**Captain Khan can**

[Listen](https://app-as.readspeaker.com/cgi-bin/rsent?customerid=9520&audiofilename=captain-khan-can&lang=en_uk&readid=storydetailarea&url=)

[Aijaz Zaka Syed](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/aijaz-zaka-syed)

July 30, 2018

Given the history of democracy, or lack of it, in much of the Islamic world, it is incredibly uplifting when a Muslim country manages to choose its leaders democratically. The epic nature of such an exercise can hardly be exaggerated when it involves a geopolitically strategic and volatile country like Pakistan.

A nation of more than 200 million people, the first to be created as a modern Islamic state and the homeland of the Muslims of Subcontinent, Pakistan has had an eventful history, tottering from one existential crisis to another. If its creation after Partition in August 1947 had been soaked in blood, claiming millions of lives, it witnessed more bloodshed in 1971 with its two wings parting ways following a bloody civil war that gave birth to Bangladesh.

Whatever the historical causes and factors behind the creation of Pakistan, there is no doubt that Mohammad Ali Jinnah, hailed by his people as Quaid-e-Azam, had envisioned a progressive, and above all, a democratic state that represented and celebrated the best of Islamic values and teachings. Unfortunately, Jinnah had no time to realise his dream. He died within a year of Pakistan’s creation when his leadership was needed the most to steer the new nation. Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, his successor and leading light of the Pakistan Movement, was brought down not long after by an assassin’s bullet, encouraging the army to step in.

Not surprisingly, while its big neighbour India progressed steadily on the path of democracy and self-reliance under such stalwarts as Jawaharlal Nehru holding free and democratic elections at regular intervals, Pakistan held its first general election 17 years after Independence, under the watchful gaze of the army. For much of its tumultuous history, Pakistan has been governed by dictatorships.

Until 2013, no democratically elected government had managed to complete its full five-year term. Even in the rise and rise of Imran Khan’s PTI, which finally appears all set to capture power, and in the slow and certain demolition and discrediting of the PML-N, many are tempted to see behind-the-scenes manipulation.

However, it would be simplistic and even naive to see the PTI and Imran as a creation to counter the likes of Sharifs and Bhuttos. It has taken the cricketer-turned-politician 22 long years to come this far. To be fair to him, Imran has worked really hard to turn the PTI from a loosely organised movement into a disciplined and focused, election-winning machine. The massive popular support and adulation that the cricket icon has been visibly attracting across the length and breadth of Pakistan today couldn’t possibly be the creation of a government agency or military institution, however clever or powerful.

Of course, Imran is hardly a paragon of virtues and is not without his share of flaws and controversies. Indeed, the recent tell-all book by Reham Khan, his second ex, has left a distinct, lingering distaste in the mouths of many a distant admirers like me. Yet, if the people of Pakistan have chosen Imran’s squad, the sniggering pundits and doubting Thomases have to accept it and learn to respect the popular mandate.

After long years of lackadaisical governance, lack of accountability and a near collapse of institutions, it seems Pakistanis are craving for change and a new beginning for the country. Imran has no time to celebrate and revel in his hard-earned victory though. He takes charge of a country that is in crisis mode and is battling mindboggling challenges on virtually every front.

The second half of the PML-N government had been marked by an imperceptible tug of war between the civilian and military ends, resulting in a crippling leadership vacuum. It had brought the business of governance to a grinding halt. The economy has never been in a worse shape. The Pakistani rupee has hit rock bottom and foreign exchange reserves are nearly deplete.

On the external front too, Pakistan finds itself increasingly isolated from its traditional allies and friends as Narendra Modi’s India constantly expands its sphere of influence across the neighbourhood, including in the Arab and Islamic world. Led by an unpredictable and volatile Donald Trump, the fair-weather ‘friend and ally’, the US, has been steadily turning the heat on Islamabad over its apparent support to the Afghan Taliban and assorted militant groups in the region.

In other words, Kaptaan Sahib inherits a most complex country at one of the most challenging points in its history. And, given the impossible hopes and optimism that he and his team have generated in an overwhelmingly young and aspiring country with their long campaign, they wouldn’t find it easy to meet all those expectations and aspirations. Especially considering that after more than two decades of its existence, the PTI is beginning to increasingly look like the two leading, older parties led by the Sharifs and Bhuttos. Indeed, as Imran’s popularity has grown over the years and power appeared within striking distance, he attracted many of the usual suspects from the traditional parties.

Be that as it may, Captain Khan has no option but to do everything possible in his power to deliver on his promises. He must do all that is necessary to ensure that the PTI does not end up becoming yet another political party patronised by the corrupt and special interests of all hues.

Having waited for power and his historic opportunity all these years, Imran cannot afford to let down his legion of supporters and the people of Pakistan. He cannot belie the hopes and aspirations of all those who saw in the ascent of the PTI a chance for clean and positive politics. Not an easy feat considering the overwhelming challenges and odds facing the country.

However, just as he came from behind to lead a struggling side to the heights of glory in the 1992 World Championship, all of us who loved his inimitable antics on the pitch would like to believe that Captain Khan could once again rescue Pakistan and lead it to glory.

The people of Pakistan, let down by both spectrums of governance, deserve better. A ‘new Pakistan’ beckons. One only hopes Imran is luckier in power than he has been in his personal life.

The writer is an independent writer and former newspaper editor.

Email: aijaz.syed@hotmail.com