

Dr. Ishrat Husain, *Governing the Ungovernable: Institutional Reforms for Democratic Governance* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2018), 550.

Dr. Ishrat Husain has enormous experience in the field of developmental economics, spanning more than four decades. He is the former Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan and has earlier held a prominent position in World Bank. After completion of his tenure as the Governor of State Bank , he accepted to be the Director of the Institute of Business Administration, Karachi. He has been contributing articles to research journals besides authoring the book, *The Economy of an Elitist State and Economic Management in Pakistan 1990-2002*, published in 2012. He is currently President of the Advisory Council of the Islamic Development Bank, apart from being a Member of the Middle East Advisory Group of the International Monetary Fund.

Dr. Ishrat Hussain's book has eighteen chapters. Each one of these chapters gives complete analysis of some aspects of governance issues in Pakistan. These include history, economy, politics, society; federal, provincial and local governments, the civil service, the judiciary, the military, private sector, role of external actors and experiences of other countries to learn from. The author thoroughly reviews various challenges faced by the country in last seventy years in his present book.

For the purpose of analysis, *Governing the Ungovernable* has been divided into two periods. The first period covers the first 40 years after independence when the country was able to maintain an average growth rate of 6%. The second phase starts from 1990 onwards when the process of irreversible decay in public life started. The author highlights the fact that Pakistan began its journey with a weak economic base, and went through a turbulent

phase of nation building along with the unending political instability. But the record of its achievements during the first forty years has been impressive. Analyzing the reasons behind poor economic performance of the country after 1990, the author singles out deteriorating governance was the primary reason behind it. Pakistan then fell even behind Bangladesh on the Human Development Index (HDI).

The author debunks many misconceptions about Pakistan's politics and economy which commonly are used as a propaganda tool against the state. Dr. Husain rejects a common perception that Pakistan's economy suffered mainly due to terrorism in the post 9/11 period. He argues that the decline in Pakistan's economy had started in the early 1990s before the country got involved in the war against terror. Governance, according to him, is the ultimate determinant of a country's economic success or failure, and not foreign aid. He explains, with statistical data, that during periods of elected governments Pakistan received more foreign aid from the US, other friendly Gulf countries, and international financial institutions than the times when the democratic process was suspended. The democratic governments however failed to maintain economic growth and improve quality of life of the common citizen. According to the author, the narrative of certain political parties that the US and western countries' support military rulers as opposed to the civilian governments is also misplaced. He points out that Pakistan has faced more sanctions during military dictatorships as compared to the periods when the civilians were in power in the country.

Dr. Ishrat believes that each institution of the state should function within the limits defined by the rules of business. He is not supportive of seeking military's assistance by the civilian governments in governance. The author also discusses the common perception about ever-increasing defense budget of Pakistan, which is contrary to the factual data. He points out that the

ratio of defense expenditure to GDP was consistently high in the first 40 years, when Pakistan was involved in building its defense forces. It has since been declining. It is now 2.9 per cent of the GDP - almost one-half of what it was in the 80s.

The biggest setback to Pakistan's economy was caused by the nationalization of private sector by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. This also opened the doors of corruption for the bureaucrats who were appointed to run nationalized industrial units and financial institutions. He holds Bhutto responsible for destroying once dynamic and efficient civil service of Pakistan. Dr. Ishrat says that the biggest disappointment for the diehard supporters of democracy came in the 90s, when Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif used the institutions of state and civil service to bestow favors on their favourites in order to promote their personal/political interests. The author's views on the role of religion in public management are quite engaging. He points out that during the last 30 years the role of religion in public discourse has been divisive, pitching people against one another. This created space for militancy, extremism and terrorism.

While discussing the eighteenth amendment of the constitution, Dr. Hussain is of the view that power and resources have been shifted to the provinces as a result of this amendment. But provinces, unfortunately, suffer from lack of capacity and expertise. He emphasizes that the true decentralization will only take place when provinces devolve financial and administrative powers to the local governments. Dr. Husain advocates substantial reforms in each sector for increasing the economic growth and improve social indicators in the country. He calls for democratic practices to be observed in the political parties in order to promote democratic values in the country.

The author in his analysis brings out the potential strength of Pakistani state, its geo-economic locational advantage and its youth bulge. These are country's major assets in his opinion. He argues that this potential needs to be exploited with massive investment in the education sector and training of youth to make them skillful and

productively employable citizens. Dr. Husain seems hopeful that the developments under China-Pakistan Economic Corridor could be a major factor in reviving Pakistan's economy.

The book has a lengthy concluding chapter at the end which sums up the whole discussion of the book. The focus of Pakistani leaders, according to the author, has been to come to power and make all efforts to remain in power after that. They were, therefore, reluctant to take any serious political risks. The author compares enduring political turmoil and destruction in Middle Eastern countries to Pakistan's fight against terrorism. He concludes that the armies of Middle Eastern countries have split on sectarian grounds, but the Pakistan Army has remained unified. It has emerged as a potent national institution and a professional force.

The title of the book could be a bit misleading as it mentions Pakistani state ungovernable. Governance might have different levels of performance or incapacities but labelling a state ungovernable could convey a completely different meaning. The book, however, provides valuable insight into Pakistan's society, politics and economy as the author has covered all aspects of governance. Timing of publication of this book was also critically important. It came out a few months before the national elections in the country. A new government has since come to power. It is no wonder that the new government has constituted a task force under Dr. Ishrat Hussain to work on Civil Services reforms. They can learn from this book as it gives complete guidelines to political elite and policy makers to target the neglected areas of governance.

Reviewed By Afeera Firdous, Research Assistant, Center for International Strategic Studies (CISS), Islamabad.