

POST-POLLS PAKISTAN

New coalition echoes same old problems

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's newly declared coalition government echoes the 2022 alliance that ousted Imran Khan, analysts say, demonstrating the military's enduring influence, but also Khan's unspent opposition power.

Last week's split-verdict national election delivered a surprise boon for independent candidates loyal to jailed ex-premier Khan, defying an army-backed crackdown with a combined showing larger than any other party.

But late Tuesday the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), favoured by the top brass, said it would partner with the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and some smaller parties to form next government.

"The more things change, the more they remain the same," political analyst Hafsa Khawaja told AFP. "This is the same set-up, but just with the stamp of these elections."

A WEAK REPEAT

The groundswell of support for Khan loyalists means a broad coalition is again needed to form the parliamentary majority required to mint a new government. But there are indications this version will be weaker than the last.

PPP leader Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, foreign minister in the 2022-23 government, said this time his party won't take ministerial roles and will back the prime minister "on an issue-to-issue basis".

There is still a lot of negotiating to go, however, including a likely return to the presidency for his father, Asif Ali Zardari.

If PPP doesn't take any ministries, that would make the administration effectively a minority government -- a copy of the previous alliance but on a "weaker footing", said analyst Amber Rahim Shamsi.

ARMY STILL PRESENT

Pakistan's military has governed the nation for much of its history. PML-N say their candidate for prime minister is Shehbaz Sharif -- who helmed the alliance that ousted Khan and is regarded as amenable to military influence.

Likewise, analysts say a fragile coalition arrangement will suit the military establishment, as it remains keen to choreograph civilian affairs after Khan's crusade of defiance.



PHOTO: AFP

Police fire teargas to disperse farmers marching towards New Delhi during a protest demanding minimum crop prices, at the Haryana-Punjab state border in Shambhu near Ambala about 200 kilometres (125 miles) north of the Indian capital yesterday.

STRICT SOCIAL MEDIA LAW

US raises concern with Sri Lanka leader

AFP, Washington

The United States on Tuesday pressed Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe to address concerns over a strict new internet censorship law that has alarmed tech companies.

Samantha Power, head of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), raised the issue during a virtual meeting with Wickremesinghe in which she also voiced US readiness to help address economic challenges on the island, a closer partner of China in recent years.

Power "highlighted strong US support for freedom of expression and

association," USAID said in a statement. She "encouraged President Wickremesinghe to address concerns about the potential impact of the Online Safety Act on freedom of expression, as well as investment in Sri Lanka's vibrant digital economy."

The law passed last month would make social media companies liable for any content posted on their platforms deemed offensive by Sri Lankan authorities, with prison terms of up to 10 years for tech executives who fail to disclose details of users found to be in violation.

Tech companies had warned that the law is unworkable and that they would

not implement it, while opposition lawmakers decried what they saw as an attempt to censor political speech ahead of presidential elections later this year.

Information Minister Bandula Gunawardana earlier Tuesday said that the government would revisit the law after considering proposals from experts.

Social media was a key tool used by protesters during Sri Lanka's unprecedented economic crisis in 2022, which precipitated nationwide demonstrations that eventually compelled then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to step down.

ROW WITH NEW DELHI

Maldives deports 43 Indians for illegal businesses

AGENCIES

Maldives has deported 43 Indians who were allegedly found to have committed crimes, Male-based news outlet Adhadhu reported on Tuesday. The archipelago nation, whose relationship with New Delhi has deteriorated under President Mohamed Muizzu, deported 186 foreigners from 12 nationalities but none from China. Muizzu is considered pro-China. The highest number of people were deported to Bangladesh (83) followed by India (43), Sri Lanka (25), and Nepal (8). It is, however, not known when they were deported. Maldivian Home Ministry on Monday said efforts were underway to shut down businesses operated illegally with earnings deposited to bank accounts held by foreigners. Homeland Security Minister Ali Ihusan said the ministry was working together with Economic Ministry to take action against illegal businesses operating under various names. He said such businesses include those operated by a foreigner instead of the registered owner. "After registering under another name, [they include] places that operate outside of the registry, especially with the involvement of a foreigner with Ruliyaa deposited to his personal account," the minister said. Ihusan said his ministry was working on shutting down such businesses and deporting foreigners who operate them.

RAJYA SABHA POLLS

Sonia Gandhi to contest from Rajasthan

TNN, New Delhi

Former Congress president Sonia Gandhi yesterday filed her nomination for India's Rajya Sabha (RS) polls with Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra by her side. This is will be the first time that Sonia would not contest in the Lok Sabha election since entering politics nearly two-



and a half decades ago. According to a list released by Congress for the upcoming polls, Sonia Gandhi will contest from Rajasthan and Abhishek Manu Singhvi from Himachal Pradesh. Congress leaders Akhilesh Pradesh Singh and Chandrakant Handore will be nominated from Bihar and Maharashtra respectively. TOI earlier reported that Sonia considered both Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan, but decided in favour of the latter.

MANIPUR VIOLENCE

One dead, 3 injured in gunfights

AGENCIES

At least one person was killed after security personnel opened fire on "village volunteers" who allegedly attempted to enter Manipur Police Training College (MPTC) in Imphal East district on Tuesday night, a senior official said as reported by news agency PTI.

The term 'village volunteers' is used for armed civilian youths guarding villages along the periphery of Imphal Valley and adjoining hills to ward off attacks from the rival community.

As per the agency, it is suspected that the volunteers tried to barge into the premises to loot firearms as they had earlier posted on social media that they needed more weapons to fight off attackers. However, no details on the motive of their attempt has been revealed.

The one person who died in the incident has been identified as Okram Sanaton. The 24-year-old succumbed to his injuries while being taken to a state-run hospital in Imphal after sustaining gunshot wounds.

"The incident took place on Tuesday night when a large number of local youths, mostly village volunteers, gathered at the MPTC gates and tried to barge into the premises, with some even succeeding in their endeavour," the official told PTI.

The official further said, "Security personnel first fired several rounds of tear gas shells to disperse the mob, but later had to fire live rounds to control the situation."



A firefighter works at the site of a residential building destroyed in a Russian missile attack, in Selydove, Donetsk region, Ukraine yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Apes show joking could be ancient trait: study

AFP, Paris

A boisterous young chimpanzee slaps an adult in his family on the back, then scampers away and looks back to see the response to his cheekiness.

Nothing yet, so the young chimp Azibo rolls back and dishes out another slap, this time provoking a reaction: the distracted adult waves a half-hearted swipe in his direction, shooting the troublesome youth away -- though not for long.

This scene recorded at Leipzig Zoo in Germany is just one of many analysed by scientists to show that great apes engage in playful teasing in a similar way to young human children.

Because all four species of great ape were recorded teasing each other, the "cognitive prerequisites for joking"

probably evolved in a shared ancestor millions of years ago, the scientists said in a new study on Wednesday.

The researchers catalogued a wide range of classic japey. One ape would offer another an object, only to withdraw it at the last second. Or they would prevent their mark from grabbing something they want. Other tricksters simply did the opposite of what they were told. Some just liked to poke.

Much of this behaviour is common in human children, starting from around eight months for the most precocious.

Somewhere between normal play and aggression, playful teasing involves anticipating the response of others as well as enjoying going against their expectations, according to the study in the journal Proceedings of the Royal Society B.

CORPORATE BOOKING

Fantasy Kingdom and Water Kingdom will be reserved on 15th February (Thursday), 2024 for Corporate Booking.

From 16th February (Friday), 2024 Fantasy Kingdom and Water Kingdom will remain open for all.

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