**What Naya Pakistan means**

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PTI-led coalition government is in the making. It has now become certain who will be part of the coalition and who will be sitting on the opposition benches.

Two weeks after the third consecutive elections in the country over the last decade, political alignments seem to have become clearer. In the past, the collective goal to put an end to General Musharraf’s regime brought the PPP and the PML-N together. Now, it is Imran Khan’s victory that has provided yet another opportunity for both parties to join hands and fight for constitutional rights. If we combine the votes of the PPP and the PML-N, they amount to approximately 20 million – much higher than the PTI’s 16.8 million votes. The PPP and the PML-N also enjoy a strong support base in Sindh and Punjab, respectively.

A positive development in the aftermath of Elections 2018 is that the PML-N and the PPP have decided to remain in parliament despite serious reservations over the polling process. Both parties have decided against leaving the highest constitutional forum vacant. These vacant spaces can easily be filled by other politicians. So, it would have been a major blunder if the PPP hadn’t made its decision to participate in the parliamentary process clear soon after the polls.

The PML-N and the PPP are aware of how tough and challenging Pakistan’s democratisation process has been and will continue to be due to a huge institutional imbalance – something that the PTI never speaks of. The PTI’s coalition government resembles the PPP-led coalition in 1988, which also had more than three coalition partners. At the time, the PML-N’s rival was the PML-Junejo (the PML-Q didn’t exist at the time).

The MQM, which has kept up the tradition of throwing its weight behind every government, is now, without any surprise, part of the new coalition. Earlier, it was believed that the PPP would join hands with the PTI as both parties had entered an alliance to defeat the PML-N in the election for the Senate chairman and deputy chairman in March.

With a simple majority in the National Assembly, the PTI won’t have many opportunities to amend the constitution and will struggle to bring about any reforms without the support of a powerful opposition. If the PTI’s past relationship with other parties serves as a gauge, it is likely these parties will be reluctant to cooperate with the ruling party on various matters, including the question of amending the constitution.

Despite its popular support base in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the PTI doesn’t advocate greater provincial rights or autonomy. It has never questioned the financial control of the centre over the provinces and provincial fiscal autonomy isn’t even on the party’s agenda. This is primarily because the party views Pakistan as a centralised state. We seldom get to hear the word ‘federation’ in its political discourse. Therefore, it will be entirely out of the question to turn Pakistan into a just federation under the tenure of the incoming government.

The distribution of fiscal resources between the centre and provinces is in accordance with the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award. This is a constitutionally-mandated award that has been long overdue. During its tenure, the PML-N cared little about the NFC Award and kept delaying it. Will the PTI make the effort to bring provinces together and work towards a new resource distribution strategy that is aligned closely with the spirit of the 18th Amendment?

The PML-N gave all major ministries to people from one province, which validated concerns that Pakistan is dominated by one province. Will the PTI do things differently? After all, the party won’t have be able to rely on the excuse that it didn’t have elected representatives from other provinces. Our federal government should reflect the entire geography of the country, not just GT Road.

The PTI has an opportunity to break the well-established structures of exploitation and dominance imposed by the bureaucracy in the centre. These structures end up allocating above 70 percent of funds from the federal budget for just one province. This is why regional inequality persists in our country. It has triggered by the unequal distribution of development funds and under-development is conveniently attributed to corruption. Will Imran Khan ask the Planning Commission how representative it is of the country’s federation? Why should the commission be allowed to be dominated by only one province?

What will a party that has come into power on the slogan of ‘Naya Pakistan’ do any differently to show its voters how it has changed the course of the country? Pakistani citizens are concerned about the provision of quality services in the health and education sectors. They want reliable infrastructure, including an uninterrupted supply of electricity.

Although the PML-N was able to add 10,000 MW of power in the national grid, it failed to reform the old supply system. As a result, power outages were quite common during its tenure. What will the PTI to improve this sector?

At this stage, Pakistan ranks the lowest in South Asia in terms of health expenditure as it spends less than 0.5 percent of its GDP on the sector. Will this trend change in the next five years?

It is claimed that literacy has improved in Punjab and KP due to better governance. But Pakistan’s overall health, education and poverty indicators have not improved. This shows that these are little more than hollow claims.

Naya Pakistan shouldn’t be seen as a mere change of faces in the capital. In order to effect a meaningful and lasting change, existing inequalities must be addressed. In this regard, feudalism and large landholdings have been deliberately ignored and most parties avoid mentioning these concerns. Poverty and inequality among Pakistanis will not wither away until meaningful land reforms are introduced and large landholdings are abolished.

Is it fair to have these expectations from the PTI? We can only hope that the PTI won’t be so preoccupied with the goal of improving the economy and ensuring sustained periods of growth that it fails to introduce policies to share the fruits of prosperity with citizens. Over the decades, we have seen how far the visible hands of growth can go and have even observed how only a few people are enriched by them.

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