**Promises not kept**

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Politicians make promises before elections and try to implement at least some after coming to power. Has Imran Khan fulfilled promises made to the people?

Start with the economy: Khan promised tax reforms, a decrease in regressive indirect taxes, an increase in tax revenues (in fact, doubling of revenues), decreases in deficits and debt, increase in exports, never giving any amnesty, and most crucially, providing one crore new jobs and controlling prices.

In the event, he has undertaken no tax reform, has increased the share of regressive indirect taxes in overall taxes, has decreased tax revenues as a percentage of GDP from where the PML-N left despite adding Rs1700 billion in new taxes, has run our history’s largest budget deficits (average eight percent of GDP or Rs3408 billion compared to the PML-N’s average of Rs1664 billion), has taken on more debt that any government (two-thirds of all debt taken in the previous 71 years), has given continuous amnesty to his property-tycoon friends and, most crucially, has rendered 60 lakh more Pakistanis unemployed, forced two crore into abject poverty and has Pakistan running the third-highest inflation among major economies of the world.

Yes, after a 43 percent devaluation and reducing exports the first two years and increasing it only by three percent in the third year, this year Pakistan’s exports have increased by 25 percent. (In constant dollars, the increase is around 10 percent over 2018). But imports are increasing at 65 percent and this year we will have the highest trade deficit (over 15 percent of GDP) in our history. But for the increased remittances due to travel restrictions, the current account deficit too would have been the second worst in our history, second after 8.1 percent of GDP during General Musharraf’s last year in 2007-08.

Moving beyond the economy, Khan promised to convert the PM House into a university, convert all governor houses into museums, limit the protocol accorded to high officials, improve education and its funding, improve health infrastructure and funding, improve delivery of justice, bring in a team of qualified professionals to improve governance, and the central promise of the PTI: end corruption and punish corrupt officials.

Of course, the PM House is still not a university, although to save face,Khan is now trying to build a new university from scratch on the back of the PM House premises, which of course negates the very idea of converting the existing PM House into a university. This project, which perhaps will use gold bricks, is proposed to cost Rs27 billion whereas universities in Pakistan are generally built under Rs4 billion.

Governor houses too remain as they are, with the KP Governor House making record high expenses for entertainment; and the extensive motorcades of both the chief minister of Punjab and the governor of Sindh are a sight to behold. Khan himself commutes from his home to the PM House in a helicopter, which is quite an upgrade from the bicycle we were told prime ministers in Europe use. (I don’t know if prime ministers in Europe regularly use bicycles to commute to their offices, but I yield to Khan’s superior knowledge of the West.)

Khan promised improvement in education, but he cut federal expenditures for higher education. He illegally removed the widely respected chairman of the HEC at the behest of a man who didn’t want his research institutions audited. Once the Islamabad High Court restored this chairman, Khan didn’t even respect that decision and instead issued notifications to take away all authority from the HEC chairman.

The PTI came up with the controversial Single National Curriculum (SNC) but failed to integrate most madrassahs, which was the original aim of the SNC. Its Punjab government has not given requisite attention to increasing enrolment or children learning math, science, history and geography but has tied itself in knots pandering to lobbies. Today over 50 percent of our children are out of school. Fifty percent! One in ten out-of-school kids worldwide is Pakistani. What has Imran Khan done about it? Nothing. Zero. Zilch.

The prime minister promised he would improve healthcare infrastructure. Has the PTI built a single modern hospital in KP in eight and the rest of Pakistan in four years? One modern lab? One medical college? No, no and no. It allowed pharmaceutical companies to raise drug prices by up to 300 percent and stopped the PML-N scheme of giving free medicines in Punjab. Yet the PTI gets credit for giving health cards to some families in Punjab and KP, a scheme started by the PML-N in 2015 on a smaller scale. However, the government has not built the infrastructure needed to cater to the increased flow of people. Nor, critics say, has the government fully funded this scheme and when the bills come due, future generations and governments will have to pay and this scheme will create another circular debt. But, even if the scheme is poorly designed, giving healthcare to the poor is a worthy initiative.

As the nation awaits Khan’s team of 200 professionals to come and improve governance, the PTI has given us the most incompetent government in recent memory. From the person who promised 17 ministers, we now have enough ministers, advisers and assistants to man the Titanic. Indeed, his team’s incompetence reminds one of Titanic’s fate. Every week we hear a new tale of incompetence. In November, while two refineries were shut down due to low sales of furnace oil, and one government refinery was trying to export it, another government company that very week was importing it.

In September, companies were seeking permission to export fertiliser as Pakistan had enough. Then 140,000 tons of fertiliser, made from heavily subsidised gas, was smuggled and we now have severe shortages that will adversely affect our crops. Last year, the government borrowed over Rs100 billion one day before the SBP lowered interest rates; this year it borrowed over Rs100 billion one day after the SBP raised interest rates! How can a government be so incompetent? The mind boggles…

The PTI promised improved delivery of justice. Yet it has undertaken absolutely no effort to undertake any reforms. It has only favoured the rich and the powerful.

Finally, this: Pakistan has gone down from 116 to 140 in Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index, the largest drop in three years. Who hasn’t heard about postings and transfers done for money in Punjab or the awarding of contracts to donors or the Rawalpindi Ring Road case or the 16 licences for limestone mining and cement plants in Punjab or the sugar, wheat and drug price scandals? The PTI accused the PML-N of corruption in the Rs27 billion Lahore Metro but built the similar-length Peshawar BRT for three times that. And then went to court to stop NAB and FIA from investigating the Peshawar project. By the indiscriminate jailing of political opponents without conviction or a charge, the PTI has turned the process of accountability in Pakistan into a vehicle of personal vengeance.

Khan seems incapable and unwilling to keep his promises. How can the nation now trust his integrity, competence and intention to deliver on his promises?

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