

Imran says will turn country into welfare state

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- Chairman Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Imran Khan in an address to the nation on Thursday declared PTI's victory in general election 2018 with a pledge to introduce robust intuitional reforms, independent foreign policy, human development and good relations with all neighbors including India. Imran vowed to create "New Pakistan" promised in election campaign, saying he would pursue strong relations with China and develop mutually beneficial relations with the US.

He said that he is inspired by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), adding he would transform Pakistan into an Islamic state on the model of state of the Medina where there will be no injustice with anyone, especially the poor and the downtrodden.

"We are successful and have been given a mandate. When I came into politics, I wanted Pakistan to become the kind of country which (Muhammad Ali) Jinnah wanted. This election is a historic election in Pakistan. In this election, the people have sacrificed a lot," he said, adding there was "no politician victimization" in the contest.

He commended the people of Balochistan for their valor to take part in elections despite all difficulties that they had to face due to terrorist attacks ahead of elections. "The way they came out to vote, I want to thank all those people," he added.

"In the run-up to the elections, Ikram Gandapur [candidate] was killed by a suicide bomber. Haroon Bilour [another candidate] was killed in a suicide attack. Despite all that, this election process was completed. I want to thank the security forces ... my party members, I want to commend all of them," he said.

Khan said: "I feel that this election has been the fairest in Pakistan's history. If you think there has been rigging, we will assist you in the investigation." He further said, "If any party has any doubts, we will open the results of those constituencies up for investigation."

Khan fleshed out his vision for what a "new" country would look like. He said he would beat corruption in the form of tax avoidance by letting people "see that their taxes are being spent on them."

"I pledge to our people that I will introduce a system that is for the masses - all policies will be for the people," he said.

He vowed not to move into the Prime Minister's House, saying it would be "converted into an educational institution or something of the sort". "I would be ashamed to live in such a large house," he said.

And despite the vitriolic nature of his comments towards India during the campaign, he struck a conciliatory tone, saying, "If we want to fight poverty then we and India have to develop trade ties." He said that he was "the Pakistani who knows the Indian people more than anyone."

He also said that his party government would learn from China how it managed to lift some 700 million people out of poverty. "The weak are dying of hunger. I will try my best that all of my policies are made to raise our weaker classes, for our laborers ... 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," he added.

He said that there are countries with less than 25 million people, but in Pakistan so many children are out of school, adding he would try his best to raise these people up and all of his policies be focused on

human

development.

He said that 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," he maintained.

"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 biggest guiding principle," he added.

About state of economy, he said that it is the biggest challenge which the country is facing as it never had such a huge fiscal deficit. "All of this is because our economy is going down because of dysfunctional institutions...we need to make an atmosphere for doing business," said Imran.

He declared that expatriate Pakistanis are the greatest asset and his party government would provide a conducive environment to overseas Pakistan to make investment in the country.

He said that people don't pay taxes because they see how the ruling elite spend that money on themselves. "I promise that I will protect the people's tax money. We will cut all of our expenses," he added.

"We will use 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 what we have seen in Pakistan so far the way the ruling elite has lived off the country's taxes, I will end this," he added.

He said that he would further strengthen the top anti-graft watchdog, besides reforming the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), the top tax collecting body known as the one of top corrupt institutions.

"We will strengthen the anti-corruption institutions and the whole government will work to make sure that farmers make money somehow. We will help small businesses. We will introduce new things to bring in employment for young people," he added.

He said, "economic crisis is such that we want to have good relations with all our neighbors. China gives us a huge opportunity through CPEC to use it and drive investment into Pakistan."

About Pakistan and Afghanistan relations, he said, "We want peace there and 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."

About the Pak-US relations, he said, "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 whatever we can do for conciliation in the Middle East, we want to play that role. We will try to bring together those neighbors which are fighting," he added.

He said that Kashmir is a core issue between India and Pakistan, adding both Pakistani and Indian leadership should sit at a table and try to fix this problem, as it is not going anywhere.

"We are at square one right now [with India]. If Indian leadership is ready, we are ready to improve ties with India. If you take one step forward, we will take two steps forward. I say this with conviction, this will be the most important thing for the subcontinent and for both countries to have friendship," he added.

AFP adds: A visibly tired Khan cut a conciliatory tone in a wide-ranging address to the nation following a controversial contest hit with by accusations from major political parties of poll "rigging" and long delays in still unreleased official results.

"We were successful and we were given a mandate," Khan, 65, said during a live broadcast from his home in the capital Islamabad, adding that there was "no politician victimisation" of his opponents in the acrimonious contest.

He went on to call the elections the "most transparent" in the country's history.

During the broadcast, Khan vowed to tackle corruption that was "eating our country like a cancer" and touched on promises to balance relations with the US that would be "beneficial" for both countries.

Khan also said he was open to a sit-down with arch-rival India to discuss ongoing disputes in the divided Himalayan territory of Kashmir which is claimed in full by both nations.

The erstwhile all-rounder's statement came several hours after his supporters took to the streets to celebrate winning an election that opponents have said the powerful military fixed in his favour.

PTI supporters were ecstatic at the projected results.

First-time voter Fahad Hussain, 21, said the party had "motivated the youth" as he hit the streets in Islamabad to celebrate with friends.

The controversy follows a campaign already considered by some observers to be one of the "dirtiest" in Pakistan's history because of the allegations against the military, and marked by the increased visibility of extremist religious parties.

Wednesday's elections were meant to be a rare democratic transition from one civilian government to another in the young country which has been ruled by the military for roughly half its history.

A PTI win would also represent an end to decades of rotating leadership between the PPP and PML-N that was punctuated by periods of military rule.

Khan, who captained Pakistan to their World Cup cricket victory in 1992, campaigned on promises to end widespread graft while building an "Islamic welfare state".

But he was dogged by the accusations he was benefiting from a "silent coup" by the generals which targeted the PML-N. Nawaz Sharif was ousted from power last year and jailed over a corruption conviction days before the vote, removing Khan's most dangerous rival.

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