also no guilt for cruelty on the part of our esteemed organisations who engage guards through private security companies, not registering them with the EOBI and paying them less than half the minimum legal wage for performing 12-hour duty each day.

A bloated government workforce is hindering progress.

From this, we can conclude that 72.5pc of the entire government of Pakistan consists of three categories of employees: qasids/ naib qasids, UDCs/ LDCs, and guards/ chowkidars. Like ministers, many are inducted on considerations of ‘relative’, ‘friend’, ‘party’, ‘clan’, etc. Must we not ponder why Pakistan Railways operates with 315 employees per train, as opposed to the Indian Railways’ 53, and Japan Railway’s 5.9? Why does the SC operate with 833 employees and its British counterpart with 64 employees for around the same number of judges? It is time to admit that only by shedding 70pc of our government workforce will Pakistan see progress.

There are at least two main approaches to reducing the size of this mountain — firstly, by using te­­chnology to perfo­rm all those functions that can enhance efficiency and convenience. National Savings’ latest software, which req­ui­res no citizen to visit a savings centre and to automatically re­­ceive profits in a designated bank, is a brilliant example. Resultantly, National Savings can potentially cut down 70pc of its employees and branches. The other approach is to eliminate all that is redundant or ceremonial. Almost all commissions and bureaus (NCHR, NCRC, NCSW, etc.) can be closed and their functions performed by their parent ministries.

Numerous ministries such as health, human rights, religious affairs and overseas Pakistanis could be merged and renamed the ‘Ministry for Health & Population’. In this manner, Pakistan could reduce the total number of ministries (and logically the ministers) from 32 to 10. These two approaches ought to be identically emulated by the defence services as well as the provincial governments. Our governance system is dysfunctional and bloated. It exists only to preserve the luxuries of an extractive class. Its dismantling is a prerequisite for the progress of Pakistan.

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