



The Pakistan test

Imran Khan has no time to lose in unveiling his leadership style and rhetoric as PM

Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf has exceeded expectations in emerging from Wednesday's election within touching distance of a majority. The former cricketer will come to the Prime Minister's office at the end of a bitter year, and his first test will be to assert a legitimate claim to power. The campaign for these federal and provincial elections in Pakistan has been called the "dirtiest" in its history, and the announcement of the results is already tainted by allegations of rigging and military interference. In fact, the removal of Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister last summer and later from the electoral arena over a conviction on corruption charges had given the impression that the dice were loaded in Mr. Khan's favour. The former cricketer will be watched for how he emerges from the shadow of the campaign and the election itself. His immediate task is to negotiate assistance from the International Monetary Fund to stave off a balance of payments crisis. Pakistan has already sought more loans from China, with no sign that the costs of infrastructure projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor will be recovered soon. His next set of challenges emerge from the region, where he will be expected to make good on promises made by Pakistan to Washington and Kabul to crack down on terror and bring the Taliban to the table for talks. Mr. Khan has long held that the U.S. must first pull out troops from Afghanistan, and was called "Taliban Khan" for suggesting that Taliban militants were fighting for "independence". The next steps will take place amid great scrutiny of the tenor of his engagement with Donald Trump's administration, given the U.S. President's tough talk against Pakistan.

Mr. Khan will also have to tackle terror groups inside Pakistan, those that target Pakistani forces and those trained with Pakistan's support to target its neighbours. It is here that Prime Minister Khan will be most tested; these groups function with impunity, and it remains to be seen whether his softness during the campaign against them will carry over into the prime ministership. Significantly, he spent the most time on ties with India when listing his foreign policy priorities. While his comments on alleged human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir will not be viewed kindly in New Delhi, those on resolving disputes through dialogue must be regarded seriously. So far, he has distanced himself from what he called the "soft approach" of the Sharif government towards India. But after the election result, Mr. Khan claimed that no Pakistani leader had engaged more with India than he had. He offered to take two steps forward if India reciprocates. For the moment, he will also be aware of other odds that are stacked against him; not the least being that of becoming the first Pakistani PM to complete a full term.

Tackling HIV

India has brought down HIV incidence, but it must do more in removing social stigma

A new report from the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) bears good news for the global war against the syndrome. Between 2010 and 2017, several countries made rapid progress in reducing HIV incidence and getting antiretroviral therapy to patients. Today, three out of four people with HIV know their status, and 21.7 million get treatment. While the largest reduction in incidence came from eastern and southern Africa, Asia also made gains. India, in particular, brought down the number of new cases and deaths by 27% and 56%, respectively, between 2010 and 2017. As the UNAIDS report says, some satisfaction is warranted. This applies also to India, which has done a few things right. For example, tuberculosis is the biggest killer of HIV patients across the world. India is now able to treat over 90% of notified TB patients for HIV. Social stigma surrounding AIDS-infected people in India, while high, is declining slowly too. Survey data show that in the last decade, the number of people unwilling to buy vegetables from a person with HIV came down from over 30% to 27.6%. But even as India celebrates such progress, it is important to be mindful of the scale of the challenge. With 2.1 million cases, India is among the largest burden countries in the world. And there are critical gaps in its strategy.

The UNAIDS report points out that a country's laws can legitimise stigma and give licence to the harassment of groups at the highest risk of HIV. These include men who have sex with other men, people who inject drugs, and sex workers. Indian laws don't do well on this count. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act criminalises several aspects of sex work, while Section 377 of the IPC criminalises gay sex. Studies show that fear of prosecution under such laws prevents homosexual men, drug-users and sex workers from seeking HIV screening and treatment. As a result, these groups lag behind average treatment rates, although their requirements are higher. According to a 2017 UNAIDS report, for example, awareness of their HIV status among men who have sex with other men was 41% in India; 52% of those who knew their status were receiving treatment, and of these, 83% had suppressed viral levels. These are troubling patterns. If India is serious about tackling HIV, it must find ways to reach such groups. Short of changing the law, the Centre can consider targeted interventions. An experiment in Karnataka, between 2004 and 2011, finds favourable mention in the report. It shows that sensitising police personnel and educating female sex workers can greatly reduce arbitrary police raids and arrests. As the UNAIDS report emphasises, the right to health is universal. India must take note of this to ensure that no one is left behind in the fight against HIV.

Prime Minister Imran Khan

Can he mature sufficiently for the requirements of his new office or will he need guidance?



AKBAR ZAIDI

While Imran Khan and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) were fairly confident that they would emerge as the largest party in Wednesday's elections, they could not have imagined that they would make such a strong showing, resulting in Mr. Khan becoming Pakistan's next Prime Minister. Even some academics, supposedly looking at empirical data, got it very wrong. Although all the results have been neither verified nor notified, and many seats will have to be given up since many contenders, including Mr. Khan who had been leading in all his five constituencies, contested and won from more than one seat, no one is going to dare stand in the way of his greatest, crowning moment.

In many cases, the victory margins of the PTI are huge and impressive. The party has even made considerable inroads into former Prime Minister and Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) leader Nawaz Sharif's fortress of the Punjab, coming a near second. It will probably form government there as well, with many of the Independents and breakaway members. Many key members of the PML(N), including former national and provincial ministers, have been defeated, including in the party's core constituencies such as Lahore and Faisalabad. The PTI is

the first party to be re-elected in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, increasing its seats. Perhaps the biggest shock has been the rout of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) in its perceived stronghold, Karachi, where again the PTI has made significant gains.

The establishment's man

There are a number of reasons why the PTI has won. Some of these are part of Pakistan's perpetual political economy and are more standard, and there is one possible explanation which is particularly bizarre. It has been clear for many months now that Pakistan's military establishment, with support from the superior judiciary, did not under any circumstances want Mr. Sharif's party to win. This establishment went out of its way to ensure that he was disqualified and imprisoned, and that many of his former allies and comrades either joined the PTI or contested as Independents. In southern Punjab, several of Mr. Sharif's allies abandoned him en masse. Furthermore, the MQM in Karachi was broken up into many groups. There was much preloved rigging by the military. Independent commentary in the media was controlled and censored and many journalists and media houses were threatened and shut down. Open discussion and those dissenting were threatened in unprecedented ways, reminiscent of Pakistan's many martial laws.

Despite being the military's favourite representative, Mr. Khan must also be given credit for a forceful campaign. He could not have won without believing that he would. He traversed the country,



speaking at multiple events on the same day in different cities. While the leaders of other parties did the same, he was more visible on electronic media and had a huge presence on social media. He was also told that it was important to have winnable candidates and advised to take many dubious candidates into his party who were considered electable. Pakistan's demography – with a large proportion of young and first-time voters, called 'youthias', supporting the PTI – is also likely to have worked in Mr. Khan's favour this time more than in 2013, given a considerably mauled PML(N).

Another explanation?

There is yet another reason being given for why Mr. Khan won so convincingly. Many months ago, a married woman and a mother of five, Bushra Riaz Wattoo, had a dream. A resident of Pakpattan in the Punjab, Ms. Wattoo was considered to be a *pirni* (female spiritual guide). She was believed to have been a 'modern' woman once who then turned to Sufism. She told her husband that Prophet Muhammad appeared in her dream one day and asked her to get married to Mr. Khan. This

would not only remove all the hurdles in Mr. Khan's way to become Prime Minister but would also eventually usher in a golden era for Pakistan, she said. It was reported in different newspapers at the beginning of this year that Ms. Wattoo met and told Mr. Khan that he would become Prime Minister only if he got married before January 5. It was later disclosed that having divorced her husband, she married Mr. Khan on or around January 1 this year, and by all accounts her prophecy has come through.

Mr. Khan has shown himself to be abusive, derogatory, misogynistic, arrogant and dictatorial, all within a few weeks. He has said that feminism degrades motherhood and that liberals 'seek blood' and are the most dangerous constituency in Pakistan. At the same time, he has been soft on the Taliban. During his campaign, he stated that he would have a national, anti-U.S. and anti-India foreign policy. He is a born-again Muslim now with a *Tasbeeh* (rosary) in his hands, a conservative Muslim nationalist who believes in neoliberal economic policies. Since his party has not won a complete majority, he will have to be conciliatory and show a far more inclusive attitude towards other groups in Parliament than he has during his vile campaign.

On the day after the elections, seven losing parties called the elections rigged. One senior leader called them "the dirtiest polls in the history of Pakistan", and the PML(N) rejected the results outright. An all-party conference to discuss the results as well as the next step has been called for Fri-

day. It is possible that the opposition parties may have learnt from the tactics of Mr. Khan in the previous Parliament. First, he did not accept the results, and as the enforcer of the results, made much of the claim that the 2013 elections were completely rigged. He took his case to the streets in his famous dharna of 2014, and to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). The ECP found almost no rigging during the 2013 elections, and he had to reluctantly accept the results.

In Naya Pakistan

The elections might be over – sorry, controversial and rigged as they have been. It is also very clear that Imran Khan is Pakistan's next Prime Minister. Whether his wife's prophecy of Pakistan entering a golden era will come true or not in Naya Pakistan will depend, to start with, on how the Prime Minister-designate handles the immediate expected backlash from the political parties which have lost. Mr. Khan, till now the vitriolic candidate and opposition leader, will have to mature to be a more sobering influence on government and on his many first-time, overly enthusiastic Ministers who are inexperienced in governance, much like himself. Probably the considerable influence of the military and the judiciary on him will go a long way in helping this. Or, perhaps, the current Mrs. Khan's visions will now guide his and the country's future.

S. Akbar Zaidi is a political economist based in Karachi. He teaches at Columbia University in New York, and at the IBA in Karachi

AI superpower or client nation?

Time is running out for India to get its policy framework right



PARMINDER JEET SINGH

Google's CEO compares AI (artificial intelligence) with fire and electricity in terms of their role in human civilisation, while Stephan Hawking feared that AI could end humanity. We are facing something really extraordinary. Industrial revolution moved the centres of physical power from human and animal bodies to machines. With the locus of intelligence now also getting disembodied, AI systems are set to transform our economic, social and political organisation.

A radical transformation

Intelligent systems typically tend to centralise and monopolise control. Sensing that an AI economy will radically concentrate income and wealth, many global digital industry leaders have called for assured basic income for all. Globally, just one or two concentrations of AI power may rule the world. Currently, these are in the U.S. and China.

Where does India stand in the AI race? Nowhere. And it is fast squandering its great advantages of high IT capabilities and a big domestic market required for data harvesting. Unlike most industrial technologies, AI does not develop in laboratories and then get ap-

plied by businesses. AI develops within business processes, as data are mined from digital platforms, and turned into intelligence, which is ploughed back to produce more data and intelligence, in infinite loops. Any country's AI therefore largely exists within its huge, domestically owned commercial digital/data systems. In the U.S. it is with Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple and Microsoft – and in China with Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent.

India has no such large domestically owned commercial data systems. And any chance that these could develop is being nipped by allowing takeovers like of Flipkart by Walmart. Soon, Walmart and Amazon will own between them perhaps the most significant set of IT/digital business when Indian policymakers should be aiming at the highest levels of new value chains that AI will create in every sector. It is mastery over the systemic cores of AI where the real national advantage lies.

The digital/AI industry works in huge ecosystems with global digital corporations at the centre, and various start-ups and specific digital/AI applications at the peripheries. Amazon and Google both push their cloud services to try to become the default machine learning platforms, which they open source to fence in the largest number of clients and followers possible. They further network selectively to aggrandise digital and AI power. For instance, Google with Walmart and China's JD.com to counter Amazon and Alibaba's e-



tary and other security/strategic purposes?

Confusion is caused by many Indian IT industry leaders conveying the erroneous message that India is doing well with AI. The problem is that they are jostling for crumbs of IT/digital business when Indian policymakers should be aiming at the highest levels of new value chains that AI will create in every sector. It is mastery over the systemic cores of AI where the real national advantage lies.

The digital/AI industry works in huge ecosystems with global digital corporations at the centre, and various start-ups and specific digital/AI applications at the peripheries. Amazon and Google both push their cloud services to try to become the default machine learning platforms, which they open source to fence in the largest number of clients and followers possible. They further network selectively to aggrandise digital and AI power. For instance, Google with Walmart and China's JD.com to counter Amazon and Alibaba's e-

commerce might, and Baidu with Microsoft to develop an autonomous driving platform.

Start-ups everywhere, including in India, are mostly vying to find a place in such huge global ecosystems, anchored either in the U.S. or China, generally by being bought out.

All the wonderful AI applications that we read about, which the Niti Aayog's new AI strategy is also replete with – whether of increased agriculture output, precision medicine or tailored learning – are basically shop-windows of global digital/AI corporations. It is just like they allured us with all the unbelievable Internet and mobile applications, provided for 'free'. These AI applications may give us spectacular one-off benefits here and there, but gathering further data from each new instance it is the AI engine owned by a Google or Microsoft that becomes ever more intelligent about India's problems and solutions. They stand to build an epochal fortune around these quickly-scaling AI engines.

AI owner or client?

A big nation like India cannot derive satisfaction from rapidly becoming a client country for AI, whether as ready users of AI applications in different areas, or by offering outsourced R&D for global digital/AI corporations through start-ups existentially eager to be bought out. What really counts is whether India owns the centres of systemic AI that comes from controlling huge commercial data ecosystems. In this regard, India's am-

bition to be an AI superpower is, frankly, sinking fast.

Technologies should flow freely across the globe, and we must welcome global technology companies to help India's digital development. But while technology is global, data are essentially local. Even with all the overlaps, there are some basic differences between core technology businesses and data-driven businesses.

Data-based sectoral platforms, like in e-commerce, urban transport, agriculture, health, education, etc., should largely be domestic. India has a right to provide such domestic protection through policy, especially if India begins to treat its collective social/economic data as a strategic national asset, as our mineral resources are. (All the talk of data being the new oil... well quite right!)

Such policy protection alone will ensure that we have large-scale data-driven Indian companies able to develop the highest AI in every sector, by employing huge Indian data to solve (equally huge) Indian problems. Once enough AI proficiency and strength has been developed domestically, it should then be used to go global.

There is no other route to becoming an AI superpower. With its highest IT as well as entrepreneurial/managerial competence, and a huge domestic market, India is among extremely few countries that can make it. But time is running out fast.

Parminder Jeet Singh is with the Bengaluru-based NGO, IT for Change

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

A new Prime Minister

Whatever be the charges of rigging, the election results make it clear that the voters of Pakistan were tired of both the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) and the Pakistan Peoples Party and wanted a change. Cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan broadened his voter base by promising a "new Pakistan" that is free of corruption. It is time for him to keep his promise and bring about that change for the better. Mr. Khan's innings as Prime Minister will be closely watched for his initiatives on the social and economic fronts, his equation with the military and religious hardliners, and his policy towards India. He should handle India-Pakistan relations with great

sensitivity. It is vital for India and Pakistan to establish peace. Pakistan could do well to invite Prime Minister Narendra Modi for Mr. Khan's swearing-in ceremony as a goodwill gesture. And if it does, Mr. Modi should definitely make use of that opportunity to repair relations.

G. DAVID MILTON, Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

The one thing that is most heartening about the Pakistan elections is that the country has rejected the Hafiz Saeed-backed Allah-o-Akbar Tehreek in all the places where the party has contested. India hopes that its relations with Pakistan become normal, but given that Mr. Khan called former Prime Minister Nawaz

Sharif "an agent of Pakistan's old enemy India", it seems that he would be more keen to bleed the military.

BIDYUT KUMAR CHATTERJEE, Faridabad

What does Imran Khan's win portend for India?

Though he raked up corruption issues in his campaign, Pakistanis also view him as a hardliner as far as the country's relations with India are concerned. India will find him a difficult person to negotiate with. It may rue the fact that it lost the opportunity to deal with a moderate like Nawaz Sharif to improve bilateral ties. After all, Mr. Sharif took decisions that were independent of the military. Mr. Khan also has

an inflexible stand with regard to the U.S. using Pakistani territory to fight terrorism. Only time will tell how his relations with the U.S. President will play out. However, he may not have too much of a role in decision-making given that the military has played a major role in promoting him and will be demanding its pound of flesh.

V. SUBRAMANIAN, Chennai

The result is no surprise. Given the reports of rigging, it seems as though democracy is not a serious affair in Pakistan. Mr. Khan enjoyed the backing of the military, clerics and the judiciary. It seems as though the groundsmen (the Army) prepared a bowler-friendly pitch to

benefit their favourite bowler and won the match.

D.V.G. SANKARARAO, Vizianagaram

A reasonable demand

The BJP-led government appears to be in no hurry to seek the extradition of fugitives like Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi ("Bring back at least one fugitive", July 26). Nor does it seem to have made any serious attempts to trace their whereabouts, other than issuing red corner notices.

It is dismaying to note from media reports that Nirav Modi has in his possession at least six passports. This makes it clear that he has gone beyond the radar of investigating agencies. This reflects poorly on the competence of Indian investigators in tracking him down, leave alone bringing him back to India.

P.K. VARADARAJAN, Chennai

MORE LETTERS ONLINE: www.hindu.com/opinion/letters/

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: EPD >>>TripAdvisor organises many literary tours, said a Metro Plus Travel front-page story "A pageturner of a holiday" (July 26, 2018). It should have said lists.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturi Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com