**Naya Pakistan, Roles and Responsibilities**

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After a controversial election campaign marred by allegations of pre-poll rigging and inordinate delays in the counting of the votes – hinting at something more than human and technical errors – Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) has emerged victorious in the General Elections 2018. We are supposedly on the cusp of a new era, one in which Imran Khan will finally fulfil his ambition of forming government and becoming the Prime Minister of the country. With the soon-to-be PM winning all five of the seats he was contesting, it is all but obvious that a significant portion of the population wanted him as their next leader.

While discrepancies may still exist, the sheer number of seats won by PTI and in many cases with large margins, tells us that Pakistanis have chosen to go a different route than the one they have taken through the course of Pakistan’s electoral history. Just how different this path is remains to be seen, for there are elements in this script that have been repeated many times in the past and PTI’s biggest rival, the PML-N and its jailed supremo Nawaz Sharif would know all too well about this. In fact, some would argue that this path is not different at all, but a repeat of history albeit with different faces. The rise to power for political parties is never straightforward, but riding on the backs of institutions at the expense of the democratic process sets the country back; the only way to recover is to allow for it to continue uninterrupted and attempt to assert the supremacy of the civilian government.

 While this election like all others before it, propped up winners and losers, it also brought the public’s attention to the obvious villain as well, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). Its silence in the face of pre-poll rigging allegations, and later the inordinate delay in counting and meek excuses offered thereafter points to a lack of independence at worst and sheer incompetence at best. In any case, those at the head must be investigated and should resign for more capable hands to take over. It is surprising that an institution that has five years to plan its next big hurrah was using technical difficulties as the major reason for its failures. If the result transmission system the ECP had set up was not capable of handling data of over 80000 polling stations, why is this something that was realised on the night of the election? Going back to the drawing board in the search for fair, impartial and efficient officials that can carry out an election with due diligence should be one of the steps PM Khan’s government takes in its bid to strengthen institutions moving forward.

Now that the dust is slowly settling, for the average person interested in the politics and the future of the country, it is important to recognise what just happened. As far as the rigging allegations go, it is doubtful that they will be proven with reasonable surety, although even the untrained eye can see that something was not quite right. However, with an obvious change in government and the PML-N losing many of its key seats in areas it considered its bastions of support, the message is clear; PTI has emerged as the country’s strongest political player, and must be accorded due respect by both critics and supporters because it truly represents the will of the people, give or take a few irregularities here and there.

Having said that, this does not mean that the next government or its Prime Minister will be above reproach. Far from it, in fact, PTI’s position at the head of government means it can no longer act with the immaturity it has in the past and everyone from journalists to the average individual has an even greater responsibility to critique the new government and stand against anything that is not right. For PTI, this means toning down on the political slogans, stopping attacks on free press by deeming everything critical ‘fake news’ and reigning in overzealous supporters from attacking others on social media. Additionally, for the Prime Minister and his members of parliament, attending parliamentary sessions with a little more enthusiasm and diligence than they had in the past must also take priority. If Imran Khan sees himself as different from Nawaz Sharif, setting an example by not contemptuously ignoring the National Assembly is paramount. One of the cornerstones of Imran Khan’s victory speeches was the promise to strengthen institutions; it remains to be seen whether he respects the one he has been elected to this time around. Imran Khan and his party have stressed time and again that they are not cut from the same cloth as their opponents, now is the chance to prove this.

As far as other state institutions are concerned, it is time to give PM Khan the chance to fulfil any goals and ambitions the party has set. This includes having complete autonomy in determining foreign policy as well, no matter what issue the security agencies may have with this. Regional ties with India and Afghanistan are important and so far, Imran Khan has not identified a policy that is too different than his predecessor, Nawaz Sharif. One can only hope that the new PM will be more successful in his attempts to steer the country towards more amicable ties with neighbours, even though many power brokers in the country will fiercely resist this. The higher judiciary’s attempts to fill the vacuum in governance must also come to an end, it should go back to matters of dispensing justice rather than oversee matters of economy and everything else concerning the Pakistani state as well.

For opposition parties, it is time to accept the decision of the people. Shehbaz Sharif’s announcement of forming a tough opposition is welcome news, for while the allegations of rigging must be investigated, rejecting the results outright is not a wise move either. The way forward is to work from within the system in these next five years, keep the government on its toes and try and come back to power in 2023. The board is now set for the next five years, and the responsibility of all those sitting in parliament is to ensure that they represent the people that voted for them instead of looking to score points against political opponents over petty issues. Good luck to Pakistan and all of its citizens for the immediate future.