Controversial Accountability process

Omar Khattab Wattoo January 26, 2020

In Pakistan, the process of accountability has always been cryptic. Both in political or military governments, the accountability as a weapon has been dexterously used against political opponents. In so doing, parliament in consonance with other state organs works so as to settle scores with the political opponents.

Cast your cursory looks into history lanes to ascertain how mainstream political parties – Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) have evermore been injecting strength into accountability bodies with a view to wreak vengeance on their political foes. This interference never lets the genuine accountability start off.

The resonance of accountability is far greater in the current government of Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf. Not a single day passes without the vociferous mantra of PTI office bearers telling the tales of turpitude of politicians from other political parties.

Prime Minister, Imran Khan, as being the spearhead is in the front of his caravan. He never misses an opportunity on any platform – international or national – to relate how this rampant malady of corruption has disturbed the whole fabric of Pakistani society.

Earlier, in the garb of a fierce opposition leader, he would rant against the corrupt leaders of Pakistan; and now from the corridors of power, he continues projecting the same narrative which the nation has been hearing for last many years.

To materialize the pledges of extracting the money gained from ill-gotten means, the role of National Accountability Bureau (NAB) takes up the centre-stage. But what happens here? This government, too, receives the innuendos of being in complicity with the NAB, as have previous governments been getting the tarnish of using this accountability tool.

At present, we face four major problems in regard to accountability. First, there lurks a question mark over the NAB being an independent institution where the independent inquiry, with least external influence, may be processed. That is why this lack of credibility leads to questions over the transparency in the NAB proceedings, thereby giving the objective opinion-makers the reason to raise fingers over the biased system of nabbing.

Second problem issues forth from the impression of grabbing the political opponents only. This impression gains credence from the events where a political opponent opens up his mouth against the policies of the federal government; the next day, a lengthy charge-sheet of the NAB comes to the fore nabbing the same, thus producing considerable ripples in the media where analysts start debates over these kinds of arrests. Moreover, the situation gets all the more dubious when the erstwhile corrupt leaders, who have now joined the PTI, receives the surprise comforts from this anti-graft body.

The third problem deals with the mechanism of investigation. The premier accountability body carries a complex mechanism: it first arrests a person, puts him behind the bars and he, most often, remains there incarcerated for months without having any charge-sheet, and then investigation starts to locate evidence and testimonies. Justice Mushir Alam of the Supreme Court of Pakistan (SC), the other day, questioned, “Why doesn’t the NAB arrest the accused after completing the investigation?”

Fourthly, the NAB has earned the repute of being a baton in the hands of ruling class. The ruling class receives favours, while the rivals gets the harshest treatment. It remains soft on Malam Jabba, Peshawar BRT project and many such cases incriminating the politicians-in-power.

This is the reason that despite its all efforts to arrest the politicians on the charges of mega-corruption scams, Pakistan has dropped three spots on the global Corruption Perceptions Index 2019. Many arrested are released, later on, because of the paucity of credible evidence.

The superior judiciary in its recent orders of last one year has seriously questioned the NAB’S functioning in different cases and used the expressions like “arbitrary use of power”, “mala fide”, “conjectures”, “unperceived perception”, “lack of capacity” etc. for the accountability body and its procedures.

Where does the malady lie? Who will correct the system? Who will save the innocent from being wronged in the name of corruption and malpractices? These are the queries which must be responded if the federal government is inclined to extract the illegally parked money.

Rejecting all such expressions and impressions, the spokesperson of the NAB says that the Bureau sees cases and not the faces in its endeavours to extirpate the menace of corruption from the country.

But the fact remains that there has developed a strong perception about the NAB being a baton in the relentless hands of powerful ruling elites.

The impressions can be expunged if there is a will to uproot the monster of corruption through across the board accountability of all those who have been or are in power. This will is to be exhibited by the parliament that may devise laws strengthening the pillars of the accountability bureau and making it apolitical in all aspects.