**Implementing change**

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Most of us believed, and some still believe, that a third political force would introduce a new model of governance in Pakistan – a model focused on institutional reforms and human development. But the 100-day performance of the PTI speaks less of any real change and more of far-fetched dreams.

The divide between what the PTI promised in its election manifesto and what is happening on the ground may have been created by many contributing factors – some inherited from the previous governments and some born out of sheer absurdity and ignorance. Whatever the underlying cause of economic chaos and bureaucratic inertia, the government has to own the system and take measured steps to stop the downward spiral.

No one can contest the fact that Pakistan’s economy was in a bad shape when the PTI took over. The current account deficit and dwindling foreign exchange reserves had started ringing the alarm bells during the last months of the PML-N-led government. Even though approaching the IMF for a bailout package was inevitable, the PTI insisted on exploring other options (issuing bonds, convincing expatriates to increase remittances and seeking financial assistance from friendly countries) as a bulwark against tough IMF conditions. This line of thinking may have a temporary soothing effect on the balance of payment, but such quick fixes can never address the economy’s structural problems.

If the PTI government is really serious and sincere in dealing with the economic meltdown, it has to develop consensus on tax reforms (widen the tax net and eliminate rent-seeking); eliminate structural imbalance (which means focusing equally on the agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors); promote vocational education; and resolve the energy crisis. State-owned enterprises (SOEs), especially the four giants: Pakistan Steel Mills, Pakistan Railways, PIA and Utility Stores Corporation, need to be reorganised in line with modern management practices to make them efficient and profitable. So far they have become white elephants thanks to political appointments and outmoded business models.

With the PTI in power, civil-military tensions have undoubtedly subsided with positive dividends for the country, but there are other simmering problems that can drain energy in the institutional tug of war. One such problem is the bureaucratic inertia – the go-slow attitude of senior bureaucrats. It will be difficult, if not impossible, for the PTI to implement its manifesto quickly, and in true spirit, if government machinery runs out of steam. At present, the mandarins seem to be wary of NAB’s overreach and/or the modus operandi of accountability, besides the unprofessional manner in which ministers interact with them.

Instead of targeting individuals working on key positions in the previous governments, the government should introduce system-wide reforms (both cultural and structural) for making the public sector even more responsive, responsible and efficient without compromising on its core values of political neutrality. One way of enhancing efficiency and reducing waste will be to make extensive use of information technology. The concept of e-government has revolutionised many services in the public sector around the world. The creation of autonomous bodies with governing boards is yet another tried and tested reform initiative for enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector.

Common people do not care about who rules the country, which political ideology will translate into social justice and which economic system strikes a harmonious balance between private and public interests. They simply wants to see their children get enough food to eat; have access to affordable public services such as education, clean drinking water, healthcare; and live in a secure and clean environment. All this constitutes the essence of the welfare state that Imran Khan promised us before the elections. We want to see him deliver on his promises now.

Blaming previous governments and searching for scapegoats will neither steer the country out of the quagmire in which it has been stuck for so long nor make Imran Khan a good leader. The new bottle must have something new for the common man to applaud.

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