[M Zeb Khan](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/m-zeb-khan)

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**No more excuses**

Last week, Prime Minister Imran Khan lamented that change of government in Pakistan every five years was tragic for setting long-term goals.

According to his assessment, almost every incumbent government, with its eyes on winning the next elections, prefers to finance projects that have high visibility and that could translate into quick political dividends. This short-termism, in essence, is the real enemy of high-impact mega projects.

What PM IK does not understand or perhaps does not want to talk about, after coming to power, is the complex nature of economic development and how it can be achieved by implementing different models. During election campaigns, he came across as a staunch advocate of democracy and attributed economic and social development in the West to good governance (democracy). He would vehemently criticise monarchy and dictatorship as the root cause of all ills in the Muslim world.

Now he seems to have changed his mind, partly because of his obsession with the Chinese model of economic growth, nostalgia for Pakistan’s DoD (Decade of Development) of the 60s, and mainly because of his inability to deliver on the promises he had packaged in his cherished slogan ‘Naya Pakistan’.

After more than two years in office, the PM is only looking for new excuses (if by chance the previous governments escape the bullet) rather than ensuring structural reforms in collaboration with opposition parties.

To be sure, neither can the Chinese model be replicated in Pakistan nor the DoD relived due to space and time problems. China has made tremendous economic progress thanks to its unique model that combines good features of both capitalism and socialism with constant focus on modernization of its bureaucracy. More importantly, China has always tried to avoid unnecessary brinkmanship with near and far adversaries. Despite political and strategic problems with India, the US, Japan and others, it has actively developed economic relations to the extent that none of them can afford to ignore China.

PM IK’s frequent allusion to a Chinese proverb that ‘the fish rots from the head’ has proved wrong in Pakistan. Transparency International’s recent report reveals that corruption has gone up in various government departments under a leader whose financial integrity is widely acclaimed to be unquestionable. This only reinforces one’s belief in institution-building rather than banking on any one individual – no matter how powerful or honest he may be. Systemic problems cannot be solved through slogans.

For most poor and oppressed people, systematic injustice is a foregone conclusion. In most cases of murder, rape, and robbery, an FIR is registered against ‘unknown knowns’ when the victim fails to grease the palms of the SHO sahib.

After investigation, which too is extremely tedious, it is the court where one can find everything but justice. The lawyer and his munshi (scribe) keep the case alive until they are sure that the client has sold out everything he had in his possession. This costly legal system denies people their most basic rights; they then have no other option but to take law in their hands in utter desperation and as such crime breeds crime.

And healthcare? Public hospitals are overcrowded in cities and deficient in villages. Private hospitals are unaffordable. Faced with the problem of poor quality and poverty, an individual with some chronic disease ends up with quacks and fake pirs for the rest of his/her life. These clever imposters assure the ‘hopeless and helpless’ patient about the efficacy of their treatment. Some may blame this on a superstitious culture but it is really the outcome of an expensive healthcare system.

We surely do not know much of Imran Khan’s compulsions and constraints but what he says and does is not what was expected from him given his long-drawn political struggle for change. Perhaps we deluded ourselves by expecting him to do the impossible or perhaps he portrayed himself as larger than life to do wonders in days and weeks to fix all state institutions with a magic lamp.

In either case, the outcome so far has largely been depressing. Instead of wasting his energy on fighting the opposition and wanting more time beyond five years, he should leave behind a robust, efficient and credible system of governance.

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