**[All hail the king](https://www.dawn.com/news/1785165/all-hail-the-king)**

[Syed Saadat](https://www.dawn.com/authors/485/syed-saadat) Published October 31, 2023 Updated about 5 hours ago

DEMOCRACY in a country with very little self-accountability and conscientiousness among the movers and shakers in government is nothing less than a curse. Our political leaders behave like kings from the Dark Ages who would assert undue power over the weak and, at the same time, show extraordinary servitude to kings more powerful than themselves.

One example of this observation involves a government servant, who once belonged to the powerful military, being given a clean chit in ‘assets beyond means’ allegations, after a reportedly short meeting with the then prime minister, while another government servant, a former principal secretary in the Prime Minister’s Office, who belonged to the beleaguered civilian bureaucracy, spent years in jail before being acquitted.

When kings are happy, they shower their courtiers with gifts and honour as in the case of a former prime minister who decided his principal secretary was worth his weight in gold. He was granted an extension in service upon retirement and later nominated Pakistan’s executive director to the World Bank for a term of four years.

Ironically, the incumbent executive director was appointed for three years instead of four, apparently to bring the appointment period in line with the election cycle in Pakistan, which now seems an exercise in futility as the outgoing government made the appointment for the next four years as well. Who said that the retirement age is 60 years in Pakistan? Apparently, with the right connections, one can keep on serving indefinitely.

The process of selection should be transparent and public.

According to reports, another appointment made a day before the dissolution of the National Assembly last August was that of Pakistan’s deputy permanent delegate to Unesco in Paris for three years. There was reported evidence that in making this appointment the former prime minister had used his discretion in the manner of an unprincipled king rather than a custodian of the public trust. A legal battle ensued and currently a couple of civil servants, who are both aspirants for the position, are fighting a legal battle in the Islamabad High Court.

Whether or not the individuals in these appointments are qualified and the most suitable for the role is a separate debate. Even, if some believe they are the best candidates for the job, an outgoing government has no moral justification to use its own discretion in making these appointments.

In such cases, the Pakistan Administrative Service seems to be acting like a clique in winning these positions by allegedly manipulating the PM Office. Everything cannot be proscribed by rules and procedures; there are certain things that one would expect senior bureaucrats, who are supposed to be highly educated, to stay away from on the basis of their own understanding and experience. But such cultured behaviour remains, unfortunately, a highly utopian idea among the movers and shakers in the corridors of power in Pakistan. Hence, we need a law to do away with the discretion of the prime minister in all such appointments, especially in the matter of foreign postings, as the office has repeatedly failed to uphold merit in the face of manipulation.

Secondly, the process of selection should be transparent and public. Corrupt practices are often concealed under the cloak of secrecy and security in this country.

One would not be surprised if in a few years from now, international organisations start selecting the appropriate candidates for these positions on their own. This might be a blessing in disguise as doing away with the discretion of Pakistani governments to make these appointments would mean a triumph of talent over sycophancy.

The only reason these positions are left to the discretion of the Pakistani government is to create a sense of ownership and representation among these international institutions for all member states. Sadly, here too we come across as manipulative, opportunistic and selfish.

Lastly, while we were busy making these controversial appointments, an international organisation appointed a former Nadra chairman as technical adviser; ironically it is the same individual who was forced to resign as chairman Nadra by the PDM government a few months ago. Now, a global organisation is set to benefit from his advice while we choose to ignore what he said in his resignation letter — to avoid appointing a bureaucrat to the position of chairman Nadra and to choose a professional instead. Maybe, the caretaker government thought that by professional he meant a professional soldier which is perhaps the reason the cabinet has recently paved the way for the appointment of a serving military officer as chairman Nadra. All hail the king.

*The writer is a former civil servant.*

[**syedsaadatwrites@gmail.com**](https://mailto:syedsaadatwrites@gmail.com)

**X (formerly Twitter):** [**@SyedSaadat55**](https://twitter.com/syedsaadat55)

*Published in Dawn, October 31st, 2023*