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**Where’s the change?**

States that don’t spend on their people don’t progress. The real development lies in uplifting the people. Metro and mega projects do not make a nation great.

We shall eliminate corruption, reform the police, wipe out cronyism, run a massive literacy campaign, ensure free health treatment, reduce the size of the cabinet, turn state-run concerns into profit making entities, make the country self-sufficient, break the begging bowl, protect minorities and ensure smooth and speedy justice for the underprivileged. These are not lines spoken by any Bollywood hero, but solemn promises made by the Kaptaan either amidst thunderous applause in large political gathering or on serious TV talk shows a few years ago. But reforms are still being anxiously awaited and the promises have yet to see materialization. The assurances held out to the masses are yet to be implemented.

Let us begin with the economy that is on the verge of imploding. We are going around the world with the begging bowl despite tall claims that we will prefer suicide over kneeling down before the international monitory institutions. Nawaz, Shaukat Aziz and Junejo at least implemented IMF and World Bank orders after obtaining loans. But it seems that the protector of our national honour is desperate to follow the instructions of global financial institutions’ mandarins even before securing any loan.

The PTI chief had claimed that people would start stuffing the national coffer with taxes once a pious brigade with people of impeccable character was voted into power. But the Federal Board of Revenue seems to have fallen short of achieving its tax target. The whopping shortfall of Rs318 billion is likely to be met by imposing more taxes or making a phenomenal rise in petrol, gas and other commodities’ prices. Even the ‘patriotic overseas Pakistanis’ failed to shower bounties. So, more troubles and more taxes for a common citizen are looming large over the horizon. This is what awaits the hapless masses that are already burdened by inflated utility bills, skyrocketing fuel prices and rampant unemployment.

To cure these economic ills, the pundits of the corporate world have suggested to the government the panacea of privatization, liberalization and deregulation. PM Khan must surely have been shocked by this unscrupulous solution because during the election campaign he would brag about the magic wand that would turn our industrial and commercial entities into profit-making concerns; according to such promises, after the PTI had been voted into power these concerns would spew nothing but revenue and profits.

Khan had rightly pointed out during his election trail that when former PM Nawaz Sharif laid his hands on state-run companies, they witnessed huge losses but when his miraculous hands touched his own factories, they multiplied their wealth. Khan made solemn promises to turn these loss-making state concerns into profit-making entities. But now the mandarins of the private sector have come up with the mantra of privatizing state-owned concerns. Dozens have been placed on the list. So, what about the promises of turning them into profit-making entities?

The rhetoric of creating millions of jobs or building millions of houses has not been translated into reality either. The abject condition of the Peshawar Metro indicates that such promises should not be taken very seriously. Instead of creating any job, the government stands accused of rendering tens of thousands people jobless in the name of anti-encroachment. Hundreds of small hotels, restaurants, shops and thatched food outlets have been demolished. More than 74,000 posts are lying vacant in federal departments only but only God knows as to why they are not filled by a government that came to power in the name of giving jobs and eliminating unemployment.

Instead of providing any job, this government is likely to render more government employees jobless by privatizing the state-run concerns. The workers of Radio Pakistan, State Life, Pakistan Post Office and a myriad of other government departments are already worried about the future of their jobs as the sword of uncertainty created by the announcement of privatization hovers over their heads. All governments claim that privatization will not render workers jobless but from the sell-off of the Karachi Electric Supply Corporation to the denationalization of banks, every surrender of the state to private capital proved disastrous for employees.

Such unemployment has a catastrophic bearing on health, education and other basic amenities of life that Khan talked about during his election campaign. One wonders how an unemployed person – whether he was rendered jobless because of the anti-encroachment drive or possible privatization – will feed his children. The majority of the people are living in times where even water, the most essential commodities for life, has to be bought. How can an unemployed person feed his family, afford education of his children or pay for medical bills? Would such a situation not create more stunted children that PM Imran Khan spoke about when he came into power?

The ever expansion of the federal cabinet also flies in the face of Khan’s tall claims; he would say that his team of ministers would not exceed 20. The number of ministers, advisers and special assistants has been swelling since the government was sworn in. Khan’s detractors claim that every department seems to have been stuffed with his cronies.

As far as the matter of speedy justice is concerned, it seems to have received no attention from the government. Thousands of posts are lying vacant in the police, judiciary and other departments. Filling such posts could be one of the ways to ensure timely justice but it seems the Tehreek-e-Insaf does not have enough time to ponder over these petty matters that affect millions of people, and which is causing a huge backlog of cases in courts.

The ideal police reforms seem to have been buried with the resignation of Nasir Durrani from the post of the Punjab police reform body while the concern of the government about health, education, environment, sanitation, women development and children welfare can be gauged from the amount that has been allocated for these crucial departments in the federal budget and the budgets of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab.

The coming months, or possibly years, are not going to be rosy for the people either as the government of change is planning to further increase the prices of energy, withdraw subsidies, impose new taxes and raise the cost of doing business to new heights. The reluctance of the UAE to help out Pakistan, the possible ballooning of import bills and the reports about Pakistan’s financial needs touching $50 billion in two years offer a gloomy picture of the coming times. So, the much-vaunted change is not likely to be in sight any time soon.

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