**[Governance problem](https://www.dawn.com/news/1617405/governance-problem)**

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MOST think that the country’s finances are its biggest problem. That is why all eyes are always on the finance minister and his team. Few realise that our main problem is not finance but governance.

One definition of ‘governance’ is “the action or manner of governing a state or organisation”. Now what is the ‘manner’ of our government?

In the last 32 months, the chairman FBR was transferred five times, commerce secretary four times, chief secretary Punjab four times and IG Punjab six times, while for the ministers, it was finance three times (with a fourth reported to be coming up), food three times, information three times, etc.

If the head of the ministries and provincial governments are changed so frequently, imagine the trickledown effect on the lower formations. The average tenure of lower functionaries like SHOs is less than six months.

So how are the different cogs of the machinery going to deliver if they know they are only in the post for a few months? The result is that the only way you can get anything done through a government department is to pay money to the mid-level underling who will ensure the expeditious movement of your application and its approval.

At the macro level, take a look at the handling of the change of finance minister. The government had a perfectly legitimate reason to change Hafeez Sheikh, as he had failed to get elected and could not continue. When he tendered his resignation it was refused but two weeks later he was relieved overnight and the first reason given was that he could not control inflation.

How will different cogs of the machinery deliver?

For there to be any semblance of good ‘manner of governing a state’, there should have been an announcement of the change, giving the reason of not being elected and a graceful hand-over should have been arranged a couple of days later with the prime minister dining him out.

Take the way the new, young and bright Finance Minister Hammad Azhar was treated. How motivated would he be when on his very first day he is humiliated and an important decision he has taken with the input of the concerned ministry is reversed? The same day the news is leaked (and not denied) that the actual minister is waiting for the court to accept his petition against NAB.

Now come to the announcement of the 25-member Economic Advisory Committee. First those members of the previous expert advisory committee, such as Sakib Sherani and Dr Ashfaque, who were vocal and had well-argued opinions, have not been included. Secondly, the committee will be chaired by the prime minister, which shows a lack of confidence in the finance minister. Thirdly, the role of the chairman of such a crucial committee cannot be to only allot time to the speakers, but to decide which suggestion needs perusing and which needs to be killed. If the prime minister has the competency to differentiate between workable and unworkable suggestions, why have a finance minister? And fourthly have you seen a committee as large as 25 people coming to any intelligent decision? These are all signs of poor governance by the decision-makers.

Out of a team of 50 federal ministers, ministers of state, advisers and special assistants, one only hears from the ministers of finance, planning, education, interior, science & technology, information, foreign affairs and climate change. What are the other members of the prime minister’s team doing? Either they are not doing anything or it is not worth sharing with the public. How can a government machine running on eight out of its 50 pistons gather any momentum?

The most ignored part of governance is the bureaucracy. The government and media think they are villains and when you talk to the bureaucrats they ask what can you do in postings which last only months and in an environment where you can be hauled up before court for anything done in your career without any time limitation; when you and your family disgraced, even though it may be with ‘good intent’. In most such cases, the officers are acquitted but after years of torture.

A law to protect actions not involving allegations of financial corruption and those based on error of judgement was made but allowed inexplicably to lapse, before confidence-building could gain momentum. There seems to be no urgency to attend to the concerns of the bureaucracy.

The administrative reform set-up of the government has made many well-publicised announcements but by all accounts they were superficial or else there would have been an improvement in bureaucratic delivery.

The main headache of the government currently is the shortage of wheat, sugar and natural gas, leading to a hike in prices. These are mostly due to poor and delayed decision-making by the federal and provincial governments, accentuated by the reluctance of the bureaucrat taking decisions.

All this covers only a few areas of poor governance. We have not even talked about the sham that provincial governments have become with their musical chair mode of governance.

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