* [Why is there still a question mark on this government’s performance?](https://nation.com.pk/22-Jan-2020/why-is-there-still-a-question-mark-on-this-government-s-performance%22%20%5Ct%20%22_new)

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Prior to General Elections 2018, the then federal and provincial governments were busy painting the good picture. In pursuit of portraying the much touted ‘stabilized economy’ through doctored image of fiscal policies in the center and so-called delivery mode in Punjab, former rulers have been hiding all the dirt under the carpet. The glitz and glamour of the ostentatious projects adversely affected the national kitty. So much so that the financial and development cycle was about to collapse, and system was at the brink of bankruptcy.

This bankruptcy did not mean financial meltdown alone but it meant, no funds for availability of medicines at the hospitals, no funds to pay teachers at government schools, no funds to maintain law & order, in a nutshell no funds to operate anything in the country.

Fiscal deficit had soared to 6.6% of the GDP, the current account deficit had peaked at $20billion and 6.1% of the GDP and public debt had increased to approximately PKR 30 trillion. Foreign exchange reserves of the country were depleting at an accelerated rate, the value of the foreign exchange rate was set artificially, and inflation was starting to affect the lives of millions of Pakistanis. At the same, structural weaknesses in the economy remained unaddressed: a chronically weak tax administration, a difficult business environment, inefficient and loss-making state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and a large informal economy. During this toughest period of the history, PTI formed government in 2018. The ongoing crisis did not let these difficult circumstances deter the government and PTI immediately started taking measures to stabilize these macroeconomic imbalances, including but not limited to IMF and seeking collaborations with brother countries.

The difficult steps taken by the government in the previous year and agreement with the IMF have started to bear fruits: After failing to show a current account surplus for the past four years, Pakistan, in October 2019, posted a $99 million current account surplus.

The current account deficit in the balance of payments reached a peak of almost $20 billion in 2017-18. It underwent a downward trend and reached to $13.6 billion in 2018-19. The current account fell further by 74% in Jul-Nov 19 and is expected to remain at $6-8 billion. FDI increased 78% in the first five months of current fiscal year and the economy is expected to grow by 3.5% in the next year. Exports which had posted negative growth from 2013-18 and had declined as a share of GDP from 13% to 9%, increased in volume by 12% in FY18-19. With the introduction of business-friendly policies, Pakistan’s exports reached an all-time high of Rs. 315 billion in October 2019. The exchange rate - which is for the first time ever, market driven - is at Rs155 against the dollar, figures from the past months reflect it’s stability.

While the center led by Prime Minister Imran Khan is successfully maintaining macroeconomics for inclusive development throughout the country, the province of Punjab is setting an example for other provinces to follow. Punjab, where the PTI government campaigned on delivering regional equalization, inclusive and compassionate growth, and institutional reforms, the PTI government, nominated the Provincial Chief Minister (CM) from South Punjab: the honorable Sardar Usman Buzdar. Even in this difficult economic climate, the provincial government under his leadership has been able to deliver reforms and has started new initiatives which directly have a positive impact on the lives of the common citizen.

Under the leadership of CM Buzdar, the PTI government introduced over 30 bills in the provincial assembly and have successfully passed the citizen centric bills to empower the common man, such as, The Punjab Right to Public Services Act, The Local Government Act 2019, The Punjab Domestic Workers Act and The Punjab Workers Welfare Fund Act. In addition to landmark legislation, the CM also launched a complaint center which reports directly to the CM and his team, to date this complaint center has received more than 82,105 complaints and has a resolution rate of over 95%. The system gives common man a direct access to CM which is what PTI had promised before coming to power i.e. open-door policy and eradication of bureaucratic barriers.

In order to achieve sustainable growth which is based on data-driven policies, the PTI government has introduced the Punjab Growth Strategy 2018-2023 (PGS) and the Punjab Spatial Strategy (PSS). To ensure that Punjab development agenda is backed by data, the government had already made the PGS part of the ADP formulation process and plans to induct the PSS into the ADP formulation process by start of next fiscal year. A result of PGS becoming part of the ADP process are the Punjab government’s enterprise loan schemes, for Small-Medium Enterprises and Startups, these schemes worth over Rs 9 billion aim to directly unleash the potential of Punjab’s entrepreneurs and create over half a million jobs. In conjunction with these loans, the government, with the aim of decreasing transactional costs of doing business launched a business registration portal and one window portal to facilitate local enterprises within the provinces` industrial estates as well as foreign investors. In line with the aim of empowering the common man, the Punjab government has placed particular importance on youth’s skills development. At the start of December 2019, the government launched Hunar-mand Naujawan, which effectively doubles the capacity of Punjab’s biggest skills provider, TEVTA. Through the program 97000 more students will be able to enroll into TEVT institutes. Government aims to boost the current capacity of training two hundred thousand youth annually to a million per annum. The government is also establishing three new technical universities, mainly in rural cities of Punjab, with the aim of increasing access to quality and market driven technical education for the youth of those cities which were previously ignored. To facilitate Punjab’s farmers, without whom the economy would shudder to a halt, the government has launched an innovative and transparent e-credit scheme, through which the government disbursed Rs.989 million to 123,764 farmers from July-Nov 2019. A safety net for small and subsistence farmers was introduced, which benefited 284,957 farmers through insurance payments worth Rs. 495 million in FY 18-19. To ensure that small farmers are taking advantage of government’s valuable subsidy schemes, this government is launching an ‘Agri-Smart Card’. This card will make accessing subsidies for small farmers significantly easier and will guarantee that only intended farmers are benefiting from state subsidies. In Northern Punjab, the government has initiated the 117-km Jalalpur Canal, a project worth more than Rs. 32 billion, it shall bring 170,000 acres of arable land under irrigation and shall facilitate 400,000 farmers in 80 villages of Khushab and Jehlum.

In line with the agenda of delivering inclusive and compassionate growth, the government has taken first steps towards Universal Health Coverage by launching Sehat Cards for 36 districts of Punjab, covering 7.2 million families. This initiative is providing a buffer against adverse health shocks by providing underprivileged citizens access to free secondary and tertiary care.

No amount of growth is inclusive or compassionate, if its dividends are not enjoyed by the masses in an equitable manner. Unfortunately, this was case for Punjab under its previous governments. Historically, previous governments have spent huge sums uplifting only the few big cities, while neglecting millions of people in South Punjab. As a result of these unequitable spending patterns and growth spheres, people of South Punjab lagged behind the rest of Punjab on almost all indicators of development. PTI government campaigned on the promise of undoing these historical injustices by taking affirmative action for the uplift of South Punjab - In an unprecedented move, CM Buzdar ring-fenced the allocated development funds for three divisions (DG Khan, Multan and Bahawalpur) of South Punjab, covering 11 districts and allocated 35% of the budget for South Punjab. In pursuit of catering the communication needs of neglected areas of the province, government launched Naya Pakistan Manzalain Asan Program through which extremely neglected rural roads will rehabilitated and the apportionment of funds among the districts is being done based on HDI. Other initiatives include, Greater Thal Canal, which will irrigate 294,110 acres of previously uncultivated land, out of the 5 new mother and childcare hospitals being built in the province, 3 are being developed in South Punjab. In addition to the mother and childcare hospitals, 4 new state-of-the-art hospitals are being built in three different districts of South Punjab. To unleash the potential of South Punjab, the CM is developing Disease Free Zones for livestock. To modernize the urban centers of South Punjab, a new waste management company has been created for DG Khan. Lastly, under a completely novel policy initiative 10,800 schools in different districts of South Punjab are being solarized.

To ensure that the state institutions work for everyone in the same manner - are transparent in their mechanisms and there is no fiscal leakage - the Punjab Government has taken upon itself to reform certain key institutions. Chief among these is the Punjab Land Records Authority (PLRA). Under the CM’s vision PLRA is opening 115 new Arazi centers, these centers are aimed at eliminating corrupt archaic Patwari Nizaam for management of land records. PLRA has also introduced a system for online fard and online payment of Government dues, in addition to this, access to digital land records has been provided to all banks for issuance of loans. Steps have been taken to transform the education sector by introducing e-transfer of teachers. This program makes transfer of teachers transparent, accountable and efficient by minimizing human interaction. In the time period from 2008 to 2018, the previous government created 56 Public Sector Companies (PSCs) with the stated goal of delivering client centered services to customers. However, the reality of these PSCs was in stark contrast to the stated goal of PSCs. Therefore, PTI’s government, immediately started a review of these companies, which found that PSCs were lacking even the basics of a good corporate governance system. After completing the review of PSCs, the government has decided to wind-up unsalvageable PSCs. Moving forward, the government plans to ensure that those PSCs which are continuing their operations, do so in such a manner that PSCs are able to deliver on their visions and objections, while maintaining a sustainable revenue stream.

In a short spam of time, this government has been able to stabilize the economy, deliver on its promises of inclusive and compassionate growth and has taken irreversible steps to uplift the people of South Punjab, then why is there still a question mark on this government’s performance?