**A hostage state**

[**Ahsan Munir**](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/ahsan-munir)

February 26, 2021

Where can one find a country that is the fifth most populous state in the world, boasts to be a nuclear power, claims to have an impregnable defence but has an economy—which underpins a nation’s strength—in tatters and owes billions of dollars in debt to foreign nations, banks, and institutions? Where can one find a country with a population of about 222 million, but has only a few hundred thousand registered income taxpayers? Where can one find a country in which an ordinary citizen is hostage to various pressure groups and mafias?

For reasons unbeknown, our parliament, unlike the parliaments of the West, legislate less and fight more over allocation of development funds for their constituencies—more in the ambit of the local government bodies. All governments which come to power comprise different interest groups, which promote their vested interests and pay little attention to the economic side of governance. Resultantly, billions of dollars have been borrowed from external and internal sources for which the country has nothing to show for. Our once flagship state-owned enterprises, such as PIA and Pakistan Steel Mills have been bankrupted; and our utility distribution companies are running into losses for reasons unfathomable to an income taxpayer, who not only pays his bill but also of those from which the government fails to collect.

[Lionel Messi remains on top of La Liga scoring charts](https://nation.com.pk/26-Feb-2021/lionel-messi-remains-on-top-of-la-liga-scoring-charts)

In our country, contrary to western societies, the salaried class pays the most taxes, while the mightiest and the wealthiest pay the least, if any. Thus, a few hundred thousand income taxpayers in this nation of 222 million shoulder the lavishness and economic blunders committed in good faith by all the political governments. However, for paying their taxes: can the salaried class go to a station to get an FIR easily registered? And can the salaried class think of agitating against the ever-growing list and scale of direct and indirect taxes they have to pay? Further, in a civilised society, judges, teachers, professors, academicians are respected and honoured. But judges are insulted in courtrooms every day without any accountability, and professors and teachers are slighted in classrooms without any consequence.

Then there is another side to our society. We have mafias such as the sugar, land, flour, oil and cement mafias which rob ordinary income taxpayers (salaried class) at will without any fear of accountability. Many traders pay almost no tax but are pampered because of their street power. They agitate and become rowdy without any fear of consequence. The transport mafia does not pay taxes and violates traffic laws, but the government does not dare apprehend them. Any legal action against them results in a countrywide transport strike. The lawyers become unruly every other day without any fear of reprisal by the state, while the politicians have been caught on camera accepting bribes but without any consequence.

[BKU warns of rally outside Indian Parliament with four million tractors](https://nation.com.pk/26-Feb-2021/bku-warns-of-rally-outside-indian-parliament-with-four-million-tractors)

Furthermore, where else but in Pakistan—for greater public and national interest—we allow foreign dignitaries to hunt and kill our national wildlife. Where else but in Pakistan, we allow foreign investors a rate of return of 15-18 percent on their investments through sovereign guarantees—the highest in the world. Where else but in Pakistan, economic policies are devised to tax the already taxed salaried class, pushing them more and more into the abyss of poverty and despair.

Thus, almost everyone has contributed to and contributes to the disarray we are in, but everyone desires to live in an equitable society: where justice is dispensed, laws are enforced, and services are provided. In search of such a society, many of our countrymen plunder the country and take the looted wealth abroad to live a lavish life in a western society of their choosing. But then there are the more fortunate ones: the ones who are the rulers and the elite here and also have a second lavish life in a society of their choosing abroad. They have the best of both worlds.

[China declares ‘complete victory’ over absolute poverty](https://nation.com.pk/26-Feb-2021/china-declares-complete-victory-over-absolute-poverty)

In sum, all our ruling parties conjure up initiatives that are trumpeted to be game changers for the ordinary masses of this nation. But all these initiatives only add to the debt woes of this country. Therefore, to stop the country from falling into chaos, there is a need to develop a society that is equitable, just, and provides necessities of life to the ordinary denizens of society. And the onus of change rests with the rulers and elite of the country, who despite being the minority, have benefited most from this country.