**Need merit Ombudsman**

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Education and merit are two important building blocks of the nation but unfortunately, they are blatantly ignored by most. While the state continues to violate Article 25-A of the constitution that declares literacy as an integral right, the framework to ensure merit based selection does not exist. There are tribunals where in-service conflicts are addressed but there is no effective platform where foul play in recruitment could be controlled. Since the fateful non-party election of 1985, flood gates of induction were opened to induct favorites into various government departments without due process. Now this dead weight has transformed into a powerful mafia that dominates civilian departments, a situation that only gets worse as more senior positions are occupied.

There are several specialised areas for which Ombudsmen have been appointed at the federal and provincial level, including matters of administration, taxation, banking, harassment. Importantly, none are merit based selections. For the restoration and strengthening of institutions, the recruitment process has to be defined and then followed. Personally, I have experienced several flaws in the prevalent system which can be manipulated easily.

[Antonio Conte appointed new Tottenham manager](https://nation.com.pk/03-Nov-2021/antonio-conte-appointed-new-tottenham-manager)

In the year 1977, I applied for an entry level job at the Pakistan Industrial Technical Center (PITAC) against an advertised position. The interviews were held based purely on merit. It was a great place to learn from seasoned professionals who had been trained abroad in their fields. In the year 2000, an advertisement appeared for the position of Chairman Pakistan Science Foundation (PSF). I applied for the job but received an interview call during my consulting assignment in Sudan. My request for a later interview was turned down and the selection was made in my absence. Before the call letter could be issued, there was a fire in the Shaheed-e-Millat Secretariat in which the record was burnt. The Ministry issued fresh interview letters and I appeared before the board and was selected based on merit with the understanding that my Grade would be changed to MP-1 as I was a private sector inductee. Later, every time I requested the Ministry for a change of Grade, there was no response. Privately, I was informed to get it approved from the Board of Trustees of the PSF. In other words, I was asked to approve my own Grade change which I refused as it constituted a serious conflict of interest.

[We need strong, green armed forces, says NATO chief](https://nation.com.pk/03-Nov-2021/we-need-strong-green-armed-forces-says-nato-chief)

I then applied for the position of the Chief Executive of the Engineering Development Board (EDB). To my surprise, I was not even short listed for the interview. When I complained to the Minister, I got a telephone call from one of the selection committee members for an interview which I turned down as it was being done as a formality. A non-engineer with a local B-Com degree was appointed as he was a close confidant of the Minister. Senior positions are kept hidden to accommodate favorites. Clearly, the short listing process is seriously flawed as it weeds out most qualified individuals. Weak candidates are deliberately called for interview, paving the way for the preferred choice.

In 2019, I was nominated for the position of Executive Director (ED) of COMSTECH (Commission for Science and Technology). A search committee was constituted under the Minister of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) which included two names from the same institution under the University of Karachi. One of the committee members requested to be removed as he wanted to be considered for the position. The ministry moved a fresh summary for reconstitution of the committee to be headed by the newly appointed Minister of Science and Technology. In an interesting twist, the Prime Minister (PM) Secretariat issued a notification in which the MOFA was asked to head the committee, bypassing the relevant minister.

[PM Imran Khan forbids ministers from giving statements regarding proscribed TLP](https://nation.com.pk/02-Nov-2021/pm-imran-khan-forbids-ministers-on-giving-statements-regarding-proscribed-tlp)

I complained to the MOFA and the information commission with a request for a merit list of candidates. After several delaying tactics, the MOFA admitted that there was no merit list. Instead of considering the credentials of each candidate, a United Nations preferential voting method was adopted for the selection of the three candidates for a final round of interviews. A gross violation of merit had taken place and I decided to approach the Federal Ombudsman’s Office. The hearing was fixed and before announcing the decision for the annulment of the selection, an interesting exemption was sought under which the actions of the MOFA could not be taken up by the Ombudsman.

This ‘donkey business’ must end for merit to prevail. I am convinced through my own experiences that without a well-defined frame work it will be more of the same. An independent Ombudsman selected on the basis of merit can ensure the quick resolution of complaints and short comings in the prevalent recruitment process with immediate effect. In the long term, it can also review the selections previously carried out against merit and suggest clean-up measures. In the banking sector, such an exercise was carried out to get rid of the dead wood. Without merit based selections, no organisation can perform. If nation building is desired, then merit must prevail for which the formation of the office of merit Ombudsman is essentially required.