

Pakistan's civil service dilemma

Khurram Ellahi

By the time you finish reading this article, the veil shrouding Pakistan's administrative ineptitude will be lifted, revealing the true architects of the nation's woes – the District Management Group (DMG), the so-called stewards of progress who have, in reality, become the custodians of chaos.

Look around, and you'll see the fingerprints of incompetence on every aspect of our society. From ill-conceived contracts with Independent Power Producers (IPPs) to untimely wheat imports, from perennial flooding in our cities to the fear instilled by our own police force, the list of failures attributed to these purported 'visionaries' is endless. But what exactly is at the heart of this systemic dysfunction?

It's not a lack of capability; rather, it's the curse of partial competence that plagues our civil service. These bureaucrats, trained in what are supposed to be the finest academies, are paradoxically both the architects of progress and the barriers to it.

Their partial competence is a dangerous cocktail – just enough proficiency to keep the system afloat, yet insufficient to drive meaningful change or innovation.

The academy where they receive their training acts as a sanctuary, shielding them from the demands of a rapidly evolving world. It's a place where antiquated ideologies and outdated practices are revered, and where the mere suggestion of embracing contemporary ideas is met with disdain.

In this environment, mediocrity thrives, and any semblance of ambition or progress is suffocated by the weight of tradition.

This phenomenon of partial competence is not unique to Pakistan. Throughout history, civilizations have been plagued by individuals who possess just enough skill to maintain the status quo but lack the vision to propel society forward. It's a curse reminiscent of those bestowed by the gods of old – a punishment that renders its recipients simultaneously blessed and cursed, forever trapped in a cycle of stagnation.

But unlike the mythical curses of yore, the curse of partial competence is not immutable. It can be broken, but only through a concerted effort to overhaul the very foundations of our civil service. This requires more than just incremental reforms or cosmetic changes; it demands a fundamental shift in mindset – a rejection of complacency in favor of ambition, and a commitment to excellence at every level of governance.

It's time to strip away the veil of partial competence and demand more from those who claim to lead us. It's time to challenge the status quo and embrace a new era of governance characterized by competence, innovation, and accountability. Only then can we break free from the shackles of mediocrity and unleash the true potential of Pakistan.

This is not a call for the dismantling of the entire civil service, but rather a demand for introspection and reform.

The academy that prides itself on producing the nation's leaders must adapt to the demands of the 21st century. It must shed its outdated curriculum and embrace contemporary knowledge, fostering a generation of truly competent leaders who can steer Pakistan away from the quagmire of partial competence and towards a brighter future.

Only then can we break free from the shackles of this insidious curse and unlock the true potential of our nation. But, in every part of my city, as our country continues to struggle, I see success stories emerging from countries worldwide, while we're left behind, missing out on opportunities. The way I'm treated at state institutions reflects our collective sense of hopelessness as citizens. We've grown so accustomed to our situation that complaining feels pointless.

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