

CORRUPTION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR: HOW TO CURB IT?

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Corruption has become a pandemic and is deeply rooted in every facet of human life. It has taken such a rough shape to be feared of. Nothing is left unaffected. Everybody wants to get rid of but no remedy, being practicable, can be discerned to root it out. It's not a social evil of the developing countries but a menace that obliterates the developed countries' socio-economic fabrics. Stringent rules are being framed, and new investigative agencies are being established to curb it but to no avail. The irony is that corruption as an illness is attributed to the impoverished and weak segment of the society instead of the people at the helms of affairs.

Corruption means giving or taking of cash money instead of getting or offering any favour. Oxford Dictionary defines corruption as a widespread moral deterioration, bribery, fraud and irregular alteration of text or language etc. It doesn't involve only cash but malpractices and misuse of authority as well. In the public sector, the irregular award of contracts for kickbacks and commissions, misappropriations of public funds, illegal appointments and nepotism/favoritism fall under the ambit of corruption and corrupt practices. Suppose the definition of corruption is further narrowed down. In that case, misuse of the official vehicle, wrong claims of TA/DA, medical bills and other arrears come within the premise of corruption and corrupt practices. Simply put,

corruption is an injustice perpetrated by an individual in official matters in official capacity instead of some gain for himself or in respect of someone else.

Bribery/corruption is so rooted in many cultures that it has been ascribed with special terms. It is called mordida (small bite) in Latin America. The French call it pot de vin (jug of wine). In Italy, la bustarella (the little envelope) is left on the bureaucratic desk to cut the red tape. South Korean uses the term ttuk kab (rice cake expense) for it. There is no society which has escaped this curse. Corruption is rampant everywhere, but it is not used as hush money to get some unlawful favour/gain but to eliminate the bureaucratic red-tapism. In developing countries in general and Pakistan, this way of corruption is familiar to all officers/officials they call speed money, but the problem doesn't end here. They have fallen in the worst form of corruption and corrupt practices which become the causes of low economic growth and development. For instance, in financial services, officials are involved in tax evasion, tax avoidance and inadmissible payments which result in billions of revenue and expenditure losses to the public exchequer. In police and other law enforcement agencies, culprits are left scot-free, and innocents are put behind bars. First Investigation Reports are not filed or filed but against the innocents for a bribe. On the



military and executive side, the modes Operandi adopted for earning black money are commissions, kickbacks, embezzlement in the Annual Development Plan and other administrative expenditures.

Politicians have a hybrid method of making ill-gotten money. They receive kickbacks, commissions and bribes on appointments, postings and transfers. They also get involved in drawing loans from banks at low-interest rates. These loans are then invested either in foreign countries or deposited in foreign banks at higher interest rates, resulting in capital flight; thereby causing the current account deficit. In most of these loans, the borrowers have declared defaulters and their loans written off. That's the reason that the landlord and industrialist turned politicians spend millions of rupees during elections to influence the incumbent government in their favours.

A question arises, why people do corruption? The problem looks simple but difficult to answer. Corruption in public sector officials can be divided into four categories. First, those officials who are impoverished enough to meet their needs from their legal income. They are not in-built corrupts but have recourse to corruption due to the growing needs of their families. They don't get involved in severe malpractices and earn as much as possible to solve their emergent financial problems. Secondly, those officials who don't indulge in financial corruption of cash and avail only the official facilities they

are not entitled. Thirdly, they grant favours to their relatives in awarding contracts, employment and postings/transfers etc. And finally, those officials who are innately corrupt. They accumulate wealth by all means. They resort to every injustice to realize their motives and are least bothered by ordinary people's tribulations. They are mostly those who are sitting in the middle or top echelons. They are the worst category of corrupts who are incorrigible and responsible for the overall national economic problem against whom it is necessary to fight.

There are officials at the ministerial level who have hands in glove with the top brass and are involved in corrupt practices, but it would be out of place to say that every low paid public servant play duck and drakes with the public money. Their corruption is like a grain of salt in the meal and doesn't affect the overall economy. With their ill-gotten money, they try to make both hands meet in the growing inflation. Their earnings don't become liquid assets to be deposited in their foreign banks' accounts but circulate in the country in the form of consumption on the use of daily commodities.

Notwithstanding, the incumbent government has come to power to eliminate corruption in the country and recover the looted money. Still, the evil of corruption persists and has multiplied as is evident from the Transparency International's corruption index in February 2021. Pakistan has been shown as 124th in the world ranking. The valid



reason might be the ineffective and vindictive policies adopted by the respective governments to curb corruption. No doubt, corruption cannot be eliminated absolutely but can be minimized through effective policies; hence, the following ideas can be highlighted in this regard:

- Any policy regarding eliminating corruption should be formulated with open heart and mind to cross the board accountability. It should not be vindictive to terrorize the opponents. All foes and friends who are corrupt should be brought to book.
- There are people in all services and groups who are more than humans but have been relegated to peripheries based on their honesty and sobriety not to be the source of nuisance for those who run the show of corruption. Suppose those people are brought to the fore-front and handed over the responsibility of having surveillance on the malpractice in the system with some extra fringe benefits. In that case, the system can be overhauled to a greater extent. They can be assured of service safety and complete authority of taking action against the culprits.
- The vaccine of improving financial conditions can inoculate those who fall in the

first three categories of corrupts. They have less income with substantially extended families to cope with inflated expenses; therefore, if their salaries are enhanced, it is expected that they can be put on the right track.

- Most of the appointments and transfers are made based on bribery and Sifarish. Those who pay money on assignments or transfers would earn back the money he/she has been paid. Therefore, all appointments and transfers must be made based on merit so that he/she may not carry the motive of bribery while entering the public offices.
- It is also desirable in the public sector services to improve the 'conduct' of the employees. Together with the teaching of the personality building taught in capacity building programs, the public servants should also be taught character building such as honesty, patience and tolerance etc.

The procurement mechanism needs to be overhauled so that the system's inherent loopholes can be plugged in and no undue favour can be granted to the services and goods providers. The concept of e-tendering can be introduced across the country to avert any direct contact between the procuring agency and the service/goods provider.