

Pakistan Elections 2013: Movers, shakers and losers

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1 May 2013: another decisive date in the arduous democratic journey of Pakistan, especially after completing the government without any major interference, despite the judicial coup. More than the success of the previous regime in completing its term, despite the forced change in the Prime Minister, free and fair elections in May 2013 will ensure that the democratic process is on track.

The previous government led by the PPP has completed its term; despite a long and painful process, it has also ensured that there is a caretaker government at the federal and provincial levels. The date has been announced and the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), despite criticisms, does not suffer from any major credibility issues.

Clearly, the process towards the next elections has been smooth so far. But the crucial question will be what after the elections? Will the polity in Pakistan be able to elect a government for the federal and provincial legislatures? Will a government be formed smoothly, immediately after elections?

There are two more questions: Will the Taliban allow the elections to be conducted? Will the military and its much hated Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) allow a free and fair election? For the purpose of this analysis these two questions will be kept away, perhaps to be discussed separately. The primary focus now is on what is likely to be the elections results.

There are two major political parties at the national level PPP and PML-N, besides the religious parties including the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and two factions of the JUI. Of the regional parties, who will make a sub-

stantial contribution to the final tally of the National Assembly MQM from Sindh and the ANP from Khybe Pakhtunkhwa will be substantial. There have been huge expectations on Imran Khan's PTI and Musharraf's All Pakistan Muslim League, though they have not tested their electoral strength. Besides the above, there is also PML-Q, which was originally supported by Musharraf.

The contest clearly is likely to be between the above political parties. Of the above, PPP and PML-N are cadre based political parties with substantial presence at the grass roots level. Despite the criticisms of favouritism and being run like a feudal organisation by the top leadership, both these parties have substantial presence at the ground level.

Of these two, the PPP's primary strength comes from Sindh, especially its vast rural districts. In the recent months, ever since the debate on dividing Punjab into two North and South, there is a belief, though untested, that the PPP has gained some foothold in the districts of Southern Punjab, especially Multan and Bahawalpur regions; the fact that the former Prime Minister of Pakistan from PPP - Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani also came from this region gives credence to this belief that the PPP may do better in Southern Punjab.

However, there are many critics who question that the PPP will do better even in rural Sindh; this criticism comes from the fact that the PPP could not do anything



substantially for Sindhis during its tenure. If one has to forecast how rural Sindh will vote much will depend on any credible alternatives for the people, even if they are disenchanted with the PPP. Neither the MQM has a base in rural Sindh, nor any other party or individuals have a substantial hold. By default, the rural Sindh is likely to vote for the PPP.

PML-N, the other major political party, is likely to do better in Punjab. The Sharif brothers have been politically very calculative during the last five years and ensured that they overtly and covertly supported the multiple movements and protests against the PPP government. As a result, Punjab, especially the Northern parts are likely to vote for the PML-N. Though the PPP and even PML-Q expects to do better in the southern districts of Punjab, it will not be an easy win for them. PML-N will remain

a strong force in South Punjab as well.

In Sindh, especially in Karachi, the MQM is likely to remain the strong party. Despite the problems and numerous political somersaults by the MQM leadership, Karachi is likely to vote for the MQM; thanks to the undivided Mohajir vote bank. In the recent years, the ANP has made substantial inroads in Karachi, thanks to the sizeable pashtun population in this mega city. Karachi is believed to be the largest Pashtun city in the world, surpassing even Peshawar and Kandahar!

However, ANP's support amongst the Pashtuns in Karachi will make a larger impact in

Sindh Provincial Legislature, rather than helping the party in winning a seat from the National Assembly from Sindh. The primary base for the ANP remains the settled districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. While the MQM remains an undisputed leader of the Mohajirs, the same cannot be said about the ANP for the pashtuns. Even within Karachi, ANP's influence is waning in the recent months, thanks to the growing TTP influence. Pakistani Taliban will remain a crucial factor in affecting the chances of the ANP, by threatening those who are likely to vote for the party. Besides, Imran Khan is also likely to divert the Pashtun vote bank of the ANP.

Will Imran Khan be able to make a substantial impact in 2013 elections? Though he has not made an impact in the previous elections either at the national or at provin-

cial levels, his popularity has grown substantially since the last elections. However there are two primary problems for Imran Khan; first, his party, unlike the PPP or PML-N, do not have strong base at the grass roots level. Most of his leaders have defected from other parties, or former bureaucrats. The youths, who vociferously support him in the social media many of them have not voted in their lives and a substantial section of this group is not even in the electoral rolls.

The religious political parties have a strong street presence; this street power never materialised into seats in the National Assembly, essentially if the elections are free and fair. Despite coming together earlier under the banner of the MMA, the religious parties are no more united. Neither the TTP is likely to support these religious political parties.

Finally, the much expected return of Musharraf has not elicited any strong response from the people so far. Like Imran Khan, his party also has a serious problem at the grass roots level. In fact, Imran seems to be better mobilized for the elections than Musharraf.

The above analysis is based on an assumption, that the elections will be free and fair, and have no interferences either from the Taliban or from the all powerful intelligence agencies. Much will depend on how the electoral process heats up in the next few weeks. As on today, the election situation stands polarised with no single party have an absolute lead in Pakistan.

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BRICS comes of age at Durban

ARVIND GUPTA

THE BRICS forum, an informal grouping of five countries composed of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, is gaining heft. The member countries are exploiting the opportunities created by the ongoing global power shift to position themselves individually and collectively in the changing world order.

BRICS leaders were in upbeat mood while describing the achievements of the forum. President Putin sees BRICS as a "game changer" and a "key element in global governance", while Prime Minister Manmohan Singh describes BRICS as a "key growth driver". President Dilma Rousseff of Brazil sees BRICS contributing to the emergence of a democratic international order and helping bring balance in global economy. President Xi of China said BRICS could assist in the rise of Africa. President Zuma of South Africa, who was instrumental in bringing BRICS focus on Africa's development, said that BRICS is not a "talk shop" and it will be help "amplify" the voice of the five countries in global political, economic and social fora.

The BRICS summit declaration of 28 March 2013 exudes confidence. A few examples are: the leaders opined that the next WTO director general should be from developing countries; they expressed their unhappiness with the slow pace of reform of the IMF; they expressed dissatisfaction at the way in which Western countries were addressing the persistent global economic problems by spreading financial instabilities to other countries; and, they demanded that the UN Security Council coordinate its approaches with the African Union and ECOWAS on African issues.

This could be dubbed as mere rhetoric. But, many concrete steps were also announced. The most notable and most critiqued of these initiatives was the decision to set up a BRICS development bank, proposed by India at an earlier summit, to help developing countries develop infrastructure. The five leaders announced, "We have agreed to establish the New Development Bank. The initial contribution to the Bank should be substantial and sufficient for the Bank to be effective in financing infrastructure."

Although the details of the proposed bank have not been spelt out as there seem to have been some differences over its location, capitalisation, etc., the bank will truly be a game changer. The World Bank has come out in its support even as several commentators have described it as an empty gesture. If implemented, this bold initiative will surely cement the BRICS place in the global governance hierarchy.

BRICS is not merely an economic forum. In the words of the summit declaration, it is a forum for long term "coordination on a wide range of key issues of the world economy and politics." Further, BRICS will explore "new models and approaches towards more equitable development and inclusive global growth."

While BRICS does not challenge the exiting world order and instead seeks an honourable place in it, it nevertheless has the ambition of making its contribution to key global issues of governance. Therefore, it is not surprising that, as in the past, this time around too BRICS has taken positions on key issues of international security including Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, Climate Change, terrorism, etc.

The BRICS position on Syria is very different from that of the West. This is not surprising considering that Russia and China have vetoed Western resolutions on Syria in the past. BRICS has called for a Syria-led process, a national dialogue and opposed further militarisation of the conflict. The declaration states: "We believe that the Joint Communiqué of the Geneva Action Group provides a basis for resolution of the Syrian crisis and reaffirm our opposition to any further militarization of the conflict."

Similarly, on Iran too, the BRICS position is different from the usual Western positions. The declaration says, "We are concerned about threats of military action as well as unilateral sanctions. We note the recent talks held in

has yet to prove its credentials. BRICS counties have many advantages as they are large economies and blessed with tremendous human, material and financial resources. According to Bloomberg, intra-BRICS trade reached \$282 billion in 2012, a steep rise from \$27 billion in 2002. It is expected to reach \$500 billion in 2015. Last year, 20 percent of global FDI came into BRICS countries, up from six percent in 2000. The combined foreign exchange reserves of BRICS are above \$4 trillion. Thus, BRICS is not an insubstantial grouping. Its potential for cooperation is significant.

Yet, BRICS members are diverse countries. Some of them like India and China have serious unresolved problems among themselves. There is latent competition between Russia and China for dominance in Central Asia although both would like to see the US dominance in global affairs reduced. China, the strongest economy in BRICS, is not even a democracy. Yet, this diverse group of emerging economies has shown the resolve to work together.

BRICS countries are also improving their bilateral relations. The Chinese president recently visited Russia and cemented energy cooperation between the two countries. Brazil and China seek to improve their commercial relations and increase bilateral trade to \$30 billion. They have also agreed on a currency swap deal. China is using its visibility in BRICS to deepen its ties with a rising Africa where resources are available for exploitation.

It is too early to dismiss BRICS as yet another talk shop or to regard it as an influential pole. It has consolidated itself in the first five summit meetings. The second cycle of BRICS summits will begin next year in Brazil. The success of BRICS as a

significant pole in global affairs will depend upon how their economies perform and how they implement the initiatives announced and how well they coordinate their positions. Their success also attracts other countries. BRICS has said they are for openness and inclusiveness. This means that they may admit more countries in the future. Given its large population, rapid economic growth and strategic location, Indonesia could be a potential future member. As yet, BRICS remains an informal grouping with no charter and no secretariat. This is possibly its strength. If more countries join, the forum itself may become unwieldy and decision making difficult.

Some have criticised BRICS as long on rhetoric and short on action. Western criticism has been particularly harsh. This is understandable because BRICS is trying to stand up to the West in some ways. But the criticism has been a tad unfair. BRICS has come some way from its inception. It has considerable potential which will be utilised in the years to come. For BRICS member counties, the forum is an excellent stage on which to project their strengths and complementarities. At Durban, BRICS seems to have come of age even as it evolves further in the coming years.

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Almaty and hope that all outstanding issues relating to Iran's nuclear program will be resolved through discussions and diplomatic means."

BRICS counties have an abiding interest in climate change negotiations. Seeing climate change as an issue of sustainable development, they have called for "a successful conclusion by 2015, of negotiations on the development of a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention applicable to all Parties, guided by its principles and provisions".

Terrorism is an issue of global concern. In this regard, the BRICS declaration echoes the Indian formulation and supports the draft convention on combating international terrorism.

Since Africa was the focus theme of the summit, several paragraphs in the joint declaration talk of African issues. It recognises the centrality of the African Union in resolving African issues and recommends greater cooperation between the UN Security Council and the African Union's Security and Peace council. The declaration takes note of instability in the Sahel region as well as the worsening human right situation in many countries. It also recognises the developmental and infrastructure needs of African countries.

BRICS has been seen by many analysts as a step towards the evolution of a multipolar world order. This is true to an extent but BRICS

Understanding Myanmar's democratic opening

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MYANMAR is in the midst of momentous political change, which has seen the country emerge from decades of repressive military rule and international isolation to be lauded by Western leaders as a model of political development.

While not a democracy yet, the new quasi-civilian government has brought the opposition into parliament and revitalised the country's political life. It has also reached ceasefires with all but one of the country's main insurgent groups, undertaken major economic reforms, and launched a campaign for 'clean government'.

Sceptics believe change was forced upon the military leadership by Western sanctions and fear that political foment in North Africa and the Middle East might spread to Myanmar, and that reforms are intended simply to shore up the regime and protect military interests. This line of reasoning is unconvincing, however. Myanmar's military rulers have a proud record of resisting external pressure, which goes to the heart of their self-legitimation, and there have been no clear and present threats to the regime's power base in recent years. Most tellingly perhaps, the recent reforms have gone much further than a conservative agenda would have warranted, and have come to pose a significant threat to many vested interests.

Five factors in particular are critical for understanding the timing, content and speed of the ongoing reform process.

First, the military's self-image. The Tatmadaw (Myanmar's military) has never seen itself as a ruling class. Its self-image is that of a 'guardian', which steps in at times of crisis to save the Union and restore law and order. In the 1970s, Ne Win ended 12 years of direct military rule by introducing a social-list one-party system. By 1988, however, the world zeitgeist had changed, and the only legitimate system of government was multiparty democracy. Thus, there was never really any doubt that the military would hand back the reins of government to a, nominally at least, elected government.

Second, security perceptions. That it took two decades for the military to transfer power to civilians was due, in large part, to a deep concern with political stability and personal security. By the late 2000s, however, both the democratic and the ethnic opposition had been decimated, and with the 2008 constitution the military had a critical tool in hand to manage the pace of change.

Third, leadership change. Compared to Senior General Than Shwe, who ruled Myanmar from 1992 to 2011, President Thein Sein is a very different leader. He takes advice; he is not corrupt; and he is genuinely concerned not just about the country in some abstract sense but also about the welfare of ordinary people. Along with fellow reformers like the speaker of the lower house, Shwe Mann, he has demonstrated an unprecedented willingness to reach out to old enemies and make them partners in the pursuit of peace and development.

Fourth, the deteriorating economic situation. While the Tatmadaw has traditionally been preoccupied with national security, there has always been an underlying concern with economic development and modernisation. Failure in this area prompted significant reforms in the mid-1980s, as well as in the early to mid-1990s, and has been the source of significant and growing internal military criticism since the Asian economic crisis in particular. The fact is that, aside from a few hundred generals and crony businessmen, the economic system under the previous regime served no one in the country. On the contrary, there was a growing sense that Myanmar was being left behind and exploited by its neighbours. .

Fifth, political momentum. The decision by the opposition, both democratic and ethnic, to work with the new government to promote peace and democracy has greatly enhanced confidence in the reform process and encouraged the government to 'go all in'. Similarly, the rapid normalisation of relations with the West has been immensely important in helping lock in the reforms and build momentum for further change.

Transitions are invariably periods of high uncertainty and it is far too early to judge how far the current democratisation process will go. Establishing genuine civilian supremacy and making the reform process irreversible will be a long-term project. Yet, as long as no new threats to political stability arise and civilian governments forego any attempt to exact retribution or seriously curtail the professional interests of the military as an institution, the Tatmadaw is likely to accept a diminished political role.

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