**[Hundred days on](https://www.dawn.com/news/1841829/hundred-days-on)**

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LURCHING from one controversy to another, the PML-N has marked 100 days in power. To ensure accountability and public welfare, one must regularly review the outcomes of all regimes via a sound framework.

The one I use says that the quality of outcomes of a regime depends on the quality of its strategies which, in turn, depend on the quality of its team. Outcomes occur in five domains (economic, political, social, security and external) and functions (legislation, policy, projects, services and institutional reform). This comprehensive framework allows analysis, while its cause and effect links give it predictive powers: if a set-up can’t present a quality team or sound strategies, its outcomes will be poor. In fact, by looking at the team, one can predict accurately, even within months, how it will do in five years.

Seeing its weak team, I had predicted in 2018 that the PTI wouldn’t deliver. My following reviews using this lens confirmed the accuracy of the prediction. Unluckily, the same is true for the PML-N. No set-up can show major outcomes in just 100 days. But by then, it must at least present a compelling vision, policies and a competent team, especially given the nature of crises we face. That this hasn’t happened in three months is cause for alarm. And if it doesn’t happen in six months, it may be cause to start writing its obituary predictively.

The cabinet, even in critical areas like the economy, interior, law, foreign affairs and social sectors, largely has inept persons, reflecting the demands of powerful forces like the establishment, various Noonie factions, and allies. One struggles to find persons with serious expertise in the ministries assigned to them. The finance minister is the new kid on the block. But though better than Ishaq Dar, he lacks the serious macroeconomic, IMF and public finance credentials needed to deal with our economic crisis. Also, the finance minister largely deals with fiscal matters. To upgrade the economy, one needs competent persons in investment, commerce, IT and industry posts, which are largely filled with inept political appointees. The icing on the cake, the prime minister, shows no ability to graduate beyond his federally irrelevant projects skills.

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The team’s gaps show in the lack of sound vision and strategy in all five domains and functions. Reflecting its lack of a sound economic vision, the recent budget does badly on key criteria, such as cutting wasteful outlays and subsidies, identifying new and equitable sources of direct taxes, encouraging durable growth in productive sectors and exports, and ensuring equity. It may deliver temporary stability and an IMF deal. But by perpetuating the root causes of our economic ills, it is laying the ground for future economic crises.

Politically, we need civilian sway, political legitimacy and civil rights. The PML-N lacks control over key federal areas such economy, defence, interior and foreign affairs, having meekly given them to the establishment. Its mandate is rigged, apparently even more than the PTI’s. Under the establishment’s push, it is taking harsh steps to curtail civil rights, such as cracking down on media, X, the opposition and dissidents, even more so than the PTI. One sees no legislative agenda to deal with our constitutional and political challenges.

The security situation is precarious, with militant groups in KP and Balochistan and criminal gangs in Sindh and Punjab. Socially, extremism is rampant, resulting in a horrendous situation for women, children and religious minorities. Yet, bey­o­­nd empty stern warnings from both Pindi and Islamabad after every incident, one sees little vision or capacity to address the root causes of insecurity or extremism in any region.

Externally, ties with major powers like China, the West and Gulf states have improved a bit, but without creating major opportunities to help us economically. Both China and the Gulf states seem reluctant to invest heavily in Pakistan, given the state’s lack of vision and the failure to inspire confidence, as was true for the PTI.

Unless the PML-N co-opts able hands, there is little chance of it giving major positive outcomes in five years even if it lasts that long. So, as with the PTI, the establishment’s new hybrid experiment may fail. The 2008-18 era, when it had withdrawn partially from politics, had yielded some political evolution, which may have improved governance too had it been allowed to flourish. But its post-2017 forays have wiped off all those gains and pushed us back by decades. Civilian sway and political legitimacy remain our only way forward, and even that is a long route to progress. But the establishment shows no signs of accepting that.

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