**Orderly management of decline**

[**Dr Farid A Malik**](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/dr-farid-a-malik)

December 29, 2020

The Iron Lady of Great Britain, Mrs Margaret Thatcher used this term after meeting with her senior bureaucrats. Yes, they are good at maintaining order even if it leads to decline. It is this backwards movement that has been taking place in the land of the pure in the last forty years ever since the ‘Zia Dark Ages’ that started on July 5, 1977. Today, most civilian institutions are totally non-functional. Even public letters are either refused or ignored. Official record is in shambles. While officers and the staff enjoy the perks of office, they deliver almost nothing of common interest. After the 1985 party less elections, elected legislators have joined the bandwagon of this journey to nowhere. The parliament has been rendered irrelevant, while public representatives enjoy facilities; the welfare of the masses is not on their agenda.

Everyone complains of the overall decline but no one seems to have a handle on reversing it. Progress will only be possible once this downward slide has been stopped. High hopes were attached with the elected government of PTI under the leadership of Imran Khan. Though the direction seems to be correct, yet the march forward has been painfully slow mainly because of the bureaucratic inertia which must be addressed. Dr Ishrat Hussain is heading the committee for administrative reforms whose recommendations are anxiously awaited. It is not a simple task. Bureaucrats are not trained to handle change; at best they can maintain the status-quo and be happy about it. Honesty alone without capability also cannot produce the desired results. Honest officers do command respect if they do not come in the way of the operational corruption networks but remain largely ineffective.

[Pakistan reports 1,776 new COVID cases in 24 hours](https://nation.com.pk/29-Dec-2020/pakistan-reports-1-776-new-coronavirus-cases-63-deaths)

Over the years, public records have been ill kept and in deplorable state, some of which have been deliberately destroyed by fires. After the Ojri Camp disaster followed by the dismissal of the upright Junejo government, no one dares to investigate the infernos. To give credit to the present regime, the burning of records has stopped. A few months back, there was one small fire in the PM Secretariat but by and large the situation has improved. Good governance requires a credible record which is non-existent. A major effort is required to first audit and then refurbish the depleted files before digitisation is done.

The term ‘order’ is very misleading. It is widely believed that there is always a lull before the storm. Often this silence is considered a sign of stability which it is not, as the currents of change keep brewing underneath. Astute leadership can sense the winds of change before they grow into a cyclone. History is full of such examples. The mighty Shah of Iran who considered himself to be the King of Kings was blown away by the Khomeni wave. It was too late when he realised that the artificial order that he was holding was based on misinformation. In the land of the pure, the mighty Ayub Khan, who had elevated himself to the rank of Field Marshal was so overwhelmed with his golden era that he decided to celebrate his so called ‘Decade of Progress’ (1958 to 1968). Little did he know that the ‘have nots’ that were excluded and left behind will stand up against him. Within a few months, by March 1969 he had to step down. The most popular leader of his time Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (ZAB) was so comfortable with his support base that he decided to hold national elections ahead of schedule. His overconfidence backfired; the opposition was not caught unawares as he had hoped. The very next day a nine-party alliance (PNA) was announced to take on his party on a one-on-one basis. The disorder that followed not only blew him from politics but he lost his life in the melee that followed.

[Biden says US needs coalition for confronting China](https://nation.com.pk/29-Dec-2020/biden-says-us-needs-coalition-for-confronting-china)

While decline is o going, the order is in fact, disorder. The slide down cannot be orderly despite all the best projections and glamour. This managed decline indicates gross miss management that must be addressed before it becomes unmanageable. The ‘Iron Lady’ introduced major reforms in the administrative structure of her country. She even took on the powerful labour unions. The Prime Minister has rightly termed these negative forces as a ‘mafia’ that resists change. As Chairman Pakistan Science Foundation, I personally experienced this ‘orderly management of decline’. Being an outsider, I was initially not taken seriously by the ‘mafia’ that operated within, which gave me room to establish my authority. Once firmly in the saddle, I was able to dismantle this ‘evil network’. Getting rid of a confirmed government servant is not an easy task but they can be moved around. As a first step after consolidation of the department record, the ‘mafia bosses’ were removed from the mainstream. Action was taken against those who resisted. Very soon the ‘evil network’ was rendered ineffective. Some of them decided to go on deputation, those who stayed were sidelined to indulge more in department and employee welfare activities.

[UN chief calls for making 2021 'year of healing'](https://nation.com.pk/29-Dec-2020/un-chief-calls-for-making-2021-year-of-healing)

Decline can be effectively reversed through growth for which bold decisions are required. Rules and regulations are blatantly flouted by both juniors and seniors. Even office hours are not kept. SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) either do not exist or are not followed mainly because of the lack of official reprimand. In the past, corruption was rampant at the highest level which has currently been reduced. The focus should now be on creating planned disorder in this deadly phenomena of ‘orderly managed decline’.