

Missing leadership

One of the first things you learn in management is that you can delegate authority but you cannot delegate responsibility. Indeed, the central traits of effective leadership are to motivate your team, lead by example and to accept full responsibility for any failure.

A great trait of Imran Khan as cricket captain was his ability to lead from the front. He was able to take wickets when partnerships threatened and anchor the innings when collapses were imminent. He not only made things happen but took responsibility for his and his team's failures.

Prime Minister Imran Khan, although often called 'Kaptaan', has yet to show anything close to his leadership traits as a cricket captain. Not only is he not able to lead by example or motivate his team, he is especially averse to taking responsibility for the failures of his government.

This is the reason there seems to be so much infighting within his team, and his players are neither willing to work hard nor exhibit discipline and nor certainly willing to accept responsibility.

Take the example of the recent devaluation of the rupee, after which the prime minister said he wasn't informed, the governor of the State Bank (a man with an unblemished record of integrity and probity) said that he did inform the finance minister and the finance minister too said he did inform the prime minister. The rupee went down by about eight to ten percent, came back up by seven to eight percent a day or so later, there was great turmoil in the currency markets, and to this day we don't know who first decided to devalue the rupee, who then decided to appreciate the rupee and who was responsible for the whole turmoil. No one led from the front.

Then there is the urban legend of Pakistanis having \$200 billion in Swiss bank accounts. When the myth started, it was just Pakistanis having this money in the bank. But then over time in the speeches of Imran Khan and other PTI leaders the myth gained momentum. It became money that was illegally sent abroad by Pakistanis. It then became money that was even illicitly earned by Pakistanis. And finally it became illicitly-earned, laundered money of (non-PTI) Pakistani politicians.

According to PTI leaders, PM Imran Khan was going to bring back the money in no time and in the words of Imran Khan himself this would result in a ten-year tax holiday, reduction in prices, creation of jobs, etc, etc. However, it took only a week into the new government for the myth to be laid to rest.

No one took responsibility for this incessantly repeated falsity and no one ever expressed regret over misleading the nation. The finance minister kicked the ball down to the accountability adviser who then kicked the ball further down the field.

(For all our expert financial and media experts who had been baying for the blood of politicians over the \$200 billion, here's a reality check. It is inconceivable that from a poor country like Pakistan where there aren't even a dozen private jets there would be even a thousand accounts in Swiss banks. For there to be \$200 billion held by Pakistanis, there would need to be an average of \$200 million cash holding in each account. Not even billionaires, of which there are no more than ten in Pakistan, have this much money in cash. This myth would have died a death under the burden of its own implausibility had someone spent perhaps ten minutes thinking about this preposterous claim).

All of this brings me to the completely avoidable electricity loadshedding coupled with the massive gas shortages going on all over the country. I wrote about this last week in this space, saying that the crucial mistake was the government not procuring enough LNG to run all the available gas-fired plants.

This much is now apparent even to our ‘tabdeeli sarkar’. They first stopped the import of furnace oil (something our PML-N government had done last year but which for some inexplicable reason was restarted after we left). They are now scurrying about trying to import more LNG. Fortunately, both these are steps in the right direction.

But no one in the ‘tabdeeli sarkar’ is willing to accept responsibility for their failure and for causing the country perhaps a billion rupee per day extra loss due to using wasteful furnace oil plants and closing down factories.

First, the government set up a committee to find out if the MDs of Sui Southern and Sui Northern were responsible for not ordering LNG and causing gas and power shortages. This committee was headed by the Ogra chairperson, a woman who understands the gas sector as well as anyone else in the government. The committee exonerated the two MDs and explained, among other things, why the import of furnace oil had caused a decrease in the production of domestic gas.

The government was not happy with the report as it didn’t recommend what it wanted. So another report was ordered, this time under the petroleum secretary, the top bureaucrat in the sector. He too wrote a report largely exonerating the two MDs and blaming a lack of coordination among the ministries as the prime reason for not ordering enough LNG. But, perhaps understanding the mood of the government and the temperament of his own minister, he recommended that the MDs may be issued a warning to perform better and that there should be improved coordination between the power and petroleum ministries.

Winter loadshedding, however, is an embarrassing failure of the PTI government – and neither the prime minister nor his ministers are willing to accept the blame. So someone had to be made the scapegoat. Both the MDs were fired, even though neither report had recommended it.

When the petroleum minister was asked about the shortage he blamed – well, obviously – the previous PML-N government. When it was pointed out that the PML-N had left seven months ago, and that it had set up the infrastructure for the import and regasification of LNG, for transportation of gas and also sufficient power plants, he then egregiously blamed the two MDs. Yet from him not one word of contrition, much less an apology.

The power minister, however, had the grace to express regret that people are suffering from these power outages.

Sadly, however, no minister or the prime minister is taking responsibility for the great hardship caused to the people and the huge loss faced by the government and the economy.

And what does this say about the Kaptan’s leadership? As an opposition member, I have always believed that PM Khan didn’t understand the complexities of governance, that he was too tolerant of his party’s shortcomings and that his unshakable belief about the PML-N being corrupt was not just self-serving but also plainly wrong.

However, like much of the nation, I always thought he would be a strong and decisive prime minister. Unfortunately, it is now becoming patently obvious that he’s not really the Imran Khan of the 1992 World Cup but more like a journeyman cricketer happy to keep his place at the top.

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