

SCENARIO 242

GENERAL ELECTIONS IN PAKISTAN [2018] -I

On 25th July 2018; general elections in Pakistan were held after another term of Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz [PMLN] was completed. The party had stayed in power for full term of five years and then, for three months, had handed over the reins to their own chosen team of interim administrators as per constitutional provisions. Seeing through the campaigning period of various contesting parties gave an interesting study.

Let us start from little earlier days.....

EARLIER, PMLN HAD LOST SARAIKI SUPPORT:

The Punjab game, in fact, had slipped out of PMLN's hand **on 21st April 2018** when ***Ju-noobi Punjab Sooba Mahaz*** [JPSM] president Makhdoom Khusró Bakhtayar had urged all the political parties to support their demand of SEPARATE PROVINCE and added that it would only be possible with consensus of all the political parties.

Terming the JPSM a voice of 35+m people of south Punjab, Mr Bakhtiar said:

"If someone cannot contribute to resolve their problems, they should not create hurdles – ours is a one-point agenda of the creation of south Punjab province for the political and financial well-being of the people of the region. In the past all political parties made commitments to us - but were never fulfilled.

It is regretted that the budget for the Orange Line Metro Train Lahore was over Rs:240bn [then] whereas the budget for the whole south Punjab region stood at Rs:206bn."

On 8th May 2018; the negotiations between *Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf* [PTI] and JPSM concluded. The JPSM group, which comprised of more than 21 sitting and former elected representatives of the PMLN, made its merger official after meeting PTI Chairman Imran Khan there and then.

In fact, the PMLN had not fulfilled its promise of declaring the Southern Punjab a province during its full tenure of five years – thus the reaction was evident. Mr Bakhtiar highlighted it categorically that the PMLN had been ruling Punjab for the last 30-35 years keeping south Punjab with itself not for the sake of federation but just to keep on ruling. Next day, during the joint media conference, Mr Bakhtiar explained his agenda that *'.....new provincial demarcations are the need of the time. The demarcation of new provinces will ensure that funds allocated for Rajanpur are not given to Multan.'*

Later, the said estranged PMLN lawmakers making JPSM officially merged into the PTI to contest the 2018 general elections under the PTI banner. PTI's Imran Khan had assured the JPSM leaders that agreeing to the formation of a new province was not a political decision but [his] conviction.

[Hard luck for the PMLN; on the last day of scrutiny of nomination papers, their seven candidates from Southern Punjab returned their tickets leaving no option for PMLN to field alternate candidates, depriving them an opportunity to win those seats.]

During the interim government period, JPSM were ready for dialogue with any party. But the PTI had backed the JPSM's demand for a separate province - not for linguistic reasons but on administrative grounds to mitigate the miseries being faced by some 35 million people living in Bahawalpur, Multan and Dera Ghazi Khan Divisions.

As per their written and signed contract, the PTI had agreed to include the formation of southern Punjab province in the PTI's agenda for the first 100 days – if they came in power. Contrarily, PMLN's Federal Minister Maryam Aurangzeb had claimed that 'those lawmakers' had already been planning to quit the party, and termed them a 'bunch of opportunists'.

On another front, news & reports of collusion between the judiciary and military for PTI were triggered. Justice Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui, Islamabad High Court [IHC]'s senior justice, released a statement on 22nd July 2018 alleging that judges were pressured by the ISI not to release Nawaz Sharif before the election. **However, he provided no evidence and was at that time facing corruption charges pending at the Supreme Judicial Council, leading to rumours about the timing of his statement.**

Pakistan's Chief Justice Saqib Nisar said he felt '**saddened at J Siddiqui's comments**', and whilst criticising them, stated that *"as the head of judiciary, I assure you that we are not under any sort of pressure"* - Staff Report of **Daily 'DAWN'** dated 22nd July 2018 is referred.

[Referring to **Reuters** dated 11th May 2018; media polls had suggested PMLN's lead had narrowed in the run up to the elections, that the party had suffered '**blow after blow**' in setbacks to re-election; most importantly the ruling PMLN facing a number of desertion and corruption charges.]

Opinion polling prior to campaigning had shown leads for the PMLN over the PTI. However, from an 11-point lead, the PM-N's lead began to diminish in the final weeks of the campaign, with some polls close to the election showing PTI with a lead. In the final result, the PTI made a net gain with 31.82% of the vote, whilst the PMLN made a net loss with 24.35%; **BBC report** dated 4th July 2018 is referred.

ELECTION DAY & RESULTS:

For General Elections to be held on 25th July 2018:

- As many as 105.96 million registered voters of the country were given a right to franchise in that 2018's general elections which included 55.9% male voters while 44.1% female voters.
- 272 seats of the National Assemblies were there to be grabbed by contesting parties. 60 seats reserved for women and 10 for minorities were to be allocated later by the ECP on the basis of proportionate performance of the parties on the Election Day.
- More than 30 political parties and 12,570 candidates were competing for their seats in the national and four provincial assemblies.
- Electioneering officially came to a close on 23rd July mid-night, with all the major parties making one final push to convince voters.
- PTI's Mr Khan held a series of rallies in the eastern city of Lahore, PMLN's political heart-land.
- PMLN President Shahbaz Sharif also addressed a rally in the central town of Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab, urging the nation to '*give respect to the vote*' (**vote ko izzat do**), PMLN's cry that referred to their allegation that the military and judiciary were interfering in the political process.
- Polls were held for the national and four provincial assemblies on the same day of 25th July 2018.

- This was the third civilian transfer of power in Pakistan's 70-year history.
- Polls were closed in time in Pakistan but the Election Commission said voters who were still inside polling booths at the close at 6pm [14:00 GMT] could complete the voting process.
- Election material including ballot boxes, seals, polling booths, ink, ballot papers and other necessary items were delivered to polling stations countrywide a day before under tight security arrangements.
- Up to 800,000 police and 371,000 military-men were deployed in about 85,000 polling stations throughout the country in a bid to ensure the vote proceeds peacefully.
- The *Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal* [MMA], an alliance of religious political parties, secured 12 National Assembly seats in the said elections of 2018.
- While Mr Khan maintained a commanding lead in that day's polls, his party was not able to form a majority government; 137 seats were needed to form a government.
- At least 203 people were killed in the weeks leading up to 25th July's vote, with a series of suicide attacks targeting election rallies throughout the country.
- Millions of Pakistanis flocked to polling stations to vote amidst violence, including a suicide attack in the western city of Quetta that claimed at least 31 lives.

[SUICIDAL ATTACK IN QUETTA: *At least 31 people were killed, including two policemen, in a bomb blast near a polling station in the Quetta city. More than 40 others were wounded in the blast on the election-day. The blast, which appeared to target a police convoy, had taken place just hours after polls opened in all over Pakistan. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant [also known as ISIS] group claimed responsibility for the attack.*

The attack was carried out by a suicide bomber operating on motorcycle. Most victims included voters so the atmosphere was tense but the voter turnout was high with people coming out in large numbers throughout the capital; daily ALJAZEERA's report dated 26th July 2018 is referred.

Earlier, on 13th July 2018, 154 people were killed in an attack on a political rally in the city of Mastung in Balochistan, the second deadliest attack ever on Pakistani soil.]

As per the Election Commission of Pakistan [ECP]'s official notification about results of the general elections 2018, *Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf* [PTI] stood victorious after bagging 116 National Assembly seats with a total of 16.85 million of the popular vote out of a total of 52.8 million votes cast. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz [PMLN], which came second with 64 seats, got 12.89 million votes while the Pakistan People Party [PPP], ranking third with 43 seats, grabbed 6.89 million votes of the total votes cast.

In the provincial break-up, PTI was the most popular party in two out of the four provinces, Punjab and Khyber PK. In Punjab alone, PTI got 11.1 million votes, while in KPK it got 2.1 million votes. PTI was the third and fourth largest party in Sindh and Baluchistan respectively. The PMLN lost its throne in Punjab and came in second, grabbing 10.5 million votes, while PPP was the most popular party in Sindh with 3.8 million votes.

The most popular party of Baluchistan was Baluchistan Awami Party [BAP] with 0.43 million votes, while the *Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal* [MMA] was the second biggest party there. The latter bagged the fourth highest number of votes nationally with 2.5 million votes, and the newly formed *Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan* [TLP] got 2.1 million votes nationally, becoming the fifth largest party.

[On 24th July 2018, *only a day before general elections, unknown attackers killed four military troops escorting an election convoy in the volatile district of Turbat Baluchistan. The assailants first fired rocket-propelled grenades as the convoy passed through the Niwano area, then shot at troops with automatic weapons. Three army*

soldiers and a member of the paramilitary force were killed. Thirteen people - eight soldiers, a member of the paramilitary force, and four civilians - were also wounded in this ambush.]

During the general elections of 25th July 2018, the statistics appeared that 4.67 million votes were cast in favour of members of religious parties who contested for National Assembly seats across the country. Candidates of religious parties received the highest number of votes from Punjab where they bagged a total of 1.86 million votes from NA-55 to NA-195 constituencies.

The second highest votes in favour of candidates of religious parties were cast in Khyber PK; 1.35 million votes were cast for them in NA-1 to NA-51. Meanwhile, in Sindh - 1.124 million votes; and in Baluchistan 0.3 million votes were cast in favour of religious parties from NA seats of NA-196 to NA-256 and NA-257 to NA-272 respectively. Further, religious parties got a total 39,804 votes from three Islamabad constituencies — NA-52 to 54.

The new picture appeared on Pakistan's canvas was that all political parties of Pakistan contested the 2018 elections on solo flight except the MMA. The PTI got majority seats in the National Assembly. The second largest political party was PMLN while the PPP got the third position. The PTI also got victory in KPK, formed its own government there without any partner; it formed coalition governments in Baluchistan and Punjab with other political Parties. The PPP got majority seats in Sindh and formed its own government.

The most important development in elections was the MMA's poor performance in KPK and other parts of the country setting new trends of 'humiliating defeat' in the country. On the other hand, the *Tehreek e Labbaik* [TLP] got the fifth largest votes in the country was much surprising for all.

The victory of PTI was also a new development in the political arena of Pakistan. PLMN performed well and in a very narrow margin lost the provincial government in Punjab. It was the first time in the history of Pakistan that political process continued for the third term with the encouraging trends to believe in democracy. Two democratic governments had completed their five year terms each despite the fact that they lost two prime ministers during this period. The youth and women participation were the most important developments giving emergence to new trends in Pakistani politics.

For the first time in Pakistan's history, ***three minority candidates were elected on general seats in the National Assembly and the Sindh Assembly***; thus the people of Sindh rejected the politics of hate, and electables regardless of their religion. Interestingly, all three candidates were contesting on PPP tickets. Notably, majority of the Hindu voters reside in Sindh, of which c 40% live in two districts; Umerkot and Tharparkar.

PPP leader Mahesh Kumar Malani clinched victory in the NA-222 constituency of Tharparkar after securing 106,630 votes. PPP's Hari Ram was proven to be victorious in PS-147 Mirpurkhas-1 constituency after securing 33,201 votes. Giyanoo Mal of the same party secured victory in PS-81 constituency of Jamshoro after getting a total of 34,927.

The ECP announced holding re-election on two constituencies of the National Assembly, ***NA-10 and NA-48, where the turnout of women voters was recorded below 10 per cent***; as per Elections Act 2017 women voters' turnout should not be below 10% in any parliamentary constituency.

However, elections of 2018 saw upsets for major political bigwigs who lost to novice candidates in 25th July polls. Among women politicians up to grab National Assembly seats, prominent candidates who lost the race were Dr Firdous Ashiq Awan, Saira Afzal Tarar and Ayesha

Gulalai. ***Eight women made it to the National Assembly through direct vote.*** Amongst the victorious women were:

- ***Mehnaz Aziz;*** of the PMLN secured victory from NA-77 Narowal-I constituency after securing 106,366 votes. ***Ghulam Bibi Bharwana*** of the PTI emerged victorious from NA-115 Jhang-II constituency after securing 91,434 votes. ***Zartaj Gul*** of PTI claimed victory in NA-191 Dera Ghazi Khan-III constituency after securing 79,817 votes against former PMLN minister Sardar Awais A Leghari.
- ***Nafisa Shah*** of PPP clinched victory in NA-208 Khairpur constituency after securing 107,847 votes. ***Shazia Marri*** of PPP was elected from the NA-216 Sanghar-II constituency after securing 80,752 votes. ***Fahmida Mirza*** of the Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) stood triumphant from NA-230 Badin-II constituency in a closely contested competition against PPP's Haji Rasool Bux Chandio.
- ***Shamsun Nisa*** of PPP won in the NA-232 constituency of Thatta after securing 152,691 votes. ***Zubaida Jalal*** of Balochistan Awami Party [BAP] created history after she was elected as the only women candidate for National Assembly from Baluchistan.

PTI DECLARED VICTORIOUS:

Before elections, some major story lines in media were:

- Would PTI successfully replace the dominant PMLN party from its political heartland of Punjab? If it does, it would go a long way towards securing the government.
- Pakistan's north-western tribal areas were going to vote for the first time as part of directly-governed Pakistan, after being merged with Khyber PK province earlier that year. Which way would the tribal areas - where a widespread rights movement had challenged the status quo - vote?
- In Karachi, would the sprawling metropolis of more than 20 million still vote for MQM, or could other parties finally gain a foothold there for the first time in 30 years?

The unofficial results of 259 constituencies out of 270 of the National Assembly showed that *Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf* (PTI) had won 114 seats followed by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) with 62 and 42 seats respectively.

PTI Chairman Imran Khan made history by winning from all the five constituencies in the general election as he became the first politician to clinch this number. In 1970 election, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had contested from four National Assembly seats and could win three of them.

The ECP postponed elections on two National Assembly seats, NA-60 and NA-103, due to conviction of a candidate from court and suicide of one of the candidates respectively. The PTI needed support of independents and other parties to form a coalition government in the centre. The unofficial results showed that independents and *Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal* (MMA) each had won 11 NA seats, Pakistan Muslim League (PML), *Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan* and Baluchistan National Party each won four seats, and Baluchistan Awami Party won 2 seats.

The Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) that was contesting against the PPP candidates in interior Sindh could bag only two seats. *Awami National Party* and *Awami Muslim League* had won one seat each.

Punjab Assembly had a total of 297 general seats and results of 294 of them were received till then to the ECP. The PMN had won 130 seats of the provincial assembly followed by PTI with 120 seats, PPP with 6, independents, 29, PML - 7, MMA and *Awami Raj Party* each won one seat.

In Sindh, out of 130 seats, the results of 120 seats were received till then. These results showed that PPP won 77 seats followed by PTI with 20 seats, GDA with 10, MQM-P, 9, and two seats each were won by MMA and Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan. The PPP was comfortable to form its government in the province.

In Khyber PK province, results of 96 seats out of 99 had been received till that day. These results showed the PTI had secured two-third majority in the province by clinching 66 seats followed by MMA with 10 seats, ANP - 6, five seats each by PMLN and independents, and four seats were won by PPP.

Baluchistan Assembly had a total of 51 seats and results of 43 seats were received. BAP won 11 seats followed by MMA 9; independents 5; BNP 6; PTI 4; ANP 3; and one each by PkMAP, Jamhoori Watan Party and BNP-Awami.

Earlier, speaking to media persons, ECP Secretary had admitted that Result Transmission System (RTS) could not perform in a manner it was expected to perform. He said that polling agents at every polling station were given copies of Form 45. Also, that there were complaints about the slowness of the 8300-information service which was powered by the ECP.

Next day, the '**Washington Post**' dated 26th July 2018 opined:

"Pakistan just held a national election Wednesday, but it ended in a major controversy.

The election was essentially between Pakistan's two largest political parties, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) and the PTI.

Pre-election polls suggested the two parties were locked in a tight contest. The unofficial results showed PTI won about 110 out of 272 seats in Pakistan's National Assembly. PMLN has won about 64. Trailing behind the two is the PPP, with close to 40 seats. PMLN has rejected the results, claiming the election was rigged."

Pakistan's Election Commission [ECP] announced the full results of general election paving the way for the winner, Imran Khan, to begin searching for coalition partners. Although Mr Khan appeared to fall short of the 137 seats needed for a majority in the National Assembly, his better-than-expected results had no apparent problems forming a government with a handful of small coalition partners.

Jailed former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's PMLN had bagged 63 seats. The PPP leader Bilawal Zardari, the son of assassinated two-time Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto could get through only one seat from Larkana; he was miserably defeated at two other seats from where he contested.

- PMLN leader Shahbaz Sharif met his brother, Nawaz Sharif, in jail. The meeting was held at Rawalpindi's Adiala jail which lasted for 30 minutes; they discussed the future course of action to go ahead.
- The key question was that how the political opposition was going to react to PTI's governing policies.

- Was this going to lead to more political instability or could the politicians reconcile with the fact that they had suffered a major defeat; whereas the traditional parties were booted out and a new party, which was promising accountability and change, was voted in by a vast majority of the Pakistani populace.
- This was, in fact, the result of 22 years of conviction, relentless efforts, determination and not giving up by Imran Khan and its PTI.

Soon PTI's main rival PMLN announced that it would sit on the opposition benches; Imran Khan in his well-articulated '**victory speech**' next day pledged to safeguard the interests of ordinary citizens while ***promising not to resort to retaliatory measures against his political rivals***. According to preliminary and unofficial results, PTI had managed to grab 119 general seats in the National Assembly, enough for it to form a government at the Centre with suitable allies.

Imran Khan knew that as the PTI had taken lead in Pakistan's general election by knocking down the traditional stalwarts of the PPP and PMLN, it was likely to face multiple challenges as a new ruling party. The first and foremost was to chalk out a strategy to calm down the major political parties which had declared the whole election rigged; though it has been a routine fashion in Pakistan that after each election, whether national, local or bi-election, the loser persons and invariably all parties never accept their defeat – elections of 2013, 2008, 1997 and others stand witness to this fact.

Imran Khan's 22-year-old dream to change the fate of Pakistan finally came true. PTI was in a comfortable position to form governments in the Centre and two provinces. The entire nation hoped that Imran Khan would talk for a '**Naya Pakistan**' despite giving up his ideology of not relying on '*electables*' to come into power. Several key issues ranging from a crippled economy, electricity outages, a worsening water crisis, and corruption mafias all around were there to test his determination, luck and muscles.

KHAN's VICTORY SPEECH (2018):

On 26th July 2018; while addressing the nation on TV, Imran Khan offered an olive branch to the opposition and said he was happy for them to have any constituency investigated where they thought there were irregularities. ***He pledged there would be no political victimisation and all state institutions would be strengthened.***

However, the opposition didn't respond with positive tone. Imran Khan announced to set a personal example of austerity and offered himself for accountability so that a corruption-free society could be realised. He vowed to drag the nation out of the poverty trap; and also, that he would strive to have harmonious relations with all neighbouring countries including India.

Here is the full text of Imran Khan's VICTORY SPEECH after winning the general elections:

- *"Briefly, I want to describe the kind of Pakistan I want to see ... look, my inspiration is the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the city of Medina that he founded, how it was based on humanity. For the first time, that state was formed based on humanitarianism.*
- *That is my inspiration, that Pakistan should have that kind of humanitarian state, where we take responsibility for our weaker classes.*
- *The weak are dying of hunger. I will try my best – all of my policies will be made to raise our weaker classes, for our labourers ... for our poor farmers, who work all year and get no money ... 45 percent of children have stunted growth, they don't reach the right height, or their brains don't develop.*

- *There are countries with less than 25 million people, and we have that many children out of school. My effort will be that we try our best to raise these people up, that all of our policies be focused on human development. I want the whole country to think like this. No country can prosper when there is a small island of rich people, and a sea of poor.*
- *I want all of Pakistan to unite. I want to make it clear that anyone who was against us, who voted against us, I think the kind of personal attacks that I have seen, no one has seen those, but I have forgotten all of those, they are behind me. ... my cause is far bigger than me. **We will not do any kind of political victimizing.** We will establish supremacy of the law ... whoever violates the law, we will act against them.*
- *Our state institutions will be so strong that they will stop corruption. Accountability will start with me, then my ministers, and then it will go from there. We will set an example of how the law is the same for everyone. If the West is ahead of us today, it is because their laws are not discriminatory this will be our guiding principle.*
- *The biggest challenge we are facing is the economic crisis ... we have never had such a huge fiscal deficit. All of this is since our economy is going down because of dysfunctional institutions. We need to make an atmosphere for doing business.*
- *I think our greatest asset is our overseas Pakistanis ... we will fix our governance and invite them to invest here.*
- *Our second problem is unemployment. We have the second youngest population in the world ... they need jobs.*
- *Where Pakistan is standing right now, **I am telling you that we will run Pakistan like it has never been run before ...** and we will start with ourselves. All rulers who have come so far, they spend money on themselves the way our ruling elite spends money, how will anyone pay tax?*
- *People don't pay taxes, because they see how our ruling elite spends that money [on themselves]. I promise that I will protect the people's tax money. We will cut all of our expenses. I am telling you here that the PM House, this huge mansion ... in a country where there are so many poor people, I would be embarrassed to live there.*
- *We will use it (the PM House) as an educational institute ... all governor houses will be used for the public. We might convert some of them into hotels, as we did in Nathia Gali.*
- *My point is that what we have seen in Pakistan so far, the way the ruling elite has lived off the country's taxes, I will end this. We have to escape this economic crisis. No one is coming to save us. We will strengthen the anti-corruption institutions ...*
- *Hopefully, our farmers, the whole government will work to make sure the farmers make money somehow. We will help small businesses. We will bring in new things to bring in employment for young people.*
- *The next thing I want to talk about is that we face a very big foreign policy challenge; if any country needs peace right now, it's Pakistan.*
- *Our economic crisis is such that we want to have good relations with all our neighbours ... China gives us a huge opportunity through CPEC, to use it and drive investment into Pakistan. We want to learn from China how they brought 700 million people out of poverty ... The other thing we can learn from China is ... the measures they have taken against corruption, how they have arrested more than 400 ministers there.*
- *Then there is Afghanistan, a country that has suffered the most in the war on terror. Afghanistan's people need peace. We want peace there. If there is peace in Afghanistan, there will be peace in Pakistan. We will make every effort to achieve peace there. We want to have open borders with Afghanistan one day.*
- ***With the US, we want to have a mutually beneficial relationship ... up until now, that has been one way, the US thinks it gives us aid to fight their war ... we want both countries to benefit, we want a balanced relationship.***
- *We want to improve ties with Iran. Saudi Arabia is a friend who has always stood by us in difficult times. Our aim will be that whatever we can do for conciliation in the*

Middle East, we want to play that role. Those tensions, that fight, between neighbours, we will try to bring them together.

- **On India:** *I was saddened in the last few days, how the media in India portrayed me as a Bollywood film villain. It seemed like India feared everything bad would happen if Imran Khan came into power. I am the Pakistani who has the most familiarity with India, I have been all over that country. I think it will be very good for all of us if we have good relations with India. We need to have trade ties, and the more we will trade, both countries will benefit.*
- *The unfortunate truth is that Kashmir is a core issue, and the situation in Kashmir, and what the people of Kashmir have seen in the last 30 years they have really suffered. Pakistan and India's leadership should sit at a table and try to fix this problem.*
- *We are at square one right now [with India]. If India's leadership is ready, we are ready to improve ties with India. If you step forward one step, we will take two steps forward. I say this with conviction, this will be the most important thing for the sub-continent, for both countries to have friendship.*
- *To end, I pledge to my Pakistani nation that I will prove that we can fix our governance system in this country, we can also bring a governance system that can make the people's lives easier.*
- *I pledge this to you today, it will be my foremost aim to remain as simple as possible ... in this poor country, these huge symbols, these mansions and protocols, on public's money, I pledge that there will be a different kind of governance in Pakistan.*
- *I am saying to you today, that for the first time, Pakistan's policies won't be for the few rich people, it will be for the poor, for our women, for our minorities, whose rights are not respected. My whole aim will be to protect our lower classes and to bring them up.*
- *Finally, on rigging. Today political parties claim there was rigging. The first thing I will say is that this election commission was formed by the two main political parties, the PPP and PMLN. This was not PTI's election commission. I say to you today, if you say there was rigging in any one constituency, we will stand with you and aid in its investigation. This is the cleanest election in Pakistan's history."*

RIGGING ALLEGATIONS:

On Elections-Day, the media observed people turning up early in Islamabad. It was indeed a tough-fought election. There was a lot at stake. All three mainstream political parties were saying that they were going to get a high number of votes and seats. But after the results:

- Shahbaz Sharif, the PMLN chief, announced his party would reject the vote count in the general election due to alleged rigging; saying that: *"We completely reject this result, completely. Today what has happened, we are taking Pakistan 30 years into the past; the peoples' mandate has been disrespected and dishonoured."*
- Pakistan Peoples Party leader Bilawal Zardari questioned the delay in announcing the first set of official results.

Next day, Babar Yaqoob, Secretary of the ECP told media that:

"There's no conspiracy, nor any pressure in delay of the results. The delay is being caused because the result transmission system has collapsed. The delay in announcing the official results was due to a technical issue with the Results Transmission System (RTS).

We were supposed to get 85,000 forms through the RTS but only 25,000 managed to come through. The forms bearing results from the polling stations would be transported by road to the Returning Officers. We haven't received a single result yet."

However, the fact remains that though marred by the allegations of **'pre-poll engineering and post-poll manipulation'**, the ECP eventually succeeded in holding *'free, fair and transparent'* general elections in the country on 25th July 2018. In these polls, the pro-change PTI just outperformed its primary political competitor PMLN, a party which had ruled Pakistan thrice.

The **Free and Fair Election Network** [Fafen] expressed satisfaction over the 25th July election process. Similarly, terming the overall election results **"credible"**, the **European Union Election Observation Mission** [EU EOM] generally praised the ECP's role in the conduct of those elections in Pakistan. However, EU EOM also said that *"although there were several legal provisions aimed at ensuring a level playing field, there was a lack of equality of opportunity provided to contesting parties"*.

The fact remains that the results of every general election in the country have been quite controversial; it is Pakistan's history. There was a massive protest by PTI against the alleged electoral rigging in the country following the 2013's general elections; the party had openly and actively disputed the credibility and fairness of those elections. Once, the ECP issued a notice to PTI chairman Imran Khan saying his vote could be disqualified after he cast his ballot in front of television cameras, violating *'the secrecy of the ballot paper'* – it was the joke of that day.

Shiraz Khan Paracha, Director of Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, told **AL JAZEERA** in an interview from Islamabad:

*"....the '**horrific suicide attack**' in Quetta, which killed at least 31 people, has not deterred people from voting. What we are observing is that despite the very serious incident, people are still coming to the polling stations, there are long queues all across Pakistan and the expectation is that this time the turnout could be even higher than the previous elections."*

Since 2013 till that elections day of 2018, more than 509 Shia Muslims - mainly ethnic Hazaras - were killed in a campaign of targeted shootings and bombings in Baluchistan province, according to the government data. Maulana Ramzan Mengal of Sunni Tehreek said *'....his party has no connection to the violence, but police have arrested him several times in recent years during investigations into the attacks.'*

However, the media reports claimed that *'....he has often been seen leading crowds of hundreds in chants of "**Kaafir, kaafir, Shia kaafir!**"*.

Important points to note were:

- The outgoing PMLN and other parties that underperformed, unsurprisingly, said it was not fair, but the ECP was standing by the results, saying any complaint should be filed with accompanying evidence. The opposition's complaints seem to centre on the vote counting process, with at least six political parties alleging their representatives were not allowed to witness the counting process, as mandated by law, and that the final counts were not documented as it should have been under the given regulations.
- FAFEN, an independent Pakistani election observer network, noted in at least 35 constituencies, ***the winning margin was less than the number of votes rejected***

by electoral officials, often a red flag for possible manipulation; BUT the number was similar in 2013 elections.

- The EU's Observers Mission in Pakistan said while there were positive changes to Pakistan's legal framework for elections, the polls were *"overshadowed by restrictions on freedom of expression and unequal campaign opportunities"*. However, PTI's chief Mr Khan - who himself alleged widespread rigging in 2013 - said his party would fully cooperate with any investigation into all charges whatsoever.
- According to former Indian Chief Election Commissioner SY Quraishi, a member of the international observers group in Pakistan, the election system was transparent, free and fair, and the minor technical glitches which showed up later in the day were due to inexperience.

Most charges stemmed from delays in announcement of the election results by the Election Commission of Pakistan [ECP] which had promised most of the results would be out within eight hours from the end-time of the vote. Allegedly the ECP's Result Transmission Service [RTS] crashed on Election Day and official results were delayed. However, PTI's senior leadership immediately discarded the allegations – as per previous routine in Pakistan.

Indeed, Imran Khan was ready to bear a heavy burden after being new prime minister. First and foremost, he had ***to ensure that he would re-establish good relations with the military which was gravely disrespected and dishonoured during the past two regimes of the PPP and PMLN.*** Simultaneously, he also had to safeguard his own credibility by not appearing as the junior partner of the Pak-Army.

The controversies regarding 2018's general elections in Pakistan largely revolved around the instant collapse of the Results Transmission System [RTS] besides a large number of rejected votes in some constituencies. The much-hyped RTS introduced by ECP that year eventually proved to be a damp squib. There were many constituencies where these invalid votes just surpassed the winning margin thus many losing parties drew intended inferences from that apparent correlation between the invalid votes and the winning margin – recounting could have done in those polling stations.

During the 2018's elections, there were many complaints about the insufficient election material, especially the Form-45, a prescribed printed paper used to prepare, compile and declare election results at a specific polling station by presiding officers. Thus the PMLN formally demanded the formation of a judicial commission to probe into rigging allegations after terming the said elections as the most controversial polls.

The losing candidates also levelled an objection that 90% of Forms-45 were not signed by any polling agent, which was a violation of the Election Act 2017. However, an ECP spokesperson clarified that there was no designated space on the Form-45 to obtain the signatures of polling agents. The signatures were instead done on tamper-evident bags that were used to transport the results to the given destinations.

The entire elections process remained peaceful throughout the day in Karachi as no violent incident or report of polls rigging were reported from any part of the metropolis except one in Lyari area. The voters turn out also remained very low till noon as major political parties like MMA, PPP, PTI, PSP and MQM-P did not field their polling agents – in fact showing confidence in Pak-Army and Rangers who were there outside the polling premises for security.

Although the ECP rejected rigging allegations but initially a recount was ordered in 14 constituencies because of procedural errors; which later led to a recount on 70 constituencies. Imran Khan's PTI was officially declared the winner in Federal elections. The margin for the Punjab election was narrow between Khan's PTI and PMLN, but independents and PMLQ factions endorsed federal winners PTI, which led to Khan's party forming government

in Punjab also. Thus PMLN lost the elections both at the provincial and the federal level becoming the opposition, nominating Shehbaz Sharif to be leader of the opposition at the federal level and his son Hamza Shahbaz as opposition leader in Punjab.

In his 1st address to the nation **on 26th July 2018**, Imran Khan, the PTI chief dismissed allegations of rigging made by some political parties; however, promised his cooperation to investigate such allegations. He said:

"Speaking about rigging, I would like to say that neither was the election commission from PTI nor was the caretaker government made without the acceptance of any party. All of you opposed me when I asked only for four constituencies to make open [referring to general elections of 2013]. However, we will help you. We will open the constituencies you want for scrutiny."

On 27th July 2018; applications for recounting of votes made by several candidates were accepted by the returning officers [ROs] of the respective constituencies; Pakistan PTI's Abdul Aleem Khan filed it for NA-129 and PMLN's Saad Rafique and Abid Sher Ali filed their applications for NA-131 and NA-108 respectively. PPP leaders Abdul Qadir Gilani in NA-154 Multan-I and Ali Musa Gilani in NA-157 Multan-IV filed their petitions with the ROs concerned which were also approved.

Shahbaz Sharif's application was rejected in NA-249 Karachi by the RO; here he had lost against PTI's Faisal Vawda who had won the constituency with a narrow margin of about 700 votes. Aleem Khan lost to PMLN's Ayaz Sadiq by around 8,000 votes; Saad Rafique and Abid Sher Ali lost to Imran Khan and PTI's Farrukh Habib respectively with very thin margins - under 1,500. More applications for recounting of votes were expected as it has been the Pakistani culture since decades.

Imran Khan declared victory with a large lead in the nearly complete vote count that day. The party of ***jailed ex-PM Nawaz Sharif said elements of the powerful military suppressed its campaign*** and made accusations of rigging during the counting process after polls day.

See [Jemima Goldsmith](#) on tweet -

@Jemima_Khan at 7:42 AM - Jul 26, 2018

"22 years later, after humiliations, hurdles and sacrifices, my sons' father is Pakistan's next PM. It's an incredible lesson in tenacity, belief & refusal to accept defeat. The challenge now is to remember why he entered politics in the 1st place. Congratulations @ImranKhanPTI"

MOST OLD HORSES BEATEN:

PMLN's Shahbaz Sharif, the brother and aspiring successor of deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif reacted to the result, saying: *".....we reject this result."* PPP's chairman Bilawal Zardari joined the chorus of those complaining of serious irregularities on polling day alleging that their polling agents were kicked out of the final count sessions. The irony was that everyone hinted at but did not name who they thought was responsible: the ECP or the respective interim government which they had chosen themselves.

*[The biggest upset of the 2018 general election was the defeat of **Bilawal Zardari** from Lyari, NA-246 Karachi South-1, a long-time stronghold of the PPP. Lyari did the unthinkable when it rejected Bilawal in favour of the Imran Khan-led PTI. What's even more shocking was the PPP chairman's failure to be the runner-*

up even. Bilawal could manage to win from Larkana, the Bhutto Dynasty, but also lost to the PTI in NA-8 Malakand.]

PTI was set to form a government for the second time in Khyber PK [KPK] where it secured 65 seats out of 99, vindicating the party's claim of carrying out development in the province during its previous tenure. Soon after the election results started pouring in, almost all the major political parties including PMLN and PPP levelled allegations of rigging '*behind closed doors*' and rejected the results. However, PMLN President Shahbaz Sharif immediately announced to sit in the opposition. In NUT-SHELL:

- The PTI's victory was based on two major wins. First, it was able to wrest much of southern and northern Punjab from the outgoing PMLN, breaking the party's vote bank in its political heartland.
- Second, it was able to hold on to most of its seats in Khyber PK, which had historically always voted out its incumbent party. The PTI won the most seats in KPK in 2013, but holding on to them represented an historic act of phenomenal change.
- For the last 35 years, the MQM, an ethnic *Muhajir* party, ruled Pakistan's largest city Karachi, with an iron fist. Since late 2013, however, a paramilitary operation targeted the party's alleged criminal enterprises, jailing dozens of workers and leaders. The operation finally led to the fractionalisation of the party, with Chief Altaf Hussain, living in exile in London since decades, unable to manage this time.
- As a result, 2018 saw an open fight over Karachi city for the first time in decades, and the results were clear: the PTI swept 14 of the city's 21 seats, beating major MQM leaders along the way. It even managed to beat PPP chief Bilawal Zardari in his party's historical stronghold of Lyari - 246.
- This election was a mixed bag for Pakistan's far-right parties, with the newly emerged *Tehreek e Labbaik Pakistan* [TLP] firmly establishing itself as the dominant **hard-line Barelvi Sunni Muslim party**, but others failing to make an impact. The TLP won two provincial assembly seats in Sindh province but, crucially, emerged as the third-placed party in a number of national constituencies across the country, regularly registering more than 10,000 votes, and going as high as 42,000 in some urban constituencies.
 - {Interestingly, the *Ahle Sunnat Wal Jammāt* [ASWJ], an alleged political front for the *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* [LeJ] armed group, and the *Milli Muslim League* [MML], the alleged political front for the *Lashkar-e-Taiba* [LeT] armed group, both fared badly at both the provincial and national levels.}
- Pakistan's military deployed more than 371,000 soldiers for the 2018 election; more than it has ever done before, and ensured fair polling where positioned. Each of the country's 85,000 polling stations was secured by army personnel, with civilian law enforcement and, in some cases, electoral officials, relegated to a supporting role.
- Entry to the polling stations was strictly controlled, and in several instances, media workers reported being disallowed from entering into the polling stations by military personnel - despite having proper accreditation. The army played '**no direct role**' in the polling process; and it only ensured security.
- Depending on how you look at it, the PPP - a party that had ruled Pakistan on four occasions since the party's inception in the 1970s - either failed miserably - thus relegated to third-party status in Pakistan. OR it over-performed expectations by holding on to its base in Sindh and picking up a few seats in southern Punjab province.

- The MQM's loss of its political base in Karachi was a major blow to the party, and the failure of even the breakaway *Pak Sarzameen Party* [PSP] to win a single national seat also suggested political atmosphere had changed in Pakistan's largest city.
- The Awami National Party [ANP], a Pashtun nationalist party in north-western KP province, only managed to win one single seat, cementing its decline since ruling the province from 2008-13.
- Miserably failed was the religious right, represented by the *Jamiat Ulema Islam-Fazal* [JUI-F], *Jamaat e Islami* [JI], and others largely failed at the polls, winning just 13 seats nationwide. Ironically, the JUI-F called for widespread protests against the results; the PMLN formulated a way forward and the PPP straightaway accepted the results though hesitantly.

PTI contacted smaller parties and independents to form a government. MQM won six seats, PMLQ won four, *Baluchistan Awami Party* [BAP] had four, Grand Democratic Alliance [GDA] in Sindh had two, and thirteen independent candidates were invited to join the PTI-led government. Additionally, *Awami Muslim League* [AML] led by Sheikh Rashid, the party's only MNA, had already vowed its support to PTI before the elections. PMLQ pledged its support to PTI's candidates for possible nomination as Chief Minister of Punjab, making it unlikely to oppose PTI in the National Assembly; BAP also announced its support for a PTI led federal government.

ALLEGED PAWNS OF ESTABLISHMENT:

Allegations of rigging by the opposition parties were generally raised as per routine with fingers pointed in all directions, including the security forces. However, the results of elections 2018 suggested that major politicians who were known as the 'pawns of the establishment' suffered a defeat while the so-called army critics won their seats. The results surprisingly suggested that two major politicians linked to the *Pashtun Tahafuz Movement* [PTM], Ali Wazir and Mohsin Dawar, won elections from NA-50 South Waziristan and NA-48 North Waziristan, respectively.

Two of the biggest critics of the army within the PMLN, former defence minister Khawaja Asif and Rana Sanaullah, won elections from NA-73 Sialkot and NA-106 Faisalabad respectively. On the other hand, elections 2018 proved to be a nightmare for most of the politicians who had moderate views about the military openly or covertly.

Almost all candidates of *Pak-Sarzameen Party* PSP, allegedly planted by the establishment to dislodge *Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan* [MQM-P] from urban Sindh, lost their seats. Chairman of PSP Mustafa Kamal also lost the elections from both his National Assembly seats in Karachi. PSP leader Raza Haroon saw the same fate.

PMLN's ex-interior minister Ch Nisar Ali Khan, a political bigwig hailing from a mighty military family, suffered defeat at the hands of PTI's Ghulam Sarwar Khan from both NA-59 and NA-63 Rawalpindi. Also, chief of *Baluchistan Awami Party* [BAP] faced defeat in NA-272 in 2018 elections. Another political asset Lt Gen [R] Qadir Baloch lost in NA-268 Chaghai; he was a federal minister in PMLN government since 2013.

Another stalwart politician Amir Muqam from KPK lost to PTI's little-known politicians from two National Assembly constituencies – NA-2 Swat and NA-29 Peshawar. Ijazul Haq, son of Gen Ziaul Haq, suffered defeat in Bahawalnagar though he had been winning from here since three decades.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), on 22nd May 2018, published the final electoral rolls ahead of General Elections 2018. According to the rolls, 105.96 million voters were able to cast their vote in the upcoming elections. Of these, 59.22m are male and 46.73m are females, with the gender gap between male and female rising to around 12.5m. Accordingly, 55.9pc of the registered voters were males while 44.1pc were females.

The numbers were approximately 23 per cent higher than the figures for the 2013 elections when the total number of voters stood at 86.19m.

In Punjab, total voters were 60.67m (23pc increase from 2013), of which 33.68m were male and 26.99m were female. A total of 22.39m voters (18pc increase over 2013) were registered in Sindh, according to the figures provided by the ECP, of which 12.44m were male and 9.95m were female.

Khyber PK, the third largest province of the country, was home to 15.32m registered voters (25pc higher than 2013) including 8.71m male and 6.61m female voters. Baluchistan had a total of 4.3m registered voters — 29pc more than 2013 — including 2.49m male and 1.81m female voters.

On polling day, amidst strict security measures, with personnel of both the police and military deployed, polling began at 8 am and, without any break, concluded at 6 pm across 17,758 polling stations of the Sindh province, out of which 2,716 had been declared highly sensitive whereas 10,864 were declared as sensitive.

Referring to daily '**Pakistan Today**' dated 26th July 2018:

".....results are pouring in from various constituencies after successful and peaceful holding of general elections 2018 in the country, the dwellers of Karachi have largely disappointed 'bigwigs' of the major political parties by defeating Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Zardari and Mutthida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan's (MQM-P) Dr Farooq Sattar."

The PPP had ruled Sindh over the past ten years [till then] but could not save its own Chairman Bilawal Zardari in NA-246 Lyari, once the stronghold of PPP while MQM-P's Dr Farooq Sattar was in the run for NA-245 and NA-247 of Karachi South and East but lost at both his parental constituencies. Interestingly, Dr Farooq Sattar lost NA-245 constituency while securing only 35,247 votes against his competitor Dr Aamir Liaquat of PTI who got 56,615 votes.

PPP's Shehla Raza and MQM-P's Ali Raza Abidi lost NA-243 constituency against PTI Chairman Imran Khan who got 91,358 votes. Moreover, MQM-P's leader Afaq Ahmed who was contesting elections for NA-240 and PSP's Asif Hasnain also lost against MQM-P's Iqbal Muhammad Ali Khan. PSP leader and former mayor Mustafa Kamal was contesting elections on various constituencies including NA-253, PS-124 and PS-127, but could not win on either of those seats.

Muttahida Majlis Amal [MMA]'s Asadullah Bhutto and PMLN's former federal finance minister Miftah Ismail lost NA-244 against PTI's Ali Haider Zaidi. Most interestingly, Irfanullah Marwat of Grand Democratic Alliance [GDA] also lost PS-104 against PPP's Saeed Ghani.

In short, PTI surprisingly emerged as a major political party in Karachi; it was ahead on 12 National Assembly [NA] seats out of 21. 2018's general elections produced surprise results in the metropolis for the first time in almost 30 years as Karachi's most popular party MQM-P could get six NA seats only. The Karachiites turned down the election boycott call of MQM's London based Altaf Hussain made on 23rd July 2018 via video message. However, the peaceful citizens of the metropolis city rejected his call and voted for change.

With Nawaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam in prison and the PMLN headed by Shahbaz Sharif, and with several legal cases hanging over the heads of the PPP's leadership most notably Bilawal Zardari's father and aunt, street agitation was neither likely nor anticipated. But even if complete calm were to prevail at home, the PTI government was expected to face challenges in the foreign policy field. It was clear that Pakistan's turbulent politics was not likely to set sail for smooth waters.

On 27th July 2018; while making a demand for transparent re-election, a multi-party conference was held in Islamabad which announced that a joint protest movement would be launched against the rigging and massive irregularities in elections. All of the parties, except PMLN, agreed that their successful candidates wouldn't take oath for the membership of the newly-formed assemblies. ***Ironically, most of those political leaders, who were then favouring boycotting assemblies, had already lost their personal seats in those polls.***

On 1st August 2018; MQM was told by the PPP that it had to choose between sitting in a coalition with them in Sindh or sitting in a coalition with PTI in the centre. On the same day, MQM-P convener Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui announced the party's six MNAs would lend their support to the PTI in the National Assembly. Next day, PMLN, PPP, MMA and ANP announced to form a **Grand Opposition Alliance** whereby the Speaker, Prime Minister and other key posts were jointly nominated and elected.

On 16th August 2018; after the elections for speaker, PPP decided to withdraw their support for Shahbaz Sharif for the post of Prime Minister, owing to previous statements made by the individual about the party's co-chairman and ex-President of Pakistan Asif Zardari. Other parties pledged their support towards the PTI nominees for speaker & deputy speaker. Those parties included Baluchistan National Party [Mengal], Grand Democratic Alliance [GDA] and *Jamhoori Watan Party* [JWP]. In addition to that, nine independents also joined the PTI.