**Revive the diary system for governance**

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In every major office of the land there is a ‘Diary Section’. It is through this process that the daily activities of individuals and departments are monitored. The Prime Minster (PM), Chief Minister (CM), Principal Secretary (PSPM) and Chief Secretary have well organised departments for handling both incoming and outgoing correspondence. Every letter is received with a dairy entry. In the past, communication was first acknowledged and then acted upon with intimation to the sender but not anymore. What goes in disappears, never to be seen or heard again. What good are these diaries if there is no follow through action.

A few months back, I was sitting in the office of SAPM (Special Assistant to the Prime Minister) who was re-negotiating the Power Purchase Agreements with the IPPs (Independent Power Producers). He was getting calls from the PM Secretariat for the finalised draft while the Secretary’s office insisted that it had been dispatched. Finally, I suggested the SAPM’s assistant should go and check the outgoing diary. To everyone’s surprise there was no entry and a few minutes later the file was hand delivered. While some diaries gained a lot of notoriety, like the recently published ‘Ayub Diaries’ or the ‘Lady Diana Diaries’, others in important government offices have been relegated to the dust bins in offices of the powerful.

[Adnan Qazi has left audience spell bound in his next music video venture](https://nation.com.pk/26-Sep-2021/adnan-qazi-has-left-audience-spell-bound-in-his-next-music-video-venture)

In the seventies, the University of California had launched the Project Pakistan programmme under which American students visited Pakistan to spend time with the locals. During one of these visits, I had the chance of meeting the US Consulate General in Lahore. He was an interesting individual. As a coin collector he walked through the streets to decipher his collection. He also carried a small pocket diary in which he noted his daily activities. It was indeed a very efficient way to operate. In 1976, when I was elected President of the departmental Student’s Union, I had to perform multiple tasks. To regulate my daily activities, I kept a small diary. It worked so well for me that it became a regular feature in my life. It was really helpful in the conduct of my official business as well; when all other records were unavailable my personal diary came to the rescue.

If the PM, CM, PSPM, CS review these diaries on a regular basis, governance can be greatly improved. I am not in favour of the online portals as I believe it to be very un-authentic. As a nation we take signatures very seriously. Businessmen usually stand by their words but government officials seldom do. Credibility is taken very seriously in the business world and verbal agreements have to be honoured. Personally, I felt a decline in the diary system during the tenure of PM Shaukat Aziz. Public contact was not his forte. He was only interested in impressing his boss, not the people he was required to serve. Relatively, the system worked much better during the tenures of Benazir and Nawaz but not after that. Either the entire system should be reactivated or disbanded to be replaced by a more people-centric mechanism like the citizen desk or complaint cells. People need to be heard, currently they have lost all contact with the rulers as their communications are blocked by the bureaucracy. Their representatives work in vacuum with a poor understanding of ground realities. The bureaucracy hides behind files and paperwork. Information Commissions and Ombudsman’s Offices are over loaded with complaints emanating from executive abuse.

['Sharif's committed corruption in motorways construction'](https://nation.com.pk/26-Sep-2021/sharif-s-committed-corruption-in-motorways-construction-fawad-chaudhary)

Since independence, the royal colonial bureaucracy has been able to dodge all attempts at accountability. The masses are still considered to be subjects and beneficiaries of the state, not its customers. In quality management, the focus shifts on customer satisfaction. In the nineties, ISO 9000 Quality Management System was implemented across the world which brought much needed organisational improvements here also. Emphasis was on record and documentation. Customer complaints had to be recorded and then addressed. In management reviews, follow-up remedial action and its effectiveness was discussed.

The concept of customer orientation has widespread implications. Customers are both internal and external. Students are the customers of a library who must be served otherwise its becomes an archive to store books. The diary system was introduced by the colonists to hear from the public. While they pursued their own national interests, they ran the system very efficiently. Over the years, we gotten away with inefficiency and a lack of service. In Punjab, after a very long time, the CM and CS have decided to focus on service delivery to the public for which the diary is the starting point.

[Lightning strikes in Thar kill four women, minor boy](https://nation.com.pk/26-Sep-2021/lightning-strikes-in-thar-kill-four-women-minor-boy)

I urge the PM, CM, PSPM and the CS to get in touch with this most important and vital instrument of governance before it is too late and the water crosses the bridge. Dictators usually complain of ignorance about public sentiments after their fall. Some of them decide to publish their diaries to seek vindication but by then, it is already too late. A diary is a living document that can better serve the alive than the dead.