**Performance scorecard**

Farah Yamin Khan

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The writer is a former lawyer and civil servant.

In August 2018, as the rest of the country celebrated the possibility of a ‘Naya Pakistan’ with the PTI taking the reins in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and the centre, Sindh continued with the not-so-new Pakistan People’s Party (PPP). Would a second consecutive term for the PPP-led provincial government mean continuity and predictability of both the good and the bad? Would Sindh be any different this time?

If there was one certainty, it was that the bar would be set higher. To prove its mettle, the Sindh government would need to showcase visible change, particularly in the urban localities of the province. A key priority, therefore, was Karachi’s law and order, mandatory to salvage the investment climate in the country’s commercial hub. Other challenges for the provincial government included infrastructure development and service delivery. There was also the daunting task of Sindh asserting itself for an egalitarian share of resources from the federal pool. Not to mention, navigating an uncharted and potentially rocky relationship with the debutant PTI government at the centre.

Fast forward three-and-a-quarter years to today and the answer to Sindh government’s performance comes as an instinctual black or white response, emanating from partisan political allegiances instead of an impartial evaluation of performance on key metrics.

Zooming in on statistics for ‘crime’ and ‘safety’ for Karachi is important. According to Numbeo’s global crime index, in 2014 Karachi was ranked as the sixth most dangerous city in the world, recording a “very high” crime index. Although in 2018 Karachi improved to become the 50th city in this ranking, the crime index at 62.2 still remained “very high”. Post 2018, a downward trend in crime rates contributed to Karachi attaining the 130th position in 2021 global rankings, with the crime index at a “moderate level” of 53.39. Today, Numbeo’s Current Crime Index reports Karachi having a lower crime index and better safety than both Delhi and Dhaka.

Although a lot still needs to be done, the Sindh government deserves credit for certain measures. From 2018 to 2021, the budget allocation for law and order in the province increased by 20 percent, causing the Home Department’s Rs100 billion budget of 2018-19 to reach Rs119.97 billion in the current fiscal year. To enhance capacity, a significant portion of this budget has been allocated to the provincial police for purchase of arms and ammunition, training and capacity building, transport and fleets, and introducing state-of-the-art DNA testing.

To empower citizens and bring the police under direct scrutiny of the civil society, in 2019 the Sindh cabinet promulgated laws establishing safety commissions across all districts of Sindh including a central Public Safety Commission. The messaging from the provincial chief executive has also sought to set the right tone for the police, reiterating that the ‘police is a service and not a force.’

Over the last three years, the CM’s leadership helped facilitate progress on security issues through Apex Committee meetings, which regularly brought together all law-enforcement stakeholders. During the current government’s tenure, a harmonious working relationship between provincial heads of the Sindh Police, Rangers and intelligence agencies has paved the way for adopting a holistic, proactive and candid approach in taking up security issues, particularly those pertaining to the threat of terrorism. Owing to close monitoring of security plans by the top leadership, a marked reduction in terrorist attacks has been registered across the province.

In November 2018, timely intervention by the Sindh Police and Rangers led to averting a terrorist attack on the Chinese Consulate. In June 2020, another major attack was foiled on the Pakistan Stock Exchange. On both occasions, a prompt and professional response by all law-enforcement agencies resulted in averting a massive loss of lives. In July this year, the Sindh Police successfully arrested the culprit for the rape and murder of a six-year-old girl from Karachi’s Korangi area. To bridge the citizen-police trust deficit, success stories like these definitely need to be replicated and highlighted.

The relative improvement in safety has witnessed several positive externalities including the return of cricket to Karachi. In 2020, it hosted the South African cricket team, and the crowd-pulling PSL final was also played in the National Stadium. These successful events paved the way for the West Indies women’s cricket team’s recent tour, and the series currently underway between the West Indies and Pakistan men’s teams.

Where the Sindh government deserves credit, the leadership of the PPP must also be lauded for persistently confronting the PTI-led government’s decision to engage with extremist organisations. While the leadership of other major parties remains mum and turns a blind eye to the government’s talks with the TTP – a decision that will impact internal security, discredit our fight against terrorism, and tarnish Pakistan’s image globally – Chairman PPP Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has vociferously condemned the central government’s decision to engage with banned outfits, going as far as to state that any agreement between the government and the TTP cannot be deemed legitimate without parliament’s consent. In light of the recent Sialkot tragedy, building a strong narrative to tackle extremism becomes even more important. It is the PPP’s categorical and unequivocal stance vis-a-viz banned outfits and its secular ideology that is reflected in the Sindh government’s policies to weed out terrorism from the land of saints and sufis.

Besides law and order, Sindh has fared well in enabling public-private partnerships. In 2018, Sindh was ranked as the sixth best in the Infrascope Report by the Economist’s Intelligence Unit, evidence of the provincial government’s inclusive business outlook as well as the private sector’s trust in the government. Moreover, in 2020, Pakistan climbed 28 points in the Doing Business ranking, attaining the 108th position globally. With Karachi having 65 percent weightage in this ranking, the Sindh government’s role in pushing the national business reform agenda cannot be undermined.

Although the highlighted successes deserve credit, unfortunately public-private partnerships and business reform agendas do not bring meaningful and visible improvement for the common citizen who is more invested in ‘roti, kapra aur makaan.’ While the government has sought to empower women and communities through establishing initiatives like the Social Protection Security Unit and Sindh Social Security Program, a lot more needs to be done to provide basic services like water, health, education and transport to the people of Sindh.

Visible change impacts people directly and brings good press. If the Sindh government wants to reclaim space on the political chessboard, it must do more to shift the media’s focus from pot-holed roads, heaps of garbage, and rain-submerged cities. It must invest more in public transport, fixing roads and drains, lifting garbage, and maintaining a functional waste disposal system. It must create more jobs, improve literacy outcomes, and increase both the quality and coverage of healthcare.

As Sindh continues its fight for more resources from the centre, it must also strategize to utilise its existing resources better. The PPP must do more to make Sindh more liveable. It must showcase more than a safer Karachi, a pro-private sector, business-friendly and cricket-friendly, secular and inclusive Sindh. And in the future, it must also do a better job of highlighting all of its nuanced performances if it aims to reclaim its erstwhile position as Pakistan’s leading national political party.