**On the foreign front**

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Before taking the oath of office, the prime minister-in-waiting has spilled the beans on foreign policy. He must be duly commended for reflecting upon his so-called world vision.

But did the Oxford graduate in politics offer anything new, or was his victory speech merely an old wine being served in a brand new bottle? At least one thing is clear that the man preparing to lead the nation for the next five years must broaden his vision.

While talking about foreign policy challenges, Imran Khan rightly touched upon Pakistan’s tilt towards China. The relationship has already crossed the barriers where it mattered which party is in power. CPEC is entering into a crucial phase and Beijing has expressed hope that the consensus reached between both the countries will not be affected by other factors.

It is time Imran Khan fulfils his campaign promise by making CPEC contracts public and starts the much-needed projects in Balochistan. At the same time, he should explore further options of infrastructure development. For instance, as an open-minded and articulate negotiator, he must not overlook the extremely soft loans being offered by China’s rival, Japan.

Rooting out corruption has remained IK’s top agenda and it is a good sign that he is looking around the world to learn from their hard-earned lessons. Chinese President Xi Jinping is going all out against the menace of corruption and it will be effectual to replicate some of his policies. As the Captain prepares to send an anti-corruption team off to China, he must bear in mind that emulation won’t work. The delegation must also consider policies adopted by New Zealand and Denmark, ranked as the top-two policies by Transparency International, and tailor a strategy accordingly. Like the purge in Saudi Arabia, one may go to any extreme, but such a drive should not be politically motivated or risk the flight of capital.

Even if one is looking towards Beijing for whatever reasons, regional situation also demands strengthening the bond with Moscow. In this decade, Russia has gradually gained a formidable position. Russia’s unflinching support to Syria and Iran are stark examples. President Putin is also pursuing a peace agenda in Afghanistan, and Pakistan has very much remained a part of it.

Mending relations with our neighbours is the need of the hour. Khan’s open-border policy ought to be taken in the same context. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has long advocated this approach, which is also backed by the British Royal United Services Institute and the United States Institute of Peace. Commonalities in thought can help Khan and Ghani achieve a sustainable ceasefire in Afghanistan and peace in Pakistan. A positive approach will duly impact our relations with India and the US, as Washington has turned its Af-Pak policy to South Asia Strategy.

It is strange that Imran Khan has vowed to improve Pak-US relations only in the context of Afghanistan. The biggest challenge for our new government is the ailing economy, and Washington can play a key role in boosting it. Though Trump has drastically cut military aid, civilian aid is still flowing in. Our future ties or further isolation depends upon our stern action against extremists. We are at a crossroads where no one is ready to buy our rhetoric; it is simply time to ‘walk the talk’.

A hotline to Washington will automatically connect Islamabad to New Delhi. Citing previous visits to India, the prime minister-to-be has created a perception that he is in a better position to solve the long-standing issues. Khan appeared realistic when he offered to solve these issues bilaterally, but not go for any adventurism on Kashmir, like his predecessors. He has already witnessed what happened to Nawaz Sharif, Asif Zardari and even Pervez Musharraf when they stepped in troubling waters.

The prime minister-to-be should opt for a cricket-like diplomacy. Last year, IK had criticised the Nawaz government for inviting ‘Phateechar’ foreign players in the Pakistan Super League. It is time he invites world-class cricketers. Imran Khan’s aura can surly help quench the desire of Pakistani cricket fans longing to see some big names play in Lahore and Karachi.

On the Middle Eastern front, Imran Khan has already held back-to-back meetings with Iranian and Saudi ambassadors to listen to both sides of the story. It is encouraging that he is talking of conciliation at a time when, backed by the US, Saudi Arabia is getting ever more hostile towards Iran. Though IK has criticised the previous regimes for taking sides in the Middle Eastern conflicts, there is no probability that the new government will either improve relations with Iran or review defence ties with the Saudis.

Reconciliation between Riyadh and Tehran is nothing more than wishful thinking, as the gulf between the two has already widened to extreme limits. The new government should also prepare itself to face the unexpected challenges which might come out of the Gulf Cooperation Council’s upcoming meeting in mid-October. Iran and, most probably, Israel will be on the top agenda in Washington. This might have far-reaching outcomes.

Before putting his feet in the saddle, it is imperative for Imran Khan to look beyond the horizon. In order to uplift the economy and pull Pakistan out of increasing isolation, renewed engagements with the world are vital. After Brexit, his ‘Naya’ Pakistan will find a host of opportunities, from Edinburgh to London. Missing the train at this point will help India get the unfair share. Above all, Imran Khan has to fulfil his campaign promise of bringing back the ‘looted’ wealth of the nation from abroad, which will be impossible without cultivating close ties with the respective countries.

The prime minister-designate has widely travelled the world, but now he should see it with the eyes of a politician and a statesman. It is high time IK went to New York and addressed the UNGA session. He has the potential to paint a convincing picture of Naya Pakistan. No doubt, he himself is a success story that many will be interested in listening to. But he must remember that the world will only help him realise his dream if they see him powerful enough to break through the traditional shackles.

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