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**Getting to grips with governance**

Given the state of the country, and the amount of chaos that runs through it, we wonder if any government would be able to solve the problems that are faced without a long, consistent policy in place. The problem, of course, is partially that governments immediately alter the policy steps taken by their predecessors simply to show they are doing something. The true intention of improving the situation for people does not seem to exist.

Imran Khan was at least honest, if not very wise, when he said in a recent press briefer that his government had too little understanding of the situation before it assumed power in 2018. Of course, in the two decades after setting up the PTI there should have been intense study of what could be done to truly create a new Pakistan and to put right all that is wrong within it. This study and research should have involved economists, health practitioners, educationists, city planners, and legal experts, as well as others from different walks of life. Of course, this didn't happen and the prime minister has been forced to concede that his government understood very little about running ministries, when it came to power.

This, of course, is ludicrous. After two and a half years, any government should have been able to work out the manner in which ministries are run and what should be done. This is especially true as many members of the federal cabinet have indeed been in power before, including the finance minister, foreign minister, former interior minister, and several others. There can therefore be no excuse for failure attributed to the lack of knowledge available to them.

Cooperation with the bureaucracy is necessary to run any ministry successfully and devise policies. If this cooperation is not coming, the government needs to understand why, and what it can do to change this reality. Bureaucrats have been a part of government for years and generally understand how things should be managed. But to achieve any objective, they need clear goals and clear targets. We are uncertain if the PTI government has been able to lay these out or to determine precisely what it wants to see over its remaining period in power. A great deal of chaos has certainly been a part of governance over the period since the current government came to power. This should not have occurred.

A government can succeed only if it has a clear-cut vision and clear-cut plans. While some commendable measures have indeed been taken, including the efforts to improve the transport system, and other areas of life by handing out health cards, and so on, they have not succeeded enough. In some cases, they proved to be complete failures. Surely, better planning in advance could have prevented so much disaster and so much chaos, as well as the constant shuffle of ministries that we see. This is after all, not a cricket team. Altering the batting order again and again will not necessarily improve performance, and may in fact, weaken the team, adding to insecurity, lack of confidence, and an inability to run matters efficiently.

This applies not only to the PTI but also to the opposition parties. As they continue their campaign to overthrow a democratically elected government, which is what the PTI is, they should at the very least, offer us a policy plan of what they would do to alter what is admittedly a very bad situation as far as the condition of people goes. Job losses, malnutrition, poor social development indicators and other factors all add to this, alongside hostility with both our neighbours on the east and on the west and pressure from the FATF on how to put in place measures to tackle terrorism. But neither the PML-N nor the PPP, or for that matter other smaller parties, has said what could be done to improve the situation quickly and offer people a better new quality of life.

We should remember that such change has been achieved in relatively short periods of time in other countries, provided there's a clear vision and focus on what needs to be done. The idea of a national security state impedes this in some ways. We should also remember that true security comes only from the people and only when people are secure can the state be seen as a success. In our case, that is clearly not what has happened now, or in the past. Much higher spending on people's rights and needs would create a better Pakistan and one where life was more equitable and more equal for all its citizens.

Recently, there have been programmes showing how European healthcare, which is more or less free in many countries, has vast advantages over the facilities offered in the US. The Trump government's efforts to overturn the Affordable Care Act of former US president Obama further adds to the problems. But a government needs to know what it wants, and better still how to achieve this. Healthcare and education must be priorities. Especially in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is essential that the government work out a plan, devise a long-term scheme of thinking and then set about attempting to achieve as much of it as it can.

There are other problems as well. In the first place, it's unclear how much we actually know about our country. There has been speculation for years that many official figures are incorrect or simply made up to meet certain interests. Even those included in the Economic Survey of Pakistan are not thought to be completely accurate by some experts.

For example, the literacy rate of around 59 percent, with 47 percent for women and 71 percent for men, has been found to be more or less a lie according to organisations, which have surveyed schoolchildren in class five and then later on in their educational career. Many are unable to write or even comprehend a single sentence in any language, whether it is Urdu, their native language or English. The standards in maths are not much better either. These organisations argue the literacy rate is actually far lower given that it is often measured simply on the basis of a person's ability to sign a piece of paper or read one headline in a newspaper.

Things need to change. We need accurate information. The debate over the 2017 census needs to be taken seriously and looked at so that we can get an accurate map of what is required in the country and any government in power can then set about the difficult task of changing reality for all the people living in Pakistan today.

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