**Straight Talk: failing accountability-beware ik**

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Steal a few thousands and you will be caught, beaten up and punished. Steal a few billions, hire a good lawyer and you will become respectable. You will be sought after and lavished with praise of your nonexistent talents. This is how the Mafias flourish in our beloved homeland.

You will probably smile. That is the killer. Accepting [corruption](https://dailytimes.com.pk/565426/official-acknowledges-corruption-in-nai-gaj-dam/) as a way of life under the maxim “live and let live” has poisoned our value system. After independence we were mostly on good grounds. Good and evil were clearly earmarked. Over the decades it has gone downhill. In today’s society we see multiple examples of nouveau richewho accumulated wealth through corruption and proudly flaunt it. It is treated as the key to success. The path to achieve wicked ambitions. Many folks join civil service, judiciary, police, customs, power, irrigation, revenue and taxation services, not to serve the country, but as the shortest route to accumulate wealth and join the corrupt elite. This path provides opportunities to abuse power to milk the state and extract from the already brutalized common man. They do it to their hearts content, become respectable and move on. Tragic but true.

However the jewel in the crown is to join politics to acquire wealth. Especially in the last three decades. It started with partyless elections of Zia Ul Haq. Doling out state funds started there and developed into a hydra with multiple mouths sucking the exchequer. Our misfortune. The leadership of the two party system were corrupt to the core. Their devilishly creative schemes for self gain led to unimaginable financial theft. It drained the state perilously close to a total breakdown. Tons of money moved overseas. Mafias came into existence in most sectors. The beneficiaries and their dependents made a second home in the west. And everything was kosher. Anytime there was a regime change or murmurings of accountability, the perpetuators slithered away to the comforts of looted wealth. This is the shameful truth thousands of times over. How did this all come about? The greed to benefit from positions of power is global. Hence checks and balances of accountability operate throughout the world. It is anemic in developing nations but operates quite successfully in the developed world. There are the common criminals, then there are white collar criminals. Detection and conviction of physical crimes have a long history. While cheating and fraud have been around forever, white collar crimes accelerated 20th century onwards.

In multiple jurisdictions around the world upon establishing the fact of criminal activity, assets are confiscated and at a minimum blocked. Outcome of the case determines their dispensation. No such laws exist in Pakistan

Unfortunately Pakistan has a chequered history in its ability to deal with white collar criminals. Fast forward to present. PTI came to power riding a popular wave of accountability to end the culture of loot and plunder. The response was overwhelming. NAB was flexing its muscles and the impression was that arrests, prosecution and convictions were around the corner. It did not take off. Popular sentiment of euphoria is turning into disappointment.

At the time of PTI’s launch we worked hard to develop its platform and agenda. The central executive thrashed out the Party program minutely. It was eloquently worded by my friend Hassan Nisar. Accountability, justice for all, merit, and serving the poor was and continues to be Prime Minister Imran Khan’s top priority. However the magnitude of problems was underestimated by PTI, hence implementation has taken a nose dive. The weaknesses of IK’s team are highlighted day and night by our popular media, which have their own biases and at time dubious motivations. The system’s weaknesses are totally ignored, an absolute necessity for any overhaul.

The State has many agencies meant to eradicate corruption. The flag bearer is NAB. Till date none of them have been able to demonstrate their abilities in various disciplines required to bring white collar criminals to justice. What does it require? Detection of a crime, proper investigation and documentation to fulfill the requirements of law before passing it to the prosecutors. The prosecutors after evaluating evidence, pick out the shortcomings, obtain further information and finally proceed with cases in a court of law.

Thus far none of the above functions have been done efficiently. Cases are failing one after the other. What is cause? The entire chain is incompetent, poorly trained, lacks commitment, resources and are lavishly sprinkled by prevalent corruption and nepotism.

On top of that our judicial system is inherited from the British Raj. The laws are archaic dating back to the nineteenth century. The traditions our judiciary wants to uphold are meant for a civilized society. What is the process in the developed world? Any asset owner can be asked for the sources from which this asset was acquired. If there is discrepancy between the value of the asset and declared sources of income, the onus and burden of proof shifts to the asset owner to provide details. Simple and uncomplicated.

Not so under the present adjudicators controlling the dispensation of justice. All kinds of reasons are being offered by brilliant minds sitting on the benches to nitpick and delay cases. Criminals are given relief on flimsy grounds. Net result; white collar criminals rule the roost and stick their nose up to those promoting accountability.

In multiple jurisdictions around the world upon establishing the fact of criminal activity, assets are confiscated and at a minimum blocked. Outcome of the case determines their dispensation. No such laws exist in Pakistan. Plea bargain is best we offer. It just takes a part of the ill gotten wealth so the criminals can enjoy the balance. Disgusting but true.

Mr. Prime Minister give accountability some teeth or it will wither away just as another pipe dream. How do you expect to convict the looters and plunderers under the present laws? Next to impossible. The laws, the teams, the adjudicators are incapable to deliver results. The system needs to be stronger than the people. It requires complete overhaul if results are to be achieved.

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