

Populism confronts reality

With Pakistan seeking an IMF loan, Imran Khan will struggle to keep up his rhetoric



S. AKBAR ZAIDI

It is two months since Imran Khan became Pakistan's Prime Minister with the very partisan and public support and assistance from Pakistan's military and its clandestine organisations, when his main opponent, Nawaz Sharif, and his daughter were put behind bars following a highly controversial and dubious legal judgment. Yet, Mr. Khan has still not discovered the fact that being a populist rabble rouser in Opposition, at which he was particularly good, is very different from being an elected leader with serious responsibilities and consequences, where sombre reality sobers down even the most exaggerated claims and promises.

Going back on promises

These last few weeks have only reinforced the appellation, 'U-Turn Khan', used for Mr. Khan on numerous occasions in the past, regarding his various statements about what all he intends to do. From making exaggerated promises that he would break Pakistan's begging bowl; that he would "rather commit suicide" than go to the International Monetary Fund (IMF); that his government would be one of new, clean faces, all chosen on high standards of merit; that his government would end nepotism of every kind in every public office; that he would bring back the supposedly \$200 billion "looted wealth in 100 days"; and so on, he has had to backtrack on all these claims and dozens of others, made at different times in different stages of exuberance.

This idea of "new and clean" faces in his Cabinet, and as his advisers, was the first to be dumped when the long and growing list of his team was announced. He appointed various Ministers and advisers who had served with and under General Pervez Musharraf in some capacity or the other, including the lawyer defending General Musharraf in the treason case. Some members of his team had been in government in different political parties prior to them



"Imran Khan has still not realised that being a populist rabble rouser in Opposition is different from being an elected leader." Labourers listening to Mr. Khan during a rally in Karachi before the elections in Pakistan. ■ REUTERS

switching to his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), the infamous 'electables' of the July election, many of whom were advised by Pakistan's clandestine organisations to switch sides. A number of Mr. Khan's close friends, including one who reportedly holds British nationality, were made advisers and 'special assistants' to the Prime Minister and given important tasks. Moreover, some of the senior members of his team, in addition to having won their own seats, have had their close relatives (son, daughter, wife) elected to the National and Provincial Assemblies, rubbing salt in the claims of a non-nepotistic style of government. Having put together an unstable coalition of political parties and individuals in order to form a government, choices have had to be made which might look unsavoury to those pursuing some ideal ethical and moral norms, yet reflect the highest standards of the reality of Pakistani politics.

The most consequential of decisions which Mr. Khan's government has had to take in its two months so far is to go to the IMF asking for a loan estimated to be an unprecedented \$10-15 billion. This will be Pakistan's 13th IMF loan since the 1980s, and also probably the largest. In addition, the political conditions surrounding IMF loan disbursement have changed considerably for Pakistan since the good old days of the War on Terror, when the U.S. per-

ceived Pakistan to be a particularly close ally when such loans were disbursed somewhat leniently and with slipping standards of monitoring and surveillance, with numerous waivers given on unmet tasks and targets. This time, for a host of reasons, the conditionalities and the political baggage behind being approved for the loan will be particularly heavy, with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo already having stated that the U.S. would be "watching what the IMF does". He said: "There's no rationale for IMF tax dollars, and associated with that American dollars that are part of the IMF funding... to go to bail out Chinese bondholders or China itself." In fact, the IMF Managing Director has also stated that the IMF would require "absolute transparency" of debts owed to China. Clearly, a different geopolitics is being played out in Pakistan today compared to that of two decades ago.

Having sworn never to go to the IMF, as has every prime ministerial aspirant in the past, Mr. Khan went "begging", a term used by one of his close advisers, for money from "friendly countries", which these days happen to be only Saudi Arabia, the UAE and, of course, China. On all three counts, it seems that Pakistan's few friends sent their regrets about bailing it out, yet again. The government had to turn to the IMF after its own indecisions and poor handling led to a huge meltdown in the econo-

my, with the stock market falling to a 28-month low, and the rupee plummeting more than 9% in one day. If there wasn't such an acute crisis of the Pakistan economy prior to his election, Mr. Khan's government's particularly poor handling ensured that one was created – and hence, to the IMF.

Mr. Khan ought to have known that going to the IMF results in severe constraints on the economy, with fiscal cuts, higher interest rates, devaluation and other so-called austerity measures. The consequence of an IMF loan backed with tight conditionality results in growth slowing down, often with higher inflation, and undermines any expansionist neopopulist programmes. Immediately after the meeting of Pakistan's Finance Minister and the IMF leadership, economists projected that Pakistan's GDP growth rate would fall to around 3% this year, down from a 13-year high of 5.8% last year, and that inflation would reach anywhere between 15 and 20% by next July. Importantly, while these early IMF negotiations were being held by the Government of Pakistan, with dire consequences for the economy writ large, Prime Minister Imran Khan was announcing his Naya Pakistan Housing Programme, of constructing five million low-cost houses in five years. Clearly, the Prime Minister has no clue about simple arithmetic, and that the numbers under IMF austerity just won't add up.

On a loan and a prayer

One of the first statements uttered by Mr. Khan a few hours after he realised he was to become Prime Minister of Pakistan was his promise to make Pakistan into Prophet Muhammad's Islamic welfare state of the Medina of his time. When he was launching his Housing Scheme, Mr. Khan tried to allay the fears of his audience about the impending economic crisis and told them, "*Ghabrain nahin, hausla rakhain* (do not worry, have fortitude)." Perhaps the chasm between populist promises and hard realities in Pakistan can only be filled by faith, belief and a prayer.

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

The value of a health scheme

The challenges for the success of Ayushman Bharat are more than just at the financial and infrastructural level



VANI S. KULKARNI

On September 24, the government launched the grand government-funded healthcare scheme, the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY). While some see its ambitious goals as its main strength, others are sceptical given the inadequate funding for the scheme, the weak infrastructure of primary health care centres, and the time required for the goals to be accomplished. However, nobody disputes the imperative of an insurance scheme as vast as the PMJAY, since every year about 36 million families, or 14% of households, face a medical bill that is equal to the entire annual living expenses of one member of the family. This frequently pushes many families into penury.

Two schemes, one focus

The euphoria over this scheme is reminiscent of the excitement over the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY), launched in 2008. Although the PMJAY is much wider in its reach than the RSBY (it covers 50 crore beneficiaries with ₹3,500 crore of government spending and provides benefits up to ₹5 lakh per eligible family), the central framework is the same: universal health care and health rights. The emerging discourse surrounding the PMJAY scheme resonates with those of RSBY. The focus continues to be on the top-down, deductive reasoning of the scheme, including issues such as allocation of funds for each illness, the types of care provided, financial considerations for empanelment of hospitals, types of illnesses covered, and transaction costs. These considerations matter. However, there are important missing links.

My recent study of RSBY in Karnataka yielded important insights that are pertinent here. Given that RSBY was embedded within the framework of universal health care and health rights, it is appropriate to pay attention to the existence of health rights in a local set-up. I discovered that the way beneficiaries of RSBY (Below Poverty Line households) perceived the scheme was not as a health right but in terms of the value it imparted, which was measured along multiple dimensions.

Households initially measured the value

of the RSBY in terms of its material benefit and measurable impact. This included the financial ease it provided in taking care of illnesses, the expense and types of illnesses that the card covered, and the transaction costs it entailed – how easy it would be to use the card in terms of bureaucratic paperwork and formal procedures.

Beyond the visible impact

However, households also valued the RSBY beyond its visible impact. They had little value for the RSBY because of many reasons. One, officials who distributed the RSBY smart card did not provide information on how to use the card. Two, hospitals did not respect patients with the card, believing that they were availing medical care free of cost. Sometimes they did not honour the card either due to inaccuracy of fingerprints or lack of money on the card. Three, neighbours and family members did not discuss the utilisation of the card, making households perceive the card as just a showpiece: important to possess but not useful. Four, the lack of involvement and endorsement by local leaders further diminished the value of the card for the households.

The value of the RSBY was also derived in relation to the value of health itself. The difficulty in understanding the basic facts of the card and using it led households to opt for seeking medical care without the card. The value for one's health undermined the value for the RSBY. As one household subsequent to repeated failed attempts to use the card lamented: "We lost time and money, and our illness got worse

all because we wanted to use the card. I tell you, if you want to get well, if you really value your health, you cannot rely on this health card." Next, the value of the RSBY card was derived in relation to the cultural ethos of health insurance. For a significant number of households, health insurance was perceived as a "bad omen" indicating the arrival of sickness and disease.

As the delivery of universal health care and health rights find yet another expression in India through the PMJAY scheme, it is more important than ever before to explore how citizens exercise their right to health and understand how it could be better practised. The biggest challenges for the success of the PMJAY scheme are not just financial and infrastructural at the local level, but how its value is perceived by the community.

Vani S. Kulkarni teaches sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, U.S. Views are personal



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

SINGLE FILE

Fanning the flames

Historically, mob violence has resulted in political gains for some

MARKANDEY KATJU



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK PHOTO

Scapegoating is a well-worn political technique to divert attention from governance failures. For instance, in 1905, the Tsarist government in Russia organised a pogrom of Jews to divert attention from its military failures. Hitler blamed the Jews for Germany's economic woes, and that

helped him win the 1933 elections to the Reichstag.

The same technique seems to have been adopted by Indian politicians. In November 1984, following Indira Gandhi's assassination, thousands of Sikhs were killed. After this, the Congress won the Lok Sabha elections. In 2002, Muslims were killed in Gujarat, after which the Bharatiya Janata Party not only multiple Assembly elections but also the Lok Sabha election in 2014. Thus, the massacre of minorities would appear to be a recipe for winning elections.

In his recent book, *The Sarkari Musalman*, retired Lieutenant general Zameeruddin Shah mentions that he was commanding the Army troops sent to Gujarat to quell the "riots" in the State. For one whole day, the troops were kept waiting for transport at Ahmedabad airport, during which time the killings took place. Since General Shah had requested then Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi for transport and had informed the Army Chief, General Sundararajan Padmanabhan, why was it not provided?

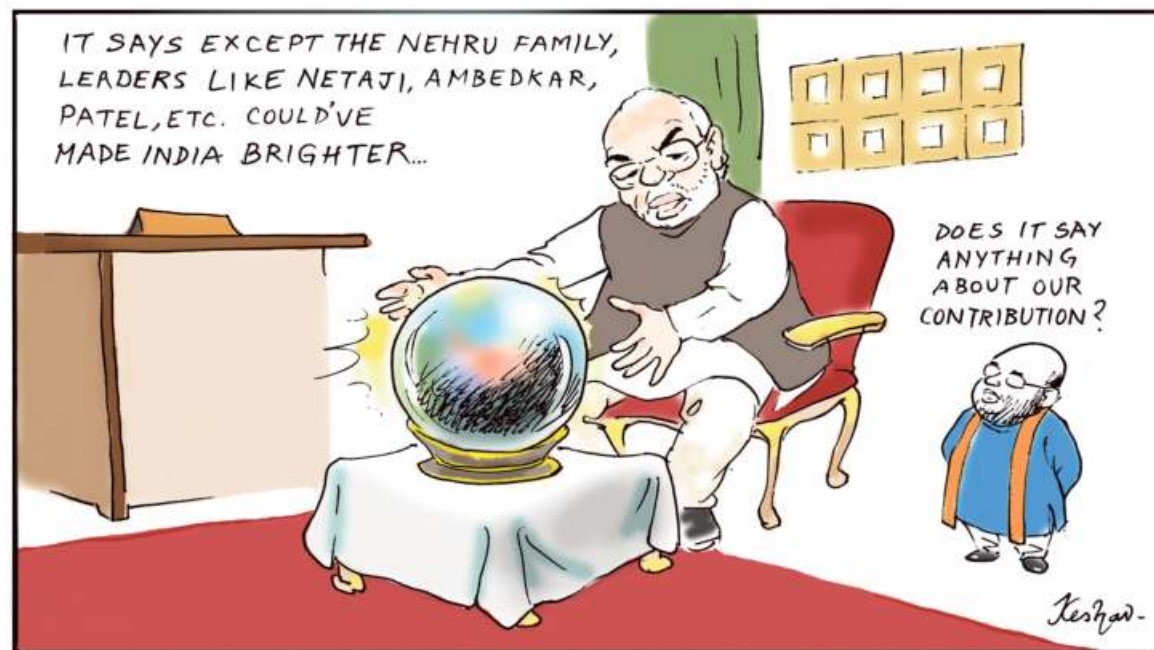
The Special Investigation Team appointed by the Supreme Court to investigate the incidents in Gujarat was headed by retired CBI Director R.K. Raghavan who was called an "absentee investigator" as he spent only a few days a month in Gujarat during the probe and as half his team consisted of Gujarat police officers. General Shah was not invited to depose before it, and he has castigated the report exonerating the Gujarat government as untruthful.

Similarly, after Indira Gandhi's assassination on October 31, 1984, the massacre of Sikhs in Delhi and other places started, but the Army was not called to quell them until the night of November 3. Meanwhile, Sikhs were being killed with impunity in Delhi and elsewhere. Crowds of vigilantes went around shouting "*Khoon ka badla khoon* (blood for blood)". In fact, Rajiv Gandhi famously said, "When a big tree falls the earth shakes."

Now, with the coming Assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Mizoram, are we again going to witness communal horrors such as those of Muzaffarnagar, as well as lynchings?

Time alone will tell, but one thing is certain: If the BJP fares badly in these elections it will adversely affect its electoral chances in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

The writer is a former Judge of the Supreme Court



NOTEBOOK

When misogyny reared its ugly head at a press meet

How a few women dealt with a bunch of angry, mostly male reporters

S. POORVAJA

Change, as the cliché goes, begins at home. This is what some of us journalists realised at a press meet organised by the South Indian Women's Film Association last week. Members of the association, including playback singer Chinmayi Sripaada, filmmaker and poet Leena Manimekalai, director and actor Lakshmy Ramakrishnan, and anchor Sriranjani, had gathered to lend their support to women from the Tamil film industry who had shared their accounts of being subject to sexual harassment and misconduct over the years.

That there was a press meet on this gave me hope. Discussions about the #MeToo movement would create awareness about sexual harassment and broaden the discourse in the film industry, I thought. However, 20 minutes into the event I was

squirming in my seat. I was not alone. Distress had turned to shock and shock to anger on the faces of the two women reporters seated next to me.

"The environment wasn't conducive for us to complain before. We want to make it more conducive. We want to support more women who want to speak up," Ramakrishnan had said at the beginning. This was forgotten when the women faced a barrage of questions from a bunch of reporters, most of whom were male. "When and where did the incident happen? What kind of torture were you subject to?" one reporter demanded to know of Manimekalai. Even when she expressed discomfort about recounting her experience again (she has shared it more than once before), the reporters would not take no for an answer. They insisted that she share more details. When Ramakrishnan

interjected and requested the media to keep the questions sensitive, a cacophony of objections drowned her voice. Reporters repeatedly asked the women to produce evidence for their allegations and recount their trauma. They demanded to know why the women had not approached the police, the courts, or filed complaints with Internal Complaints Committees, even as the women attempted to explain how institutional mechanisms had failed them over the years.

"Does this mean that you will all throw allegations against any man?" asked a few angry male reporters. "This press meet is coming across to us as an attempt to defame all men," a reporter shouted.

Seeing the situation spiral out of control, some of us tried to steer the press meet in another direction but we were hopelessly outnumbered. Finally,

silence descended on the room, albeit briefly, when Sripaada stood up with folded hands and pleaded with the reporters to be more sensitive. "Some of us have come forward after all this time and it is not to defame all men. There has been harassment and we have stories. We are asking men to stand with us. And we are being told here to shut up," she said as photos were furiously clicked.

Sitting there, I thought about the many distasteful comments, memes and "jokes" on #MeToo that had been doing the rounds online. I realised that I didn't have to look too far for the origins of that mindset. When the press meet ended, I apologised to Manimekalai for the questions that members of my fraternity had posed. When I told her that she had handled them well, her wry smile spoke volumes about how it was a battle that had just begun for her and many other women.

FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 23, 1918.

The German Retreat & Allied Advance.

Reuter's Correspondent at British Headquarters telegraphing last evening [October 22 at 10-35 p.m.] said: The enemy resistance is stiffening. In Flanders we have reached the west bank of Escaut between Pecq and Lenfer, both of which are in our possession. The Enemy is maintaining heavy fire from the opposite bank. Strong enemy rearwards are disputing our progress on the line of Roubaix-Avelghem railway. We again attacked this morning eastward of Courtrai and are making satisfactory progress. On October 21, Reuter [was] informed that the British have reached the Scheldt between Stikamand and Tournai. The Allies are within five miles of Ghent. LeCateau sector was quiet to-day [October 21]. Although the enemy retreat has halted, there is no reason to believe that the pause is more than temporary.

Housing of the People. Trade Unionist Demand.

The Labour Housing Association held its annual conference at Derby on 31st August. Mr. J.W. Ogden, chairman of the Parliamentary Committee of the Trade Union Congress, who presided, said that according to an estimate, 500,000 working-class houses were required at present, and to meet the needs of an increasing population an annual supply of 10,000. Housing was mixed up with the land question, and it was impossible to deal with one problem without dealing with the other. At present selfishness was in a great measure contributing to overcrowding. Trade unionism was very properly associating itself with all these problems of work, housing, education, and recreation – in fact, it was not an exaggeration to say that trade unionism had become a religion (Cheers.) A resolution declaring the need for State loans free of interest for housing schemes, brought forward on behalf of the Dock Workers' Union, was adopted.

CONCEPTUAL

Premature deindustrialisation

ECONOMICS

This refers to a phenomenon wherein the growth of an economy's manufacturing sector begins to slow down prematurely in its path towards development. Economists generally picture economic development as a process by which labour and other resources gradually move from agriculture to the manufacturing sector before these resources move to the services sector at higher stages of development. Some economies, however, may witness a premature movement of resources to the services sector, thus leading to underdevelopment of the manufacturing sector. The concept was popularised in 2015 by Turkish economist Dani Rodrik.

MORE ON THE WEB

Watch: ODI batsmen who have scored over 150 runs the most times

<http://bit.ly/150runs>