**[Good governance requisites](https://www.dawn.com/news/1425907/good-governance-requisites)**

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THE new party in power is busy selecting ministers and bureaucrats for key posts in the administration. The way this process is carried out will indicate how stable Pakistan’s democracy is and how capable is the state apparatus of ensuring efficient governance.

In a stable parliamentary democracy, experienced legislators often become ministers by demonstrating expertise in the affairs of particular ministries. They establish themselves as subject specialists during debates in the legislature on matters related to all ministries; such discussions are frequent and detailed. Legislators with high academic qualifications or sound records as administrators, especially in elective office, are sometimes automatic choices for ministerial assignments.

Pakistan’s political parties have seldom displayed interest in grooming their legislators for ministerial responsibilities or in getting subject specialists elected to parliament. Not even to the extent the Muslim League did by bringing into the first Constituent Assembly eminent lawyers (Jinnah, Suhrawardy, Zafarullah Khan and Abdus Sattar Pirzada), academics (Dr Mahmud Husain, Prof Omar Hayat Malik) and finance experts (Ghulam Mohammad, Habib Ibrahim Rahimtoola).The Senate offers opportunities of easily getting ministerial talent into parliament and to some extent the quota for ulema and scholars etc has enabled skilled professionals to become senators, but without a serious attempt at talent gathering.

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The way ministers are usually chosen in Pakistan does not suggest awareness of the imperatives of efficient and democratic governance. One justifiable consideration is that all federating units should be represented in the federal cabinet (and all regions in a provincial cabinet). This does affect selection on merit but the underlying principle cannot be given up. Otherwise, the prime minister, who is often treated as a cult figure, chooses his cabinet colleagues on the strength of their loyalty to him or services to the party, including sometimes the questionable use of muscle power. It is all largely a patronage game, a system of buying support through the grant of favours.

Much of this must change to meet the requisites of a stable and efficient democracy. This cannot be done by pushing a button nor can any single government in the present socioeconomic framework be expected to carry out this task. But the sooner our political parties start preparing for the required change the better it will be for Pakistan.

The selection of key bureaucrats to lead an efficient administrative apparatus is even more difficult than the choice of efficient ministers. In stable parliamentary states, the administrative structure remains unaffected by a change of government. Civil servants heading ministries continue as before and give ministers advice in accordance with rules and standard practice. In some countries, the head of government cannot even choose his principal secretary; he may at best select one of the three most eligible civil servants. If he needs more advice he may appoint advisers to himself without executive authority. The number of advisers cannot be as large as Pakistan is notorious for keeping on the public payroll.

Pakistan confirms itself as an unstable state by the sweeping changes in the administration that follow a change of government. Not only are holders of key posts in the secretariat replaced, police officers in districts, heads of TV, radio, and state corporations, down to SHOs and patwaris in certain areas are also replaced. The idea usually is not to find better persons for these jobs; it is to place favourites of ministers and party influentials in positions where they can serve their interests. In this process, officers considered honest or sticklers for the rules are more often than not bypassed for obvious reasons.

The state of the administration has been extensively scrutinised by the judiciary, civil society and the media over the past several years and much has been found that is unforgivable and which ordinary citizens don’t like. The main areas of concern are favouritism, huge scales of wages to officials chosen for jobs in autonomous corporations and public limited companies, disregard for the rules and regulations while taking decisions — especially those involving financial transactions, circumvention of accountability processes and a general contempt for the rights and privileges of the people, the poor in particular.

One of the main reasons for this sorry state of affairs is the apparent decline of the institution of the Public Service Commission. In the past the commission (and the provincial commissions) enjoyed the services of highly qualified persons of integrity and such persons may still be there. But the general impression is that public service commissions are used by the political authorities to accommodate the chosen ones from amongst the retired civil and military officers. Besides, the reports prepared by the commissions on the quality of human material and the standard of education and training available in the country are not given the attention they deserve. (It would not be a bad idea to place the report of each public service commission on the table of the relevant legislature and reserve some time for a debate on it.)

The key to good administration is putting the right person on the right job, which is easier said than done. In Pakistan, this principle is shown little respect. It is decades since the Cornelius Commission identified the discretionary powers of the decision-makers as the principal cause of inefficiency and corruption, and the finding is still valid. The entire service structure is in need of reform. Enforcement of the rule of merit in matters of posting, transfer and promotion could cure the administration of many of its chronic  ailments.

Sometimes, great emphasis is placed on civil servants’ austere habits and honesty but, while these qualities may give an edge to the value of one’s work, they are no substitute for efficiency. Pakistan needs public servants in all areas of state employment who are both efficient and honest.

Again, no single government can atone for decades of maladministration — but no delay in starting the job must be tolerated.

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