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The Challenges for the new Government: Governance

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The new government is confronted with massive economic and development challenges. One of the priority areas is to improve governance function at all levels. This would require a two pronged strategy: one covering relatively a longer period between now and 2023 to produce tangible results in the political, economic, social, judicial and executive dimensions of governance and initiating the process to demonstrate that the government has embarked on the right course to rectify the widely pervasive institutional and systemic dysfunctions.

The other prong, in the immediate horizon, is for the government to reduce the credibility deficit between the citizens and the state and to demonstrate visible improvement in the quality of life of the people. This, a priori, will entail a qualitative improvement in the institutional responsiveness and public sector governance function to the felt needs of the people especially at the interface level between the public sector and the citizens. More specifically, there are broadly four functional domains which the government needs to target with utmost speed and high priority:

- (a) Improvement in the law and order and watch and ward function for peace and security of the citizens including a visible albeit progressive change in the "Thana culture", respect and dignity of citizens and control of street crime;
- (b) Enforcing rule of law and writ of state for the infractions at the street level e.g., traffic management, encroachments removal, elimination of unauthorized parking lots; action against illegal construction etc.,
- (c) Efficient and effective management and delivery of and access of public to the basic services like education, health, water, sanitation, waste management, electricity etc.; by toning of the relevant state system and apparatus;
- (d) Optimizing the operational efficacy of the municipal and local administrative and regulatory systems and procedures to expeditiously provide administrative remedy and support services to the citizens e.g., land revenue records, building plans, connections for utilities and services, emergency health services, rescue operations, repairs- restoration of basic infrastructure etc.;

Tangible gains could very well be achieved without additional budgetary outlays and with the existing human, financial, institutional and organizational resources. The necessary policy, legal and regulatory frameworks and the accompanying operating procedures are also already in place. What is required is the unswerving political commitment and administrative will to uniformly implement the law and strictly enforce monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

There are already a couple of incidents which seem to have attracted adverse publicity and tarnished the image and vision of the newly elected government of creating a "New Pakistan". The allegedly unpleasant altercation between the Railways Minister and the staff member in a meeting at Railways headquarter in Lahore and the request of the officer to proceed on leave,

sadly, sent a wrong message to the people as to the attitude, sagacity and management-competence mix of the political leadership. The transfer of the District Police Officer from Pakpattan without observing the formal enquiry procedures was yet another palpable evidence of departure of the government from its own manifested commitment to rid the public sector institutions and in particular police, of political servitude and interference. The government needs to realize that empowered and strengthened institutions functioning on a sustainable paradigm with well established. performance management and accountability systems are sine qua non for good governance. It is the actions and not the rhetoric which ultimately count.