

5 major challenges before Pakistan's new government

By

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In politics the real match starts after victory. This means that Pakistan's new government, likely to be headed by the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), will need to deal squarely and smartly with a slew of challenges of which the following five will test its mettle to the limits of its endurance and capacity unlike anything that the party has encountered thus far.

First, it is hackneyed to state that Pakistan has never had lasting productive civil-military relations since its inception. The a posteriori science of successfully running a nation-state requires competent rule by the civilians. This rule of thumb is gleaned from the historical experience of the management of nation-states since the beginning of the global era of the modern nation-state following the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

As long as Pakistanis remain stuck in the rut of fixing the blame rather than fixing the problem, harmonious civil-military relations will remain in the realm of the desire. The new government will quickly need to find a modus vivendi that allows the focus to be on mutual cooperation rather than internecine interference underwritten by rule of law.

Second, intimately connected with the challenge of building civil-military cooperation is that of economic growth. The country has been waiting since 1947 for an economic miracle. The need of the hour is not to score constitutional brownie points on who enjoys precedence over whom but for the new government to set to work ceaselessly for making possible national socio-economic transformation.

The modest economic target should be to double the GDP till 2023 which means that the GDP must grow to USD 600-650 billion by the end of the next five years. The ambitious goal should be to triple the GDP by 2025 which means that concerted efforts should be made to ensure the GDP is around USD 900 billion by that time.

If the new government succeeds in achieving the modest GDP growth target, it shall find itself in a very strong and respectable position in the hierarchy of spheres. If it succeeds in meeting the ambitious GDP target, it may at last find the supremacy that all Pakistani civilian governments have always hankered after but none have ever worked wisely and indefatigably for. Meeting the modest target and pushing ourselves to score the ambitious one is also a sure-fire way of defeating domestic and regional threats. However, if the next five years are lost in political fighting, Pakistan may permanently be left behind in the regional race for development.

Third, related to the challenge of economic transformation is the challenge of compressing work and leisure times. The new government will need to achieve more with less. This can be done by doing more in less time. This in turn demands turning 24 hours of a day into working hours seven

days a week by introducing the system of three daily shifts of 8 hours each in all walks of national life.

This is possible keeping in view our demographic dividend. Backed by a solid, well-conceived, and multi-stakeholder national development plan, this is the only way to make up leeway and pick up the slack. This is the real meaning of Quaid-e-Azam's advice to "work, work and only work".

Fourth, the next five years will coincide with the challenge of the development of the second phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which, according to the China-Pakistan Long-Term Plan for CPEC, is supposed to consist of the: near-completion of the national "industrial system"; coordinated development and activation of "major economic functions"; major improvement in "people's livelihood along the CPEC"; balanced "regional economic development"; and the realization of "all the goals of Vision 2025".

This is a long and grueling schedule of national deliverables which will not be fulfilled unless institutional harmony, political stability, interprovincial coordination, engagement of population, public-private collaboration, and time compression strategies are in place.

Fifth, Pakistan's looming civilizational failure will perhaps be the biggest challenge confronting the new government. This is the challenge that all previous governments have only aggravated.

Civilization, in the last analysis, is the art of building and living in towns and cities. Pakistanis are failing terribly at this art. Instead of places where people can flourish in prosperity, health, contentment, and virtue, our cities are fast becoming urban wastelands where deprivation, disease, misery, and vice have begun to run wild. This civilizational failure of Pakistan is based on abysmal people-to-people interaction, rent-seeking state-society relations, and exploitive society-nature relationship.

According to a 2011 McKinsey report on the future global urban growth, by 2025 600 cities will have 2 billion inhabitants or 25 percent of the world's population, generate USD 64 trillion or about 65 percent of global GDP, and contain 735 million households with an average per capita GDP of USD 32,000 of which 235 million households will live in cities in the developing world with annual income of more than USD 20,000.

The new government will need to plan for positioning Pakistani cities to become engines of growth rather than juggernauts of arrested development.

How the new government will set about meeting these five big challenges with focus and consistency in the currently charged atmosphere of sharp political and institutional polarization is hard to say. Without social stability that is itself predicated on political stability, national development seems likely to become imprisoned in the Sisyphean roll of political conflict.

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