



File photo: The Nation Newspaper

As per the former cricketing hero turned politician Imran Khan, his party the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party (PTI) has apparently won the 2018 election in Pakistan, in spite of the official results not being declared yet and a large lobby of protesters challenging his statements on the grounds of rigging, corruption and the alleged interference of the country's military to assist Khan's victory.

After the end of his cricketing, Khan has longed to fulfil his dreams and ambitions to lead his country politically. In spite of being a former cricketing hero, who led Pakistan to a World Cup victory, everyone in his country probably does not share similar sentiments anymore, considering a large number of the country's opposition parties and even those not a part of any parties have termed the election as one of the "dirtiest election" in recent history.

The military in Pakistan has ruled the country for half of its 71-year history and even when it didn't there has always been rumours of alleged involvement or interference in civilian elections. If the election process is successfully completed this will only be the second time there has been a transition from one civilian government to another. However, the journey so far has not been uneventful as apart from the rigging allegations and the ex-prime minister and his party facing a legal challenge, there was a major disruption in the campaigning and voting procedures, after a suicide bomb killed over 31 people at a polling station in the city of Quetta.

Yet, even before the issues regarding corruption and rigging were raised, Pakistan's Independent Human Rights Commission had raised concerns about some blatant and undemocratic means to influence the outcome of the election, mostly by exerting pressure on the media and trying to intimidate competitor candidates. Even though the military has constantly denied their involvement in influencing the elections, it has been the perceived opinion of many that they were definitely satisfied with the exit of Nawaz Sharif's PML-N party, which apparently adopted a very aggressive stance to push back against the military's influence. Sharif, who went on to face legal challenge and being arrested now receives support from his brother Shahbaz Sharif, who ensures the party's lobby and stance in the public sphere is maintained.



File photo: Imran Khan/The Dawn

However, Khan and his party also stand to benefit from the socio-political scenario itself in Pakistan. This is in line with the frustration of the country's voters with the chronic corruption and clear evidence of dynastic politics being practised during the Sharif Administration and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) administration, the latter currently under the leadership of Bilawal Bhutto, the son of the assassinated Benazir Bhutto.

In the west, Khan still leaves an impression of a celebrity with a swagger. In Pakistan, he is trying to portray an image of rejuvenation where he promises to develop a new Pakistan and completely reform the systems of the past. He is trying to present himself as an outsider who is attempting to clean up dirty politics, despite coming from an upper-class privileged family himself, who is known for having the support of designated vote banks who support them irrespective of what party they represent. Surprisingly he has won the support and approval of the religious far right, promising to defend blasphemy laws and terming the Taliban's campaign in Afghanistan as a "holy war".

Even though official election results have not been declared, a survey of the results so far have shown Khan's PTI party to be in the lead. Khan's campaigning record is not encouraging, but in terms of statistics, it seems like he might be on his way to lead a country that already suffers from a variety of issues ranging from chronic corruption, violence and poverty to a collapsing economy and a tense international environment. Foreign relations with the US, India and Afghanistan continues to worsen and China's influence on the country continues to increase.

Many feel that Khan's "rebooted" version of Pakistan shall again be one which has the military playing a major role in the background, orchestrating and shaping national and international policy. Khan even claimed that the country's "umpires" would step back if he won the election. Hence from the nature of his comments and the already existing rumours of covert military involvement, the country, some feel is going down the road of the military rule once again. The projections of an apparent "new Pakistan" some critics suggest is not going to be anything new at all but an unfortunate partial reversal to the military rule era of the country. In what already has been a controversial election, it seems like Shashi Tharoor's analysis of **Pakistan as a military having a state rather than a state having a military is taking shape in the real world yet again.**

Imran Khan's real political test approaches: Where the election stands and where it might be headed

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