**[Truth to power](https://www.dawn.com/news/1859877/truth-to-power)**

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*’Afdhalu jihad kalimatu ’adl ‘inda sultan jabir’  
(The best jihad is a word of truth to a tyrannical ruler) — Hadith Sharif*

AS a senior citizen, I have a duty to express my view at a life-threatening time for my much-abused country. The cumulative effect of corrupt and in­­sincere governance, far more than the lack of com­petent governance, explains the worst-ever crisis in Pakistan today. So, what is good governance?

Policies comprising good governance are gene­rally well known. Basically, it is a matter of gove­rning intent as perceived by the people. They can­not be fooled forever, as Abraham Lincoln famously said.

Intentions determine the extent to which poli­cies comprising good governance are implemented. For Pakistan, given the present political situation, they will also determine whether or not the country survives. By almost every measure, Pakistan is becoming a failed state. Nevertheless, for its ruling elites, avoiding state failure is apparently not a priority.

A colonial administration may provide good administration. It cannot provide good governance. An elected government often provides corrupt go­­vernance, which does not become good governance because it is indigenous and freely chosen. Constitutional governance may be in accordance with the law, and yet not fulfil the conditions of good governance.

Pakistan adopted the Western political model of having a Constitution that requires a government be elected by the people in an independently and credibly conducted, monitored and certified free and fair election, to be legitimate. The people of Pakistan, accordingly, [made their choice](https://www.dawn.com/news/1812974/independents-take-lions-share) on Feb 8, 2024. Their choice was forcibly snatched from them. Instead, a [government](https://www.dawn.com/news/1815907/consensus-at-midnight-paves-way-for-pdm-20) was manufactured by a constitutionally subordinate institution whose duty is to defend the country, not rule and ruin it.

Why would any Pakistani not support such a nation-saving process?

No religious law, ethical code, or political ideology condones such malfeasance. Accordingly, force and deception have been resorted to, most recently in Sangjani, KP and Balochistan, to suppress a violated and outraged people. This merely exacerbates the malfeasance.

Accordingly, the government that was installed after the Feb 8 election is representative of the power that installed it rather than of the people. That power mimics a colonial administration which can neither command the people’s loyalty nor provide good governance. It treats the people as an adversary to be controlled, outwitted and subdued.

The Prophet (PBUH) said the quality of actions depends on the quality of intentions. Intentions cannot be hidden by gimmickry or sophistry. This applies to governance as much as it does to any other individual or collective human activity.

So where do we go from here? We can only go towards [good governance](https://www.dawn.com/news/1834401/good-governance) as the indispensable condition for national survival. This entails almost every aspect of national activity.

It comprises the rule of law; accountability; meritocracy; strong rights protections; free or low-cost quality education, healthcare and housing; creating more confident, innovative and productive citizens through a holistic [STEM](https://www.dawn.com/news/1807349/schoolchildren-shine-with-innovative-ideas-at-learning-festival) (science, tech­no­logy, engineering, mathematics), SMAL ([sports](https://www.dawn.com/news/1851056/arshad-nadeem-hurls-himself-into-history-with-olympic-gold), mu­­sic, [art](https://www.dawn.com/news/1807600/need-stressed-for-protecting-pakistani-art-in-an-interconnected-world), literature), and HERP (history, ethics, re­­ligion, philosophy) approach to learning; deve­loping class consciousness and solidarity among workers and [farmers](https://www.dawn.com/news/1832618/farmers-march); comprehensive land and industrial reforms, including cooperative farming and worker ownership of factories; [progressive taxation](https://www.dawn.com/news/1847215/agri-tax-an-attempt-at-equity) to reduce deficit financing, regressive indirect taxation and gross economic disparities; reducing [military budgets](https://www.dawn.com/news/1839569/rs212-trillion-proposed-for-armed-forces) to create fiscal space for development expenditures; financing a Pakistan green new deal; exiting the intensive care unit of the IMF; etc.

Given this vast scope of ‘Good Governance’, it will have to be a ‘whole of the nation’ learning pro­cess guided by a dedicated, people-friendly lead­ership to break the hitherto unbreakable begging bowl.

South Asia is among the world’s poorest regions and, within it, Pakistan arguably has the worst [Gini Coefficient](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=PK) and [Multiple Poverty Index](https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/Country-Profiles/MPI/PAK.pdf), indi­ca­ting the utter irresponsibility of its governance. This mandates radical political and socioeconomic change and comprehensive technology upgrades. The elites will oppose such empowerment of the people.

Apart from the Western concept of good governance, there are Islamic and eastern traditions which emphasise the community rather than the individual as the criterion for good governance. Nevertheless, good governance in any tradition has one unmistakable quality: when the people have it, they know they do, and when they don’t, they know that too.

Whenever the voice of the people has no hearing in the corridors of power, there is no good governance. Such hearing can’t be faked, even if the ruling elites insist whatever they do constitutes good governance. Their camp followers, ie much of the middle class intelligentsia, including media intellectuals, who are educated, articulate and well paid, confine their ‘criticisms’ within limits set by the establishment. They become, despite their cultivated image of dissidence on behalf of the people, collaborators against the people.

In Pakistan, around five per cent of the population, or 10-12 million, live very or reasonably comfortably. Hovering insecurely around the [poverty line](https://www.dawn.com/news/1839760/budget-ignored-11m-poor-pakistanis-experts-bemoan) are the so-called ‘precariat’ of the lower middle and working classes of around 20pc of the population. The remaining 75pc are more or less caged within their variable, but by and large hopeless, situations.

Should they perish quietly? How long can they be securely caged within their worsening conditions with counsels of patience, false promises, enticing prospects in the hereafter and, meanwhile, brutal repression? Charles Dickens answered on behalf of today’s elites: “ask me no questions, and be told no lies!”

Accordingly, good governance can never be won by a merely awakened, questioning and protesting people, although that is an essential start. It can only emerge from sustained struggle and sacrifice by an informed and organised people, supported by a government committed to radical reform, and led by elected and educated servants of the people. Why would any Pakistani not support such a nation-saving process?

Tragically, there are the ruling few who do not. Instead, they seek to mangle the Constitution. They should search their conscience and desist from dismantling democratic governance. Other­wise, revolution will be the only way forward. Why should the people be subjected to such an ordeal?

Unfortunately, far too many comfortable Pakis­tanis are impervious to such an appeal. The ruling mafias bank on their treacherous indifference towards the enormity of elite betrayal.

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