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What has the PTI delivered?

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It's been a long two and a half years of this hybrid rule, halfway to a normal parliamentary tenure. It is time to ask: what has the PTI delivered in this time?

Remember the hype created before Imran Khan was installed as prime minister? That every politician except him was corrupt but he was purer than driven snow. And his purity extended to all those who joined his party. That he made the ultimate sacrifice by giving up his jet-set life in Europe for us – the unwashed masses. That once he would do the favour of ruling over us, all our problems would vanish.

We were told that once the PTI came to power, our schools would become better. Have they? We were told our hospitals would become better. Have they? We were told our thana culture would improve. Has it? Imran Khan was going to spend more on human development? Has he? He was going to provide jobs and homes. Has he? He was going to convert government residences into universities. Has he? He and his team were going to end VIP culture and stop using government 'protocol'. Have they? Has Imran Khan done any of the things he claimed he would do to improve our lives? Can we point to even one area, just one area, where governance has improved?

When the PML-N left the government, the combined income of all the Pakistanis was \$312 billion. After two years of the current government, our combined income has been reduced to \$264 billion. It's rare in our history that our national income, even expressed in dollars, goes down. But the PTI has managed this feat.

In order to protect its hot money investors, the government raised interest rates to an absurdly high level thus killing our economic growth and creating the highest budget deficits in our history. Moreover, by running high inflation, especially food inflation, it has made it extremely difficult for working people to make ends meet. The high inflation and huge increases in utility bills have forced families to make unsavoury choices between parents' health and children's education, between food and rent, or

between electricity bill or bus fare. A government that, through its callousness, corruption and incompetence, forces millions of our fellow citizens into poverty has no moral right to rule over us.

Food inflation didn't just happen. It was created. Within weeks of coming into power, the PTI allowed a million tons of sugar to be exported. But within a couple of months of that, before even a kilogram of that export quota was utilised, the government again allowed another 100,000 tons of exports but this time with the proviso that provinces can give subsidy for exports.

Before even the minutes of this meeting were issued, the dutiful CM of Punjab chaired a meeting and allowed the subsidy. Only three industrial groups had substantial quantities of sugar at the time and, wouldn't you know it, the two biggest sugar stockholders were both PTI bigwigs. At the time, the government said Pakistan had enough sugar stocks. But then this year it preposterously claimed that in May Pakistanis consumed five times as much sugar as they normally do, that is, instead of around 400,000 tons we consumed two million tons of sugar. All this was done so billions could be made off the people.

Last year, millions of tons of wheat were smuggled to Afghanistan and Central Asia from Punjab's flour mills. This cannot be done except in connivance with the Punjab government. Moreover, 800,000 tons of wheat was made available for animal feed. Let's be clear: prices of sugar and atta went up as a consequence of corrupt policies.

This year, Pakistan will only grow between seven and eight million bales of cotton. Cotton is the backbone of our economy. What has this government done to improve cotton production? Has it worked on developing new seed varieties or imported seeds suited to our environment? Has it worked on improving cotton yields or increasing the acreage planted? Is this even a priority for this government? We import billions of dollars worth of chickpeas, lentils and edible oil. Has this government even thought about working on policies to increase their production?

Khan Sahib claimed that he will not just stop incurring more debt but start paying back some debt. In the event, he's taken more debt in two years than the PML-N did in five years. In fact, in just two years, the PTI has added 40 percent of all debt added in the last 70 years. And don't let them fool you; they have not reduced Pakistan's debt by even a single rupee. If any debt has become due, the government only re-rolled the debt by issuing yet more debt.

Imran Khan and Asad Umar had also promised to improve public enterprises. But today public sector losses are the highest they have ever been. Circular debt is the highest ever and increasing at the fastest pace ever. Gas has a new circular debt as the PTI's spot deals for LNG are some of the most expensive in the world, certainly much more expensive than China, India and Bangladesh. Plus, there is gas shortage, and we are producing power with more expensive diesel and furnace oil. Is this what PTI supporters expected?

My one sentence here will not do justice to the lives and livelihoods of thousands of Pakistanis, but in two years the government has destroyed the Pakistani aviation industry, particularly PIA. Remember how the PTI played politics when the PML-N tried to privatise PIA and Pakistan Steel? The government hasn't announced any plans to privatise Pakistan Steel which could preserve or even increase jobs, but is actually laying off people.

Imran Khan said he would end corruption. Whether in sugar, wheat flour, medicine prices, BRT Peshawar or the Billion Tree Tsunami, corruption seems to have thrived, in both the Punjab and federal governments.

So, the question is: after all the curbs on the media, all that happened before and during the elections, all the machinations with the courts, and all the strife in our body politic, which has certainly harmed our democracy and put our right to dissent on the backburner, what has this hybrid regime achieved? Is this the morning we were waiting for? Is this the Naya Pakistan promised to us?

Is today's Pakistan more just? Is the government even working on legal and other reforms to make our society more fair and just? Are our children, particularly less affluent ones, getting a better education? Are poor patients getting free medicines? Is the economy progressing? Are jobs being created? Is inflation under control? Are exports increasing? Is Pakistan improving its relations with the Islamic or the Arab world? With Europe and America, or China?

What has the PTI done for Pakistan during its time in power? Are we better off today than we were two and a half years ago?

The writer has served as federal minister for finance, revenue and economic affairs.