**No, thank you**

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Imran Khan has worked hard and got what he wanted – a chance to build Naya Pakistan. The familiar whirlwind has started: sycophants are waiting in the corridors, professional lobbyists with oily smiles are lining up in Bani Gala while government officials are probably spoiling him with unimaginable VIP protocol and comforts. This is where Imran will hopefully shed the ‘old’ Pakistan, push back with his humility and wisdom, and say to himself with a smile, “No, thank you”.

Yes, Imran you will get a lot of free advice (as I am giving you now). Smooth salesmen who have taken previous leaders nowhere will come out of the woodwork to tell you that they have the answer. Once again, listen quietly but just say to yourself, “No, thank you”.

Pakistan has been in crisis mode for 70 years – and, perhaps, a few thousand years if you think of all the invasions in the region. They will look for hasty decisions from you on the pretext of a crisis. Remember to say to yourself, “No, thank you”. Don’t let them rush you into something on the pretext of a crisis. Don’t do anything without adequate due diligence and process.

There is always an economic crisis in the country. Yes, we will need the IMF. But will we repeat our past mistakes? Will we continue to reinforce the poor fiscal policy choices of taxing everything arbitrarily, collect withholding taxes but never meaning to refund them, give wage increases to all public servants regardless of their productivity or performance, and never close down useless departments? While saying “No, thank you” to this, think of the new areas that you can explore to simplify governance, introduce reforms, and improve fiscal policy.

Remember that a convincing and serious reform programme will be a sell to the IMF. If not, you will do what the last few governments have done: let bureaucrats play with numbers while keeping us barely afloat on the leaky boat of the status quo.

They will come to you with ideas of forming councils with businessmen and random economists. Remember that this has been done many times in the past. Every government had councils like this. What did they achieve? Nothing apart from looking good. So, just smile and say, “we will” while whispering “no, thank you” to yourself. Part-time, self-interested councils are mere rent-seekers that should be entertained as little as possible.

Bureaucrats will love to control your time and agenda. They will send you on useless foreign visits. They will crowd your calendar with many useless meetings. Your political colleagues will beseech you for favours. Smooth-talking businessmen will want to ask for SROs, subsidies and all manner of protection. In these situations, think “no, thank you”.

Remember to never fall into your predecessors’ routine of lazy governance, hasty meetings, much ceremony, and political wheeling and dealing, VVIP movements/travelling, and leaving all decisions to bureaucrats.

You can tell if you are doing all right if you have at least a few hours a day to read and reflect without interruptions; most of what is coming to you is on well-researched memos; there are no meetings with PowerPoints presentations and you don’t allow decisions to be made on PowerPoints presentations; and due process is rigidly followed in every decision you take with as much openness and transparency as possible.

They will make the government all about ceremony for you. They will try to make it easy by saying that your wish is their command. Don’t let that happen to you.

Governance is hard work and limited ceremony. It involves unleashing ideas for research and thought. Only when a proposal is studied properly and you believe that it is well-researched should you think of implementing it. Don’t fall for the oft-repeated line that ‘solutions are known; only your predecessors did not implement them’.

Lastly, development isn’t merely about projects and certainly isn’t about bricks and mortar. Development will happen through serious reforms. Focus on reforms. Push for reforms every day. Make reform the buzzword of your government.

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