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Friday, October 23, 1998

Interview: Imran Khan

"Helping the setting sun to rise again"

Offering Pakistan an alternative

By: Tashbih Sayyed

Pakistanis during their 51 years of existence, have been swinging between hope and hopelessness. Immediately after their founding fathers left the scene, the stage was taken over by time worshippers and swindlers. These spinners dealt a death blow to the confidence of the masses. Time and again the people of Pakistan reposed their trust in "leaders" who claimed to represent them and their interests, only to find out that they have been thoroughly swindled. From Field Marshal Ayub Khan's Basic Democracy to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Islamic Socialism to General Zia ul Haq's Islam, they were taken for the ride of their life. Even with the new generation of leaders like Benazir Bhutto and Mian Nawaz Sharif, they did not receive a respite from the exploitation and oppression. Each leader was like an acrobat with bag full of tricks, but the country had lost the depth to accommodate any more misadventures. The last elections, according to some assessments have played the cruelest joke on democracy and the people of Pakistan. It arranged to give Mian Nawaz Sharif a mandate whose parallel is not available in the annals of democratic history. And as a result of this amazing mandate, today, the people of Pakistan are being baptized in a river of blood. They have now reached a stage in which they are skeptical about any one who declares his intentions of delivering them from the darkest hour in their national lives. In such an hour, a sportsman, who had a long track record of pulling his people from deep troubles and leading them to success after success, came forward and offered to solve



their problems. He had already proven his ability to provide relief to those who needed it the most. He had built a hospital out of nothing by sheer will power. A hospital for cancer patients. Many people of Pakistan are suffering from cancer - an ailment that is the ultimate symbol of hopelessness - and Imran Khan has given hope to the most hopeless.

Shaukat Khanum Hospital broke ground in many directions. First it presented itself as the most modern and the most technologically advanced hospital in the treatment of cancer. Secondly, it offered to treat those patients free of cost who were too poor to pay. And it just so happens to be that in this hospital, 95% patients are treated free. These patients are treated free not because that they suffer from some ailment that can be treated with the most inexpensive medicines. They are treated free because somebody believed in the value of life - a trust of God Almighty in the hands of man. And the ailment was not some simple cold but the dreadful cancer and the man who had decided to snatch the life away from the clutches of death was Imran Khan - the undefeatable > skipper of Pakistan's cricket team.

Imran Khan established Shaukat Khanum Memorial Trust Hospital to serve those who had no chance to receive credible treatment for their ailments. Imran Khan took care of a setting sun of life in a society where it is a common practice to only worship the rising sun. Imran used his time, energy, resources, contacts and clout to give Pakistan something to be proud of. At a time when the country had left nothing to write home about, Shaukat Khanum Hospital provided it an opportunity to raise its standards. It is a hospital where the health dispenser does not know if he is treating a patient who is a charity case or a patient who has paid the full cost of the treatment. In Shaukat Khanum Memorial Hospital all are human beings - all are equal in the eyes of those who can make a difference.

Imran, after giving the dying a hope for life, is now trying to pull the masses out of the depths of despair by offering himself as a possible messiah - another kind of politician - who if given the charge will row the boat out of the storm. To a majority, Imran Khan is the only politician who has a clean and transparent history.

Today when the government in power seems to have no clue as to what is wrong with them or the system, when the leader at the helm of affairs appears not to know and not to understand the gravity of the problems and difficulties that surround him and who appears to be unconscious of the hefty contribution he and his team have made in creating and deepening the crises that stares him in the face, it is important to get to know the other mind who is trying to correct the situation. Pakistan Today, in an exclusive interview, has attempted to look into the mind of Imran Khan who, sooner or later is bound to play an important role in the lives of all Pakistanis.

Imran Khan, who is the chief of Pakistan Tehrik -I - Insaf, suggested to me that there should be a referendum in Pakistan to decide if a caretaker government can be formed to carryout the accountability. He stressed that only uncontroversial people should be allowed to participate in this setup so that the accountability process is completed with utmost legitimacy. Imran said his party believes that the first and foremost priority for the country now is ruthless accountability of those politicians who have been in power. It appeared to be very clear in his mind as to who can be in this government. As far as the Shariat Bill is concerned, Imran Khan thinks that it is useless. In his view the present constitution has all the authority to implement the Shariat. According to him, Nawaz is dividing the society through the Shariat Bill. He pointed out that the federation of Pakistan is in danger, The law and order situation in the country is out of control and the foreign policy is in shambles vis-?-vis our ties with Iran and Afghanistan. He said that the foreign policy of Nawaz Sharif has isolated Pakistan internationally and he is not capable to deal with countries like Iran and Afghanistan.

On the issue of CTBT Imran's views are very strong. He says that our security will be compromised by signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. He stated that we should have the nuclear deterrence in case India continues developing nuclear weapons. During the interview, Imran confirmed that he had been approached to join the opposition alliance to oust Nawaz Sharif. But he could not accept the offer as his party cannot join any alliance in which Benazir Bhutto or Nawaz Sharif are included.

Pakistan Today: What are your thoughts on the present situation in Pakistan?

Imran Khan: Pakistan is facing the gravest crisis of its history. It is a multi crisis. It is a crisis of state, in that, most of the state institutions have collapsed. It is the crisis of the federation, three smaller provinces are feeling victimized by Punjab, thanks to the over centralization of power by Nawaz Sharif. And it is an economic crisis, a crisis where Pakistan is facing stagflation - recession and inflation - and Pakistan is now drowning in a sea of debts. It is borrowing money just to payback debts. which is called the debt trap. There is no coherent government policy to get us out of this trap. Related to this is the crisis of confidence of the government. No one has any faith left in the government. People don't believe in it. Whatever policies it makes, people feel that nothing will happen. The government hasn't succeeded in pushing through any policy so far. So there is a big crisis there.

Pakistan Today: In the last 51 years in Pakistan there has never been a government that people have really approved. Governments who were welcomed by the people with the hope that they will help them in realizing their basic needs have disappointed them the most.

Benazir Bhutto's government was one of them. But Nawaz Sharif's government has broken all records. It seems that there is no hope left for the people in the country. Against this backdrop, could you comment on the role of the armed forces?

Imran Khan: I feel that the armed forces, after 1988, decided to take a back seat because they came under severe criticism. There was a consensus in Pakistan, that martial law was unacceptable and people wanted democracy. Also, in America, on which Pakistan depends heavily because of its heavy reliance on debts, the public opinion didn't support military dictatorships anymore. All these things combined to give army a back seat. And Nawaz Sharif is taking full advantage of this situation. This government decided once and for all from day one, once it was given this big mandate, and that is debatable, I feel that it was given this big mandate. From then onwards, all it has done is consolidate its power. And it has done that at the expense of other institutions. Nawaz Sharif has brought in a dictatorship in Pakistan. We can call it a Prime Minister Dictatorship.

Pakistan Today: In view of the ousting of General Jahangir Karamat, there is a view that the only reason that all these senior generals could not take any action against the highhanded and anti people policies of Mian Nawaz Sharif is the fact that the armed forces of Pakistan are not as united as they were in the past. The perception is that Taliban- like elements have gained strength and are supporting Nawaz Sharif. Your thoughts?

Imran Khan: Well there are various theories floating around and I don't know really what is true. All I know is that from day one Jahangir Karamat was never the sort of man who was going to take over power. In light of his past record and the people who understood him and knew him, it was clear that the decision to take over was just too big for him. He was not capable of taking that decision and he was never going to take that decision.

Pakistan Today: You hailed and supported the comments of General Jahangir Karamat, regarding the performance of Mian Nawaz Sharif's government, in his address to Naval War College. Could you give us the rationale behind your support?

Imran Khan: I supported his views, because he voiced the sentiments of the people of Pakistan. That the things were bad. That the federation was in danger. And above all the decision making process of the government was extremely poor. This weakness in making appropriate and timely decisions and inability to act correctly is pushing the country deeper and deeper in to these crisis. There was nothing in it that wasn't true. What he said was the fact. His suggestion that there is a need for a National Security Council, if so disliked by the government, could have easily been pushed aside or ignored instead of taking this drastic action of removing him, it

basically shows the insecurity of the government and a desire to grasp all levers of power.

Pakistan Today: What is your reaction to the increasing hold of Taliban over Afghanistan and Pakistan's relationship with them ?

Imran Khan: The reason that Taliban are gaining strength in Afghanistan is one and one reason alone and it is that they have managed to restore law and order in a country which was completely destroyed, first by the war with the Soviet Union and then the civil war. Where the whole fabric of society and the institutions had collapsed, the Taliban have incredibly succeeded in giving Afghanistan peace and order. People now can walk around and their life and property is safe. That's why they have so much support amongst the local people. Of course that is not to say that Taliban are perfect. Obviously they have flaws in the way and probably they should form a more representative government which they claim that they do. They also need to have a more enlightened version of Islam. But the point is that in context of Afghanistan and given the history of the past decade, what Taliban are providing to the population is security. The people are secure, the families are secure, their property is secure and that's why they are popular.

Pakistan Today: How in your view, should Pakistan handle the fears of Iran and China regarding Taleban's growing power and Pakistan's influence over them ?

Imran Khan: This is where we have failed miserably. We have failed on the diplomatic front. Pakistan should have been in the forefront in stopping this stand off between Iran and Taleban. Also, Pakistan should have allayed the fears of China. This is where a country's foreign policy should have been working. But unfortunately like everything else Pakistan is hamstrung. The perception in Pakistan is that our foreign policy is not even independent. It lacks credibility. No one trusts Pakistan, neither Iran nor Afghanistan nor China. Which is why Pakistan stands isolated today.



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