[**Struggling midway**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1606315/struggling-midway)

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THE PTI’s term is half over. So how has it done? The quality of a regime’s outcome depends on its actions whose quality, in turn, relies on its team’s quality. Outcomes include political, economic and foreign ones. Actions are in five governance areas: legislation, policy, institutional reform, projects and service delivery. Only major work in the first three areas gives big change but its fruits reach masses mainly via the last two. However, if done without the first three, the two give poor results.

Seeing the PTI’s weak team, I had said earlier that it can’t keep its big promises. The team largely lacks skill. Some of the experience comes from failed actors of the past. New electables, allies or unelected advisers who lack party loyalty dominate the cabinet. The leadership’s claimed honesty helps little. KP and Punjab have set-ups run by an inept centre. Local bodies were dissolved.

The government’s work in the three key areas is the weakest. Despite passing many laws, it has yet to give transformative ones like the PPP’s devolution or the PML-N’s Fata merger laws, or major economic policies like the PML-N’s CPEC. Its main policy is on construction, not industry, which may cause bubbles and non-transparency. Police, court, tax and state enterprise reforms are on hold. Frequent political transfers have hurt institutions. The bureaucratic reforms unveiled are largely seen as weak and education reforms as regressive. But IPP contract reforms may yet work.

Halfway into the PTI’s term, true change is still not visible.

Even the government’s own key change claims are on projects and services. The sole big project is the ‘billion trees’, which may give long-run gains. But no project is giving much-needed quick economic boost. CPEC and Karachi are stuck. Peshawar BRT had big delays, cost overruns and technical hitches. In service delivery, the government claims big pluses on the Covid-19 response, the Sehat scheme and Ehsaas. In fact, our Covid-19 death rate is near average regionally. However, cash relief via BISP was apt.

The Sehat scheme is a good one but has issues too. It covered 51pc KP families by 2016 and recently announced the extension of health coverage to all KP residents. Given high disease rates, this means access/ supply issues. The insurer must pay up to Rs1 million per family yearly in expenses against Rs2,849 premiums from KP. Less lavish market plans start at Rs50,000 given cost realities and small insured pools. But the captive state insurer may go broke despite a large pool if usage spikes.

The PTI calls Ehsaas a big step-up on BISP with 140 initiatives. Its website shows eight actual programmes (sans one-off Covid relief). Two BISP ones still make up the bulk of its budget. Langar and ration programmes have only data portals for private entities. Amdan, Loan, Nashonuma and Scholarship programmes, the only new funded ones that partly build on BISP, may do well but are still too new to be judged. Unclear website data hinders review. Without work on the key governance areas, such work may be of poor quality. So without public hospital reforms Sehat patients may still get poor services.

Given weak actions, outcomes fall below pre-2018 levels on dollar GDP and per capita income, GDP growth, inflation, jobs, tax revenue, fiscal deficit, interest rate, exchange rate, foreign reserves, exports, foreign investment, debt and poverty, arguably more due to government actions than Covid-19 or past-era mismanagement. Outcomes excel pre-2018 levels on trade balance and remittances. But the former has choked GDP growth and is again in the red.

The recent claim of economic spike is iffy. We fell on global indices such as the Corruption Per­­ception. Like past regimes, some media reports say an inept government has cost billions. Its mandate is iffy given EU-alleged 2018 pre-rigging. Some say it thrives on establishment crutches whose sway has grown. There are big curbs on opposition, media and civil society. Ties with key allies (eg. the US and Saudi Arabia) have cooled. Aims to nab ‘looters’ and looted money have failed.

It is evident it has done worse on the these outcome axes than even the inept PPP and PML-N, which gave major devolution and Fata merger laws, CPEC and tax policy, big power, road and transit projects, BISP; more political freedom, the first civilian transition with clean polls and hand-over; and less deep state sway. Terrorism fell. Foreign ties and economic indices were better. Despite many gaps we were slowly going ahead. But the slogan of *tabdeeli* has mainly been U-turns and reversals. Given the weak team, I again predict a weak second half. The blame goes to the PTI team and captain but also to those who fixed the pitch.

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*Published in Dawn, February 9th, 2021*