Why do anti-corruption campaigns fail in Pakistan?

There are references to bribery in many of our historic sources– the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi from the 22nd Century BC, Egypt's 14th Century BC Edict of Horemheb and Kautilya's Arthashastra from 14th Century BC India.

Its roots date back to the colonial period when the British awarded lands and titles to their loyalists, leading to nepotism and corruption.

Two significant crises played a fundamental role in the genesis of corruption in this part of the world: defence-related purchases during and after World War II and the allotment of evacuee property after the partition of the Indian subcontinent.

The nationalisation policy of the 1970s created new opportunities for corruption and gave birth to a new breed of corrupt government officers, lasting well into the 1980s.

Although public sector corruption was considered an impediment towards development, it gained a growing focus in developing countries as a result of the neoliberal idea of 'good governance' introduced by international donors.

This worked on the assumption that governments in developing countries were inefficient, and one of the primary causes of this was the rampant corruption in the public sector.

So, Pakistan's then-president, General Pervez Musharraf introduced the draconian National Accountability Bureau (NAB) in 1999 in order to follow international donors' good-governance prescriptions.

Although General Musharraf introduced NAB to ostensibly control corruption, Pakistan's current Prime Minister, Imran Khan, took it a step further, initiating an ambitious anti-corruption plan (which was the main slogan of his election campaign in 2018).

Both have failed miserably and instead, corruption increased significantly.

Several significant corruption scandals have been reported during the hybrid rule of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party.

According to Transparency International, instead of overcoming corruption, PTI's government significantly increased it in the past two and a half years.

So why have Imran Khan's good intentions, when it comes to controlling the widespread corruption in state departments, failed?

This failure is a result of misunderstanding the nature, characteristics, patterns and organisational structure needed to devise anti-corruption strategies.

Since the 1950s, Pakistani politicians have been accused of being corrupt. They are singled out as 'rotten apples' ignoring social, political and economic structures and are primarily responsible for "abuse of public authority for personal gains" – a Western concept proposed by the famous German sociologist Max Weber.

But there are at least two preconditions required for the application of this concept of corruption.

Firstly, there has to be a sharp distinction between the state and society, implying that the state departments should be insulated from interest groups or kinship ties. Secondly, kinship societies are ones where individuals exist in relation to others instead of as individuals, but this concept assumes individuals are free of their kinship ties.

For this reason, in countries like Pakistan which are kinship societies, people seek approval of their family members and, in some cases, even of their extended family members or a whole clan for their most critical decisions.

But when these relationships are translated into politics, individuals go through the same process, voting for kinship relations rather than associating themselves with the large unit of society, that is, the nation-state.

They do not vote for political manifestos but instead vote on what they get individually, as families or as communities, from the political candidates.

The system of non-party elections introduced during long periods of military dictatorships, especially for local governments, has had a long-lasting impact on Pakistani politics.

Political candidates could not mobilise people on party bases and, consequently, relied on their clans and castes to support local government elections.

As a result, local government elections led to politics based on clan and caste loyalties and a significantly segregated population along clan and caste lines. These loyalties ultimately strengthened the politics of patronage.

A new political elite emerged from these local councils and came to power through military patronage as well as the strength of their clan and caste.

After becoming members of national and provincial parliaments, these new politicians introduced politics based on their experience of local governance – that is, they introduced the politics of personalised patronage and then subsidised their clan-based constituencies by using development funds to boost their chances of re-election. Western societies have gone through several centuries of transformation, from kinship-based societies into nation-states. Many developing countries have yet to develop a sense of association with a larger nation-state beyond kinship loyalties.

This is truer for countries like Pakistan, where several decades of direct military rule has privileged non-party elections and there remains an ongoing military interference in politics.

In fact, the situation has significantly strengthened the kinship system of politics – at the detriment of establishing the state as a rational-bureaucratic entity accountable to people.

In a society where kinship ties have yet to be transformed, a state anchored by patron-client politics has prohibited a clear separation of the state and society – disempowering people to make the state accountable in overcoming corruption.

The military-controlled patron-client politics has also hindered state formation in the country, which still seems to be incomplete.

But again, language is important when it comes to Pakistan. Strictly speaking, there is no state in Pakistan; there's only an administration, military and civil officials. The term 'state' itself is an elusive one. It seems inappropriate to use the term regarding the institutions of the country. Although there is a 'community' with a monopoly over coercive ability, it has failed to devise institutions that confer legitimacy over the use of this force.

This is true even though there has always been an ongoing effort to build a state, initially by politicians and then by the military since 1958.

Disturbing videos show Taliban has no interest in peace in Afghanistan

From P1

The Deobandi group's larger objective is to impose Sharia on Afghanistan by converting it into an emirate and expand its influence all over the country at the cost of the minorities and women rights.

In one of the video clips on Twitter, several men are seen gathered around a man, picking up stones and repeatedly throwing them at him as he tries to save himself. "The world sees everything with its own eyes, but it is silent. I do not know why we are not human beings. We do not have the right to live. This is the situation of the Afghan people," a user wrote along with the 2:19-minute clip.

In another clip, a man is seen being beaten with sticks and stones and kicked by men. Yet another video was tweeted, which show the Taliban cutting the private parts of a man. It was not possible to verify the authenticity of these videos or ascertain where they were shot.

On Thursday, the Taliban said they had killed a popular comedian. Nazar Mohammad, known as Khasha Zwan, was taken out of his home on July 22 and killed. The family of the comedian, who previously served in Kandahar Police, blamed the Taliban for the attack.

Last week, viral videos showed Mohammad with his hands tied behind his back and sitting between two men in a car, being slapped repeatedly. His body could be seen in one of those clips.

Earlier this month reports said the Taliban has ordered women to not leave home alone, set dowry regulations for girls and men to grow their beards among other diktats. According to reports, the Taliban has also issued a statement ordering local religious leaders to give them a list of girls over 15 years of age and widows under 45, reports have said. The Taliban, the reports said, has promised for them to be married to its fighters.

In the past as well, the Taliban enforced a strict interpretation of Islamic law, including public lashings, flogging and stoning. Women were required to cover their bodies and faces in a burqa and were barred from going to school or work or leaving the house without a male relative.

The United Nations has expressed concern with the number of reported "serious human rights abuses" and violations. The global body has said that authorities are obliged to respect the human rights and dignity of all Afghans, especially those of women and girls. Reports of killing, ill-treatment, persecution and discrimination are widespread and disturbing, creating fear and insecurity, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has also said.

Apart from the torturing people in captured areas, reports also said that Taliban fighters have destroyed 11 sites on the Salam telecommunication network and looted its equipment. Reportedly, an Afghan online portal, said citing local officials that the Taliban fighters also closed seven other sites in Paktia's occupied districts.

The Kabul Times

Korea, Uzbekistan eye closer economic ties

South Korea's trade ministry said Thursday it plans to expand economic ties with Uzbekistan by launching new projects in a wide array of areas from ICT to the medical sector, as the COVID-19 pandemic has recently weighed down bilateral business cooperation.

Seoul and Tashkent are set to hold their fifth round of working group meetings virtually later in the day to share ideas on how to expand cooperation in trade, investment and other areas, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy.

The two countries agreed to hold regular talks on economic ties during their summit in 2019.

During the meeting, South Korea and Uzbekistan vowed to find ways to revitalize their trade, which recently has been hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, by promoting the digital trade and tapping new infrastructure projects.

South Korea also offered to lend a hand to Uzbekistan's medical sector, including establishing an information management system at its hospitals.

The latest efforts come in line with South Korea's efforts to penetrate deeper into the Central Asian market.

In January, the two countries said they will seek to clinch a free trade agreement named the Agreement for Sustainable Trade and Economic Partnership (STEP).

Trade between the two countries came to $1.72 billion in 2020, down 27 percent from the previous year. Uzbekistan was the 36th-largest export destination for South Korea, with outbound shipments reaching $1.7 billion.

South Korea mostly shipped auto parts and cars to the Central Asian nation, while major imports included pulp, a raw material for paper and fruit.

When completed, the pact with Uzbekistan will mark the first free trade deal signed with a Central Asian nation.

Nepal: New government should address rights

(New York, July 29, 2021) – Nepal's newly installed prime minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, should ensure that his administration focuses on upholding the rights of citizens and strengthening the rule of law, Human Rights Watch said this week in a letter outlining several key human rights issues.

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected Nepal citizens' basic rights, including access to health and education. After decades of progress in reducing maternal and neonatal deaths, a study has shown a massive drop in the number of births at health facilities overstretched by the pandemic is a huge setback for maternal and neo-natal health, while school closures and inadequate government assistance are pushing children back into exploitative and dangerous child labor, reversing gains made in recent years, Human Rights Watch found.

"The new government should take measures to safeguard and continue progress on health and education, including through assistance for households whose livelihoods have been devastated by the pandemic," said Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "Safety nets are critical for ensuring that crises do not prevent children from continuing their education or harm progress on reducing child marriage and child labor."

Human Rights Watch has urged the government to expand its Child Grant program, which currently benefits a quarter of children under age 5, to include all families with children, helping to keep children in school.

Another major area of concern is the culture of impunity for serious rights violations, which has undermined the rule of law since the end of Nepal's armed conflict 15 years ago.

Nepal's two transitional justice commissions, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons, which were established in 2015, have made almost no progress in investigations. In 2014, the Supreme Court struck down provisions in the transitional justice law that allow amnesty for the most serious offenses, including torture, murder, and enforced disappearance. However, the law has not been revised.

Previous governments have cited the supposed transitional justice process to block conflict era cases from being heard in regular courts.

"War begins with thought and ends with thought," Wafayezada

From P1

"They are working for others and destroying their homeland." Recalling Alama Iqbal poem, Wafayezada said, they are neither compatible with Imam Jafar Sadeq nor are loyal to Imam Azam Abu Hanifa Kabuli, but only allegiant to Salafism and religious fossilism (rejected religious rites.) "Their war is not in Takhar, Badakhshan, Kandahar, Ghazni, Herat and Helmand provinces, but their war is of ignorance and arises from a violent, raw, bloodthirsty mind, poor thought and foreign intellectual instincts, which will bring nothing but ruin and destruction," the country's acting Minister of Information and Culture continued. To change the ongoing situation, Minister Wafayezada advised, there was a need for an intellectual and cultural work and to deconstruct the culture of war and violence and instead to build the culture of peace and tolerance and to eliminate the grounds for mobilizing the youth and the society in favor of the groups of ignorance, war and violence. **The Kabul Times**

Attacks, land grabs leave Bangladesh's Indigenous groups on edge

Dhaka, Bangladesh – On the night of May 31, Agrojyoti Bhante was brutally attacked by two machete-wielding men at a monastery in Khagrachari, 270km (168 miles) south of capital Dhaka in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

The attackers, later identified as two Bengali construction workers who worked at the monastery, also looted about 60,000 takas ($700) from the monastery and left the 47-year-old Buddhist monk, belonging to one of Bangladesh's Indigenous communities, for dead.

While no accurate data on the number of Indigenous people in Bangladesh is available, a census conducted by the government in 2011 found they are about 1.6 million.

But Indigenous and activist groups claim their population is at least 3 million, or 2 percent, of more than 160 million people in the Muslim-majority country.

There are about 54 different Indigenous communities in the country, the majority of them living in the northern and southeastern plains. The rest, about 20 percent, are in CHT – most of them Buddhists. In the plains, most are Christians.

Indigenous groups and activists say the communities suffer from gross human rights violations and disparities.

On May 30, a day before the Khagrachari incident, a case of arson against the Indigenous Khasi people was reported at Baralekha in Moulvibazar district, 278km (170 miles) from CHT.

Unknown miscreants had cut down thousands of betel leaf trees at an Indigenous farm that served as the primary source of income for at least 48 families in the area, who, according to sources, incurred a loss of at least $8,000.