**[The road to disaster](https://www.dawn.com/news/1798329/the-road-to-disaster)**

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POLICE and the judiciary are among the top corrupt institutions, according to Transparency International Pakistan’s National Corruption Perceptions Survey 2023. The top 10 sectors perceived as very corrupt are police, tendering and contracting, judiciary, education, health, local government, land revenue administration, customs, excise, and income tax. As a former police chief, I am ashamed to admit that the public perception of police as one of the top corrupt departments is quite true. However, perceptions at times cannot expose the bitter truths about sacred cows and the powerful elite who are the root cause of this cancer of corruption in the body politic of our benighted nation. These inconvenient truths must be told.

As a public servant and law-enforcement officer who worked for the government from 1973 to 2011, I can say, without fear of contradiction, that successive political and military regimes have indulged in corrupt practices with impunity. In violation of their constitutional obligations, they have disregarded the moral and ethical standards demanded of public office holders. There are rogue elements within the state who consider themselves above the law and accountability. Many generals and judges shy away from public scrutiny of their assets. They believe their internal accountability mechanisms are effective and that parliamentary or public oversight amounts to interference in their administrative and operational autonomy.

We also see the increasing militarisation of anti-corruption witch-hunting. Institutional anti-corruption bodies such as the National Account­ability Bureau (NAB), Federal Investigation Agency and Anti-Corruption Establishments generally follow the diktat of the deep state. Police commanders, who believe in the culture of integrity and strict internal and external accountability, are sidelined and given non-field staff assignments or consigned to nondescript roles without portfolios. Only compliant courtiers can thrive under an unaccountable system.

There are, of course, some exceptional police officers with the courage to say no to the illegal practices expected of them in an environment of sleaze and persecution. A senior serving police officer conceded that no organisation can earn public respect without performance legitimacy and strong self-accountability. However, he said: “We are less corrupt, but people perceive us otherwise as they are mostly directly affected by our acts and practices, that too often in public gaze and knowledge.”

A hurricane of hate has engulfed our land.

Exceptions apart, most of our politicians are corrupt and spineless. In order to win elections, they can go to any extent to curry favour with the string pullers and unelected elements of national power who call the shots. Except for a few national and regional parties, the mainstream political juggernaut is controlled by certain dynasties and families. Their leaders consider it their birthright to rule by hook or by crook.

Now that elections are approaching, the issue of political financing will come into play. Exorbitant non-refundable amounts are sought from all the candidates applying for tickets to fill the coffers of the parties going into the elections. One can expect opaque financial support to be available through courting real estate tycoons and big corporate business interests, along with indulging in bribery and secret deals via controversial elements. To avoid public scrutiny, stolen money is likely to be stashed in offshore havens, with beneficial ownership transparency disregarded through the questionable transfer of properties and ill-gotten wealth.

As a representative of civil society and a board member of the Vienna-based global Alliance of NGOs on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, this writer recently participated in the UN Convention Against Corruption’s 10th Conference of States Parties in Atlanta, Georgia, held on Dec 11-15. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the anti-corruption convention. For the first time, civil society came up with a declaration seeking a greater role in anti-corruption plans and strategies being adopted by the states. Pakistan spoke on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and pledged to adopt a more transparent anti-corruption agenda based on the rule of law, good governance and adherence to human rights.

Matters related to the abuse of authority, transparency in beneficial ownership, political finance, victims of corruption, rules-based system, assets recovery, whistleblower protection, militarisation of anti-corruption measures through torture, forced disappearances and extra-judicial killings, political engineering, and civil space being captured by the armed forces in the area of criminal justice and governance were highlighted as key issues in the Global South. Pakistan is no exception and faces the challenges of organised corruption. Unfortunately, there is a strong nexus between corruption and organised crime. Flagrant human rights violations are the biggest cause of concern.

On the occasion of the International Day of Human Rights this month, our caretaker foreign minister said: “Pakistan’s democratic traditions, civil society, media, and legal institutions underpin our unwavering commitment to the rights and freedoms of all citizens.” He must look in the mirror and express remorse for such a misstatement in the current environment of persecution and disregard of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution. Doesn’t he see that a hurricane of hate has engulfed our land?

We need to ask why everyone is so grumpy these days? Why are so many Pakistanis despondent about the state of their country and its future? Why is everyone dissatisfied with the state of the economy, security and justice? The truth is that our rulers are not committed to the freedom of speech. They enforce the law when it works for them and their protégés. It is a culture of oppressors and the oppressed. Will the ruling demigods and the deep state abandon their game of thrones? Public perceptions should not be ignored. Yes, police and the judiciary are corrupt, but the biggest culprits are those who are responsible for state capture.

As human rights vanish from our national agenda, the fury of the victims grows. The state and the guardians of fundamental rights have failed the test of social contract. To avoid total disaster, the wave of toxicity can be stemmed by adopting a path of protection through collaboration, compassion and compromise.

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