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## New Government: What's there for the People of Pakistan?

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### 1. Background:

Election 2008 produced a split mandate. PPP and PML(N), the two winners, have decided to sit together but there is concern that old political rivalries between PML-N and PPP will soon emerge. There is a school of thought that believes that the current political alignment between the two winners is only against their common political rivals: PML-Q and its patron President Gen. (r) Pervez Musharraf. The argument goes that as soon as these political rivals are defeated, PPP and PML(N) would go back to being rivals.

The other school of thought gives *“credit to both Mian Nawaz Sharif, leader of PML-N, and Asif Ali Zardari, Co-chairperson of PPP, that they not only accepted each other's mandate and carried along but also joined other political forces to form the first ever truly broad based government in Pakistan[1].”* The current political alignment between both the leaders and parties has not only given a certain sense of solidity in Pakistan's politics but has also raised the hopes of the Pakistani population that is desperately looking forward to getting “some form of relief” in the face of growing energy crisis, price hike, unemployment and the deteriorating law and order situation.

On March 28, Asif Ali Zardari, PPP's Co-chairperson, said: *“This is not an easy task and we would present the true picture to the people of Pakistan.”* Finance Minister, Ishaq Dar, who has long been challenging the claims of economic growth of the previous government, warned the nation of an *“economic meltdown”* and *“tough times ahead.”* Will the new government be able to manage the economy? Will the new government be able to take up additional challenges on the domestic, foreign and political fronts?

Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani recently announced his 100-day plan and announced the restoration of labor and student unions. The PM also reversed the restrictions on the media. He also announced an increase in support price of wheat from Rs. 510 to Rs. 625 along with many other measures. He also announced to increase the minimum wages from Rs. 4,000 to Rs. 6,000 and *“we know it's just not enough[2].”*

The big question lurking in the minds of Pakistani people is: How good is this new democratic journey going to be in terms of helping them live a decent life? No one as of now knows the answer, though, the gestures of the political setup till now are encouraging and promising but practical steps are yet to be taken.

### 2. Situational Analysis:

The new government has many issues to tackle and there's little time to handle or resolve the issues which Pakistan is facing. These issues emanate both from the legacy of the previous government, political mismanagement of President's office as well as the electoral promises that both the parties, especially PML-N, made during the campaign. These include the supremacy of the Parliament, restoration of the judiciary, holding President Musharraf accountable, domestic terrorism, Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), energy crisis, price hike, employment, education, health, military operation in Balochistan and FATA and political management both at the federal and provincial level. Three of the four provincial assemblies have not yet been called in session to start their parliamentary proceedings. The federal cabinet has not yet been formed as the President's office delayed the oath taking ceremony from Saturday Mar 30 to Monday Mar 31, 2008. This, indeed, has left lots of suspicions in the minds of the political observers and masses alike. PPP, PML-N, ANP and JUI-F are likely to lead all the coalition setups at the Center as well as the provinces. Former government coalition partner, MQM, has announced to unconditionally support this alliance both in Center and Sindh. But they had sharp differences and contrasts with PML-N where the latter has voiced its concern about the PPP's political partnership with MQM. The coalition, no doubt, has taken off a positive note in trying to bury the past and

look forward to the future and a large part of the population expects good coming out of this alliance at all levels of the government.

According to many concerned observers, the new government is facing extremely tough issues but have a little time and space to prove its effectiveness. The population will feel even worse during the coming summers as there's severe energy crisis in Pakistan with no quick solutions available. "The public temperature will also rise with the mercury in the thermometer," a diplomat commented in a reception and "a lot of effective political and economic management would be required based on an altruistic vision." The way is there but is there any solid will? The sentiment of the people of Pakistan is balanced and especially the voters of the coalition are willing to give suitable time to the new government but for that "the new government has to show some promising steps and ensure achievement-oriented steps forward," a news article<sup>[3]</sup> commenting on the selection of the government's team said.

Pakistan today is simmering and the new political setup has many distracting challenges. The new government has not yet announced the strategy and the steps required in the direction of providing quick and immediate relief to the masses. "The Pakistani voter is in a generous mood but if Gillani's government wouldn't show signs of improvement in the coming 100 years, this generosity would be replaced by frustration and anger<sup>[4]</sup>," a development professional commented.

For now, the situation is well-balanced in favor of the government and people are waiting to see some tangible results coming out of the acts of the government. The new political setup has also shown maturity, grace and dignity in handling all the conflicting issues from forming the government coalition and keeping to work together despite all odds. There is a strong hope and desire of the Pakistani people that democracy this time around should change the lives that they have been living for a long time.

### 3. Recommendations of CRSS:

Keeping in view the challenges that the new government is facing, CRSS strongly recommends the following:

1. The government must activate the committee system of both the lower and upper houses of the parliament to effectively hold the government accountable and address issue of public interest.
2. The Sensitive Price Index must be watched and controlled on daily basis and if necessary, the government must provide necessary subsidies as required on various items.
3. Relief to the people must be made the top priority so that the political unrest is prevented along with fostering the faith of the masses in democracy.
4. Unnecessary confrontation must be avoided with the political opposition.
5. The government should form an interactive strategy to help resolve the issues in consultations with various civil society and public-interest organizations.
6. Government should devise plan and strategy to help people reflect their aspirations and wishes in the central policy making processes. This could be done by encouraging the direct and indirect active public participation.
7. The government must ensure strengthening both the constitutional and administrative institution of the State so that people could have faith on and relief from these institutions.
8. The government must ensure that people are taken in confidence and are appropriately informed about the real situation vis-à-vis various issues concerning their daily lives e.g. management of wheat, grains, essential supplies, energy etc.

<sup>[1]</sup> Live with Talat, Aaj TV. Mar 24, 2008.

<sup>[2]</sup> Interview with a PPP leader.

<sup>[3]</sup> The News on Sunday. Mar 30, 2008.

<sup>[4]</sup> Comments of a development professional working on Democracy and Governance issues for an international aid agency.