

Not just the 'most corrupt'

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Society & social problems

THERE are aspects of life in our country that the whole world is talking about but not many of us are. Only a few years ago, Transparency International found and declared Pakistan to be the 'most corrupt country' in the world.

How many of us did feel hurt or ashamed? Hardly any. With us it has been business as usual, as if nothing at all had happened to merit our attention. At present we are, not quite the 'most corrupt', still very much among the most corrupt. We do not have to be told by others. Don't we know it ourselves? Don't we encounter unabashed corruption at every step?

There is some saving grace. We can derive some consolation from the feeling that it is totally, unfair to fasten the indignity of being the 'most corrupt nation' on 99 per cent of the people of this country. They are completely untainted by any trace of corruption of any kind. It is wholly unjust and improper to paint the entire 135 million people with that broad black brush of corruption.

The people of Pakistan are not the 'most corrupt'. They are clean as clean can be. They are the victims of a few hundred of their own irredeemably corrupt countrymen. Quite a few of these internationally known con men are quite well known to international monitors who go about laying down the laws.

Now comes an even more stunning shock. The World Bank, and presumably some other international finance institutions (IFIs) going about as the do-gooders and doing the very opposite, have put Pakistan among the poorest nations in the world. This is not surprising. The billions of dollars which the corrupt few of 2Pakistan have been playing with is the wealth robbed from the people of Pakistan. If millions of dollars are involved in defence deals like the Bofors, Tehelka and Augusta, this kind of money changed hands from Third World to the First World operators. Does it not? Nobody ever heard any noise about the 'most corrupt' in the First World.

This monumental plunder of the masses by utterly corrupt governments is not something peculiar to Pakistan. What Third World client government of the World Bank, the IMF and the other IFIs present the picture of a paragon of virtue, completely untainted with state corruption?

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rupters were the forces too strong for the most well intentioned in Pakistan to resist. First, the political power holders (General Ziaul Haq and his tail-bearers) were corrupted. Many of them are billionaires. Then Zia took all political orphans under his umbrella. He did not have to look very far because the left-overs of the leeches of the Ayub regime were very much around. All this suited the cold war powers.

To cut the long story short, now let us note that controlled by the corrupt few, nearly half of our economy is 'informal.' It flourishes in open defiance of the government and the state. It cheats the national exchequer. It keeps its resources to itself — not only out of the reach for the public exchequer, mostly out of the country, too. That suits foreign banks fine.

Audacious corruption has been rampant in the highest echelons of political life. Almost anyone who was somebody in a government is implicated in big-time loot, evasion of taxes, defalcation of public funds, and finally, transfer of immense amounts of wealth out of the country. Everyday the newspaper headlines tell fresh tales of corruption in high places.

Pakistan's inexorable descent from the 'most corrupt' position to the level of the poorest nations is something that was waiting to happen. There is no way you go on robbing the people: one day the robbed ones would be in dire penury. It was something that was inevitable — only a matter of time. With corruption endemic in every sphere of national life, we have seen the banks plundered, utility services run to seed, social sectors starved, growth rate of economy fall into stagnation, if not actually in the reverse gear. This is what poverty of a nation is. We have reached a point where we are now among the poorest.

We have only our corrupt to blame — the politicians, the government bosses, the national and international bankers, the anti-corruption watch-dogs, the

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From the beginning of the cold war, which predates the formal end of World War II in 1945, the performance of the Bretton Woods institutions has been, in essence, fighting the cold war by other means. These other means have been installing governments throughout the Third World that would be anti-people and pro-West in the cold war. There was no way people-friendly governments in the newly freed countries would willingly side with the colonialist exploiters of yesteryear. So puppet governments had to be installed, and such governments had no option but to be politically, financially and morally corrupt to serve the objectives of the new managers of the world. That's what they have been for long. Now being corrupt is their first habit.

Pakistan was born just when the cold war was gaining momentum. It happened to be sharing borders with two giants — the USSR and China — that were the chief targets of the West's cold warriors'.

That was the beginning of military dictatorships in Pakistan. The first scene was the assassination of the first prime minister of this country. To this day, Pakistan has been under perpetual military rule in one form or the other. There is no end to this aberration in sight, not unless a miracle happens.

Now the cold war said to have been long over, but is it really? It was a relentlessly shooting war, fought from the shoulders of Pakistan and many other Third World countries until the other day. If anyone talks of Pakistan as the 'most corrupt nation', or among the 'most corrupt', he should first convince the world that he has had his eyes open when all this was happening in aid of the so-called 'free world' and its tall talk about freedom, human rights, clean administration, upright politics and what have you.

Because Pakistan was the front-line state in America's cold war against the Soviet Union, particularly after the invasion of Afghanistan, this country was systematically corrupted as a matter of war strategy. The cor-

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police and so forth.

One minister, driven to the wall, snapped back: "Why don't the people speak out, now they are free to speak?" He fell silent when told that the people do not speak out because more than forty years of dictatorship (directly military or headed by its servile surrogates) has kept the people's mouth shut by use of brute force. The people have all but lost their tongue and voice. After years in chains, incarcerated in a dungeon, Byron's Prisoner of Chillon did not know what to make of his freedom when informed that he was free. "So much long a communion tends/ That even I and my chains, grew friends," was the lament on his release from the dungeon.

The strong and influential among the power-wielding classes — the wadera, the billionaire, the bureaucrat — remain in a permanent coalition of the corrupt in all seasons.

No political leader has spoken about corruption and how to combat it. Today, the most important political figures — Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif — stand in public view. Both are subject to profoundly embarrassing suspicions in the eyes of the people.

There are scores of religious parties in Pakistan today preaching piety from a thousand pulpits. No redeemer of our souls has ever so much as mentioned the existence of the evil of corruption, and the curse of poverty in the country. They are firing away their cannons at "fahashi and uryani" — in plain words vulgarity and obscenity. What can be more vulgar and obscene than public servants, high as well as low-grade, extorting bribes from helpless citizens?

It is obvious that the entire moral value system of our country has been subverted. When will the sense of self-respect of the saner and more senior citizens wake up to the need for a national protest against corruption in public administration? This country now needs a moral reformation therapy.