

PAKISTAN ELECTION 2024

What challenges will the new govt face?

REUTERS

Pakistan held a national election yesterday to elect a new government, with multiple crises plaguing the nuclear-armed, South Asian nation of 241 million.

Here are some of the challenges that will confront the government that takes charge:

TREADING A NARROW ECONOMIC RECOVERY PATH

Pakistan narrowly averted sovereign default last summer through a last-gasp \$3 billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) - but the lender's support ends in March, following which officials believe a new, extended programme will be needed.

Negotiating a new programme, and at speed, will be critical for the new government, which will take over an economy beset by record high inflation and slow growth caused by tough reforms.

LOWERING POLITICAL TEMPERATURES

Political tensions have been high in the run-up to the election due to what former prime minister Imran Khan has called a crackdown on him and his party. The former cricket star has been in jail since August, angering his millions of supporters.

Khan maintains mass popular support in Pakistan, and a continued crackdown and his remaining in jail would only stoke tensions at a time when stability is needed to attract foreign investment to shore up the economy.

LIVING WITH THE MILITARY

Pakistan's military has long held sway over the country but its role has grown even more pervasive in recent years. Khan says the military launched a crackdown on him and his party after they fell out on policy decisions when he was the prime minister. The military denies this.

The military's role in economic decision-making has since been formalised by its representation in the new high-powered body called the Special Investment Facilitation Council.

The new government will need to maintain a balance between keeping the country's powerful generals happy while charting out its own policies.

DEAL WITH RISING MILITANCY

Militant attacks have risen over the past 18 months after a lull when many Islamist groups were driven into neighbouring Afghanistan with a military operation in 2014.

The groups reorganised in Afghanistan after the Taliban returned to power there in 2021, and have been reportedly using advanced weaponry left behind by Nato-led forces. Militants have carried out a string of high-profile attacks and returned to strongholds inside Pakistan. But Islamabad's limited fiscal space limits its ability to fund another sustained military operation.

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A Hindu woman votes as others wait in a queue at a polling station during a general election, in Tando Allahyar, Sindh, Pakistan yesterday. Inset, election officials count ballot papers after polls close at a polling station in Lahore. Pollsters predicted a low turnout from the country's 128 million eligible voters following a lacklustre campaign overshadowed by the jailing of former prime minister Imran Khan, and the hobbling of his PTI party by the military-led establishment. PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP

'Vote matters' despite alleged rigging

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistanis turned out early for election said they believe their votes count, despite allegations of rigging in the nation's most fractious poll in recent history.

"I believe in democracy and I think my vote matters," said 22-year-old psychology student Haleema Shafiq, among the first to vote in the capital Islamabad.

"I cast my vote as it's my duty," she told AFP inside a polling station. "I wish for a deserving party to come to power."

Polls opened at 8:00 am (0300 GMT) for 128 million eligible voters, with the first participants trickling into the Noorpur Shahan girl's school and inking their fingers before stamping papers in gender-segregated booths.

Early voters were outnumbered

by around a dozen armed security personnel staffing the station, a day after twin blasts claimed by the Islamic State group killed 28 outside candidate offices in the nation's southwest.

"I want a government that can make Pakistan safe for girls," said Shafiq.

Analysts predict a low turnout after a muted campaign overshadowed by the jailing of ex-prime minister Imran Khan and the hobbling of his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party by the military establishment.

"Is this the way an election should be conducted?" asked 40-year-old Imran Khan, a driver who shares his name with the jailed opposition leader.

"Everyone has the right to vote according to their own will," he said. "Today is not the day to stay at home. Those who choose to sit at home today

will do injustice to themselves."

Monitors say the treatment of PTI amounts to "pre-poll rigging", and the party has voiced fears that voters would face interference at polling stations.

In a nation where nearly 40 percent of adults are illiterate, the ballot papers featured symbols associated with different parties, varying from a tiger to an arrow and a set of scales.

A Supreme Court decision stripped PTI of the right to use their cricket bat symbol, which alluded to the charismatic Khan's star sporting career.

As a result, PTI's selected candidates are running as independents with a hodge-podge of symbols on ballot papers ranging from eggplants to bottles.

Analysts have said it's one more hurdle being used to disconnect PTI from their voter base. Ballots were posted into white and green boxes, Pakistan's national colours, and crowds steadily grew in the first hour after polls opened.

C'wealth observer group 'quite pleased'

DAWN ONLINE

Chair of the Commonwealth observer group, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, has said he is "quite pleased" with security arrangements across Islamabad.

"We have seen that the government is working to ensure that elections are credible," he said while speaking at a press conference in Islamabad alongside Caretaker Interior Minister Gohar Ejaz.

"We encourage people to come out and vote because that is the only way you can consolidate democracy in the country," he added.

Jonathan said a comprehensive assessment of election related security arrangements will be shared on Sunday.



Imran votes by postal ballot

DAWN ONLINE

Pakistan's former PM Imran Khan and other incarcerated political figures have cast their votes through a postal ballot from Adiala Jail. However, Khan's wife, Bushra Bibi, was unable to partake in voting as she was arrested after the completion of the postal voting process.

Putin, Xi reject US 'interference'

Praise their own ties, trade during phone call

REUTERS, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke by phone yesterday and both rejected what they called US interference in the affairs of other countries, the Kremlin said.

Kremlin aide Yury Ushakov gave details of the call in a briefing to journalists, saying the two leaders had spoken of creating a "multipolar, fairer world order" in the face of US-led efforts to contain both of Washington's biggest adversaries.

Putin and Xi would continue to have "close personal interaction" but there were no plans for reciprocal visits right now, Ushakov said.

China and Russia have grown

closer and expanded trade ties in recent years as the United States and its allies imposed sanctions against both countries, particularly Moscow after its invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Putin and Xi met twice last year as China-Russia trade hit \$218.2 billion during January-November, according to Chinese customs data, achieving a goal set by the two countries in 2019 a year ahead of schedule.

Russia meanwhile leapfrogged Saudi Arabia to become China's top crude oil supplier in 2023, Chinese data showed last month.

The two countries would press on with joint energy projects in 2024, Ushakov said.

Putin and Xi also discussed the

situation in Ukraine and conflict resolution in the Middle East and see eye to eye on those conflicts, he said, without elaborating. Russia supported China's policy on Taiwan, he said.

Moscow and Beijing have increasingly carried out trade in roubles and yuan as they phase out trade in US dollars. Putin and Xi stressed on their call that it was important to build "financial infrastructure that ensures reliability of payments", Ushakov said.

Chinese state media said Xi told Putin the two countries should pursue close strategic coordination and defend the sovereignty, security and development interests of their respective countries.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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e-GP Tender Notice

This is an online tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, please register on e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>).

e-Tenders are invited in e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) by Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Gopalganj for the procurement of following works. e-Tender details can be downloaded from e-GP System Portal <http://www.eprocure.gov.bd> for purchase.

Tender ID and Package No.	Name of work	Last date and time of purchasing/downloading document	Closing date and time
246182 60/e-GP/GRD/2023-20234 (LTM)	Supplying and Laying of Wearing Course (Asphalt) Materials including Tack coat for several damaged, Undulation & Depression surface at Ch. 22+000 km to 24+000 km of Gournadi-Agailjhara-Paisarhat-Kotalipara-Gopalganj Road (R-852) under Road Division Gopalganj, during the year 2023-2024.	27-Feb-2024 16:00	28-Feb-2024 12:30

Accepted tenders will be opened online immediately after opening time.

7.2.24
Md. Azharul Islam
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Executive Engineer (C.C), RHD
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