

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



“ Robust legal safeguards are critical to encourage disclosures without fear of retaliation; the pending Whistleblower Protection and Vigilance Commission Bill must be enacted to signal commitment.

Legal reform should be accompanied by institutional guarantees for impartial investigations and visible protections for reporters. ”

Justice (R) Zia Perwez

Chairman, Transparency International -Pakistan



ICMA: Digital governance is often presented as a solution to corruption, yet weak implementation can create new loopholes. What safeguards are essential to ensure the digitalization genuinely enhances transparency rather than replicating old inefficiencies in new forms?

Justice (R) Zia Perwez: Pakistan has made encouraging progress through digital initiatives such as NADRA's computerized identity management system, the Federal Board of Revenue's Point of Sale (FBR POS) integration for real-time tax reporting, Pakistan Revenue Automation Limited (PRAL) digital tax administration systems, e-procurement, e-office platforms, the Pakistan Citizen's Portal, and the digitization of land records, tax filing, and business registration. These initiatives have improved efficiency and reduced opportunities for discretionary decision-making in several public services.

However, digitalization alone cannot eliminate corruption. To ensure that technology genuinely enhances transparency rather than replicating existing inefficiencies, digital reforms must be supported by

strong governance frameworks, including transparent procurement, cybersecurity and data protection, interoperability between government systems, public access to information, effective grievance redress mechanisms, and independent oversight. Accelerating integrated, citizen-centric digital services will improve public trust, facilitate investment, and promote sustainable economic growth.

ICMA: Despite 66% of Pakistanis reporting no bribe payments last year, provincial disparities remain stark. What does this uneven corruption trend reveal about governance capacity across provinces, and how can accountability frameworks be harmonized to ensure equitable standards nationwide?

Justice (R) Zia Perwez: Transparency International Pakistan's National Corruption Perception Survey (NCPS) 2025 found that 66% of respondents reported not paying a bribe during the previous year, which is an encouraging progress with regard to good governance in public service delivery.

However, the survey also reveals significant provincial variations, indicating that governance capacity, service delivery, and institutional oversight remain uneven across the country. These disparities underscore the need to strengthen accountability mechanisms consistently across all provinces through effective implementation of procurement laws, Right to Information legislation, digital governance, citizen feedback mechanisms, and performance monitoring, while encouraging provinces to adopt successful governance practices from one another.

Equally important is improving public awareness of corruption reporting mechanisms. Citizens can only contribute effectively to accountability when they know where and how to report corruption, are confident that complaints will be handled fairly, and see tangible action taken in response.

ICMA: Whistleblower protection remains underdeveloped in Pakistan. How can robust legal frameworks and cultural shifts be fostered to encourage disclosures without fear of retaliation?

Justice (R) Zia Perwez: Whistleblower protection is one of the most effective tools for detecting and preventing corruption, but it can only succeed when individuals are able to report wrongdoing without fear of retaliation. As a State Party to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), Pakistan is committed to strengthening legal protections for persons who report corruption in good faith. The recent approval of the Whistleblower Protection and Vigilance Commission Bill, 2025 by the Senate Standing Committee on Law and Justice is a welcome development and reflects growing recognition of the importance of whistleblower protection. However, the bill has remained pending before the National Assembly of Pakistan for nearly a year.

Transparency International Pakistan has consistently advocated for stronger whistleblower protection. It is important that bill is passed through the parliament. This will build a culture where reporting corruption is regarded as a public service, rather than a personal risk.

ICMA: A majority of respondents remain unaware of official channels for reporting corruption. What does this gap reveal about the state-citizen disconnect, and how can institutional design and communication strategies be restructured to make anti-corruption mechanisms accessible and credible?

Justice (R) Zia Perwez: Transparency International Pakistan's National Corruption Perception Survey (NCPS) 2025 found that 70% of respondents remain

“
Transparency International Pakistan's National Corruption Perception Survey (NCPS) 2025 found that 66% of respondents reported not paying a bribe during the previous year, which is an encouraging progress with regard to good governance in public service delivery. However, the survey also reveals significant provincial variations, indicating that governance capacity, service delivery, and institutional oversight remain uneven across the country.
”

unaware of the appropriate government institutions for reporting corruption. This reflects not only a communication gap but also a broader disconnect between citizens and public institutions. When people do not know where to report corruption, or lack confidence that their complaints will be acted upon, they are less likely to seek accountability.

Addressing this challenge requires more than awareness campaigns. Public institutions should establish simple, accessible, and citizen-centric reporting mechanisms, supported by digital platforms, toll-free helplines, and clearly defined grievance redress procedures. Equally important is ensuring that complaints are acknowledged promptly, investigated impartially, and resolved within reasonable timeframes. Transparency in reporting outcomes and regular public disclosure of institutional performance can further strengthen public confidence.

The Editorial Board thanks Justice (R) Zia Perwez, Chairman of Transparency International-Pakistan, for sparing his precious time to give an exclusive interview for Chartered Management Accountant Journal.