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**Such relentless misgovernance**

In my column on Jan 1, I asked: “What has the PTI done for Pakistan during its time in power?” My thesis was that after the hype created by the media and ‘patriotic uncles’ sharing posts on Facebook and Whatsapp, the PTI has failed to deliver for the people. Here I list some of its broken promises.

On the evening of July 25, 2018, as results were coming in, the computer program of the Election Commission of Pakistan that tabulated the results, called the RTS, stopped working.

For the first time, the top leaders of four of the largest parties were running from Karachi. The PTI was declared a winner against PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif in Baldia. The PML-N had commissioned a poll prior to the elections, which showed it had 42 percent support with the JUI at number two at 17 percent. The PTI was at number four, behind the MQM.

The PPP’s Bilawal Bhutto Zardari had the upper hand in a Lyari race where his only real competitor was the TLP. And here too the PTI won, beating the PPP and TLP. In the Lines Area and Soldier Bazar seat, the MQM’s then convener Farooq Sattar lost to the PTI, even to the surprise of the PTI’s own people. The only party leader to win from Karachi was Imran Khan.

After the PTI was designated as the largest party, Khan addressed the nation and said he would not live in the PM House because, being the leader of a poor country, he would be embarrassed to live in a palatial home. He chose a smaller home in the same compound but has now, I suppose, overcome his embarrassment and lives in his own 300-kanal (150,000 yards) estate, and commutes daily by helicopter.

The new government promised to convert the PM House into a university and an event even took place commemorating that decision. Yet it still hasn’t happened. Nor have the provincial governor houses turned into libraries.

The government claimed it would bring about austerity and reduce expenses. In fact, though, the government’s current expenditures, including the PM’s Office and the Presidency’s budgets, have been increasing faster than the inflation for the last two years. True to form, the PTI tried to show, falsely, that the PM Office expenses have decreased – by excluding certain incurred expenses that were counted as part of the PM Office budget in prior years.

The current government promised it would double revenues. In fact, in spite of rampant inflation, in two years it did not even cross the revenues the PML-N had collected in its last year. Tax-to GDP-ratio, which the PML-N had taken to 11.2 percent has been reduced to 9.3 percent.

The PTI said it would increase exports. After a huge devaluation you would think it would at least succeed in this. You’d be wrong. Exports during the first two years of the current government were below the PML-N government’s last year number. In the first half of this year, our exports are five percent below last year’s level.

The PTI was critical of previous (democratic) governments for borrowing and said it would reduce borrowings. Instead, it has in two years added 40 percent of all debt incurred in Pakistan’s history. If we give free electricity, gas, sugar and atta to every Pakistani (including all homes, factories, hospitals, schools, etc) for the next four years, the expense would still be less than the debt this government has incurred in just two years. The reasons are the history’s highest budget deficits in the last two years, and doubling of interest rates to incentivise hot money investors. This destructive increase in interest rates crippled our manufacturing and caused huge losses in jobs.

The PTI famously promised to provide one crore jobs. Since the party has come to power, unemployment has increased by over 40 lakhs and more than one crore people have been forced into abject poverty. Millions of more children go to sleep hungry than before. We were also told that the PTI would build 50 lakh homes. Not one home has been built.

This government promised to keep inflation low. Yet today food inflation in Pakistan is setting new records. The steep price increases in minor crops, including vegetables, is due to the PTI’s policies that have impoverished smallholders thereby reducing their ability to grow vegetables, etc. This curtailed supply of food items has caused the prices to increase.

Of course, the price gouging in some commodities, particularly sugar and wheat, is due to corruption. The FIA’s sugar inquiry report must be disheartening for PTI supporters who are left wondering how a party that campaigned on an anti-corruption platform gave into greed so quickly, as if corruption is what it came to do.

The cruel increase (up to 300 percent) in the prices of medicine can only be explained by greed. Unfortunately, this rapacity directly hurts the sick and the poor every time they go to buy lifesaving medicines.

It is not greed but complete lunacy, however, that explains the entirely unjustified destruction of our civil aviation industry and PIA’s reputation. What possessed a minister to give a flawed and incorrect statement about Pakistani pilots and ensure that PIA now cannot fly to most international destinations boggles the mind. His first sticking to the statement and then backtracking from it, after it was too late, has hurt our national airline no end. On top of that, prime minister's closest adviser decided to shut down Roosevelt hotel, PIA’s most valuable asset. That hotel is now under threat of being seized by a company that has won a case against Pakistan, just as a PIA plane was seized in Malaysia a few days back. The sorry saga of this government is relentless.

Malaysia is a friendly nation, but upset at us when our prime minister, after first promising, didn’t show up at a summit held there. The fact that we publicly explained the prime minister’s absence due to pressure from Saudi Arabia meant that we made the Saudis upset as well. So, we managed the unique feat of upsetting both sides of a tussle at the same time. Saudi authorities are now asking for their money back, the Emiratis aren’t giving us visas, and even Iran isn’t a big fan of ours. We have managed to have sour relations with Islamic countries of all stripes.

Khan tweeted how he wanted to see Narendra Modi win elections in India. Why he would tweet his preferences in the elections of a foreign country is beyond me but in the event his wish came true. Modi won the elections and promptly annexed occupied Kashmir. We couldn’t even get the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to call a protest meeting. But we did rename Kashmir Highway in Islamabad as Srinagar Highway.

Because the PTI was declared winner of 14 NA seats from Karachi, it announced a grand package of Rs165 billion for Karachi. No money was actually released. When Karachi was inundated in 2020 after heavy rains, the central government announced a grander package of Rs1100 billion. Again, in almost a year no money has been released. But, of course, the package is very handsome.

Finally, the PTI’s central claim was that it will end corruption. Transparency International just issued a report that shows what we know: corruption has increased under this government.

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