**With so many wounds where to apply the balm**

[Hafeez Khan](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/hafeez-khan/" \o "More Articles by Hafeez Khan)

February 17, 2021

Writing at times can be a curse. You have to think, feel and be sensitized to your surroundings. At times one feels overwhelmed by the weight of all the bad around you. I was talking to my friend, Afzal Ghauri about the wisdom of this self-inflicted wound. Why am doing it? Why can’t I bury my head in sand and confine myself to the joy of being alive and having a loving family and friends? He narrated a Farsi verse that took away my loneliness and despair. I am not alone in my journey. I need to share these wise words.

“Tane hama dagh dagh shud, pumba kuja kuja naham” translates “with so many wounds where to apply the balm!” Poets are a blessing in any language. They capture the moment through a bouquet of words that conveys the mood, sentiment, and facts in such a precise and effective way. It gave me the re-enforcement to continue my journey identifying ills that batter my nation and ponder on solutions. I have no perfect answers but with half a century of being a student of politics, I believe I can opine quite effectively.

At times it becomes difficult to decide where to start so I will go with the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat. Pakistan has some of the highest levels of pollution in the world. We injure ourselves with every breath we take! It has all happened within my lifetime. I remember the pristine streams flowing down the mountains in and around Abbottabad. I used to farm in Kasur next to river Sutlej. It was a routine during winter months to have a “rahoo” fish caught early morning and get it grilled for brunch. Along came a rush of tanneries built upstream in Kasur city. The callous tannery owners in cahoots with corrupt officials started to discharge their wastewater in Sutlej. It killed all the fish and flora.

The skeptics think in aping the West, we have adopted a system of governance not suited to our society facing Himalayan challenges. The nation needs an overhaul

In 1971 when Pakistan was torn apart, the population of the remaining country was around 60 million. It has exploded nearly 400% in the last five decades. This unbridled increase led to unplanned burst of urbanization, increased pollution and strained water resources to the limit. If we keep growing at same pace, in next fifty years we could be around a billion! We are headed to becoming a man-eating society. Out of fear of Mullahs, no government focused on population control since Ayub Khan. What a shame!

Through confused priorities, agriculture production has not kept pace with the growing demands. The prices have shot through the roof and criminal hoarders and profiteers are gouging the public. Add to that the sharp decline of moral values and greed has spurred food adulteration to its peak. A coalition of corrupt traders, bureaucracy and failure of justice system has led to people being poisoned. Milk has chemicals, red chilies contain brick powder and “thandi murghi” dead chickens are openly sold. Weighing and measuring machines are tampered. The list goes on and on. A slippery slope with no end in sight.

What is the root cause of all these ills? It is the failure of the Government machinery led by inept bureaucrats seeped in corruption. Justice system has collapsed, laws are outmoded and there is no accountability. Police, civil servants, utility providers and service providers are busy raking in money for personal gains with no respite for the common man. Laws of jungle prevail with powerful and rich exploiting and brutalizing the society.

How will relief ever come? Who is to blame? The fault lies squarely with the leadership of the country that has been in power for the last five decades. There has been no short or long-term planning. The leaders have been corrupt to the core seeking self-enrichment at the cost of the nation. The country was a rudderless ship. Its captains feasted on the flesh of the hapless poor and drinking their blood. Indebting the nation and pushing it to insolvency while rulers and elite laundered their stolen wealth overseas.

It seemed even God was overlooking our plight. It was under these circumstances a leader emerged challenging the wicked on their own terms. PM Imran Khan’s struggle was long requiring unbelievable resolve and commitment. He finally got a breakthrough in 2018 by achieving power. No one doubts his determination, commitment to change and honesty, but there are some gaping holes that can derail his entire struggle.

He came in without a strong competent team, lacked a well thought out plan to meet the challenges and conditions were far worse than advertised by his predecessors. This combined with a razor thin majority in the Center and Punjab making the achievement of reforms extremely difficult. Senate is obstructing every effort to pass meaningful legislation. Hopefully that would change next month. Will that permit PM IK to take on the humongous challenges facing our nation?

The skeptics think in aping the West, we have adopted a system of governance not suited to our society facing Himalayan challenges. The nation needs an overhaul. A rule with an iron hand having zero tolerance for corruption. It calls for ruthless accountability, extreme competence and total devotion to change. Will the existing system of Governance permit such radical correction of its course? It is time to consider all our options if we want to step out of this quagmire.

*The writer is the director of CERF, a non-profit, charitable organisation in Canada*