

Imran's maiden hundred (days)



Regional Diary

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Internally - economy, energy and extremism, and externally relations with China, US and India will determine Imran's achievements and failures.

Hundred days is too short a period to evaluate any government. However, the world over, the first hundred days of any government generates certain interest. In Imran Khan's case, it is even more, as he completes the first 100 days in power.

Is Imran on track regarding what he has promised? Alternatively, are there likely to be more "U-turns" for which he is severely criticised inside Pakistan?

One could identify the following six issues as major areas of concern during Imran's first hundred days: economic situation and the dialogue with the International Monetary Fund (IMF); Aasiya Bibi and the political rise of the TLP; Imran's visits to Saudi Arabia and China; Pakistan's relations with the US and India; resumption of terrorist attacks; and stabilizing civil-military relations.

Congratulation Captain! This is a different and difficulty Century

First, congratulations are in order for Imran Khan. It may not be a great beginning, but, is not a bad one either. For the problems surmounting Pakistan, when he took over as the Prime Minister cannot be addressed in 100 days or in a few years. Many of the present day problems that Pakistan is facing today are not his creation or of his party. The PML-N and the PPP will have to share the primary blame, along with the Deep State in Pakistan for where the country today is. Ideally, Imran should be complaining of having to govern a "moth-eaten Pakistan"!

It is not easy to make changes in 100 days. Nor is Imran known for his centuries! During his cricketering days, though he was one of the greatest all-rounders of his days (along with Kapi Dev, Ian Botham and Richard Hadlee), Imran was a better bowler than a batsman. The statistics (six centuries as a batsman vs 362 wickets as a bowler) would reveal, that he could make the opposition dance to his balls, than his ability to score against them.

Imran's comments on his "U-turns" should be based on a realisation that it is totally a different ball-game to be ruling than being an opposition.

The hundred days calculation assume importance, not just because the opposition and rest find it as a yardstick to critique Imran's performance. It assumes significance because Imran himself has talked about making a change in a hundred days. Imran has an innovative website - [http://pm100days.pmo.gov.pk], with clear projections and self-ranking.

His 100 days chart lists the following six as major thrust areas: Transform Governance; Strengthen the Federation; Revitalise Economic Growth; Uplift Agriculture and Conserve Water; Revolutionise Social Services; and Ensure Pakistan's National Security. Within the above six, the website looks at numerous other issues/yardsticks and evaluate the same as where they stand - whether they are completed or under progress.

For an outsider, where does Pakistan stand after Imran's first hundred days?

It's the economy

The biggest issue that Imran Khan has faced in the first hundred days undoubtedly is finding a way out of Pakistan's economic crisis.

Imran's government has multiple plans and strategies to kickstart the economy. For example, the new government wants rapid creation of jobs for the youth, revive the manufacturing industries and address Pakistan's energy challenges. The last one is the most crucial to achieving the second (improving the manufacturing), and thereby addressing the first (creation of jobs).

Pakistan's energy security poses the most significant challenge to the country's economic development. In turn, it slows down exports and reduces job opportunities - creating social and economic problems. Imran Khan cannot be blamed for Pakistan's energy situation. Successive PPP and PML-N governments since the 1990s ensured that politics and cor-



danger that Imran Khan faced when he assumed office was to decide on whether to approach the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for loans or not. Three months after, one could see the initial rhetoric from the PTI in seeking help from the IMF, and misplaced expectation that China and Saudi Arabia would bail out Pakistan has resulted in Imran losing substantial time.

So, the biggest challenge that Imran Khan has faced in the first hundred days was his IMF strategy. One could see those who talked about not approaching the IMF, silently shifting from their jingoism to a more pragmatic approach. Though there is still strong rhetoric of "one last time" concerning Pakistan approaching the IMF, Imran Khan and his team should have realised by now, that they have no other option.

Saudi Arabia and China: Higher than the Himalayas, but weaker on the Bailout

The first trip that Imran Khan took was to Saudi Arabia. It should not have been an easy decision for Imran Khan to approach Saudi Arabia; the Khashoggi affair was at its peak when Imran landed in Riyadh. Back in Pakistan, there have been a series of debate within the Parliament during the last two years emphasising that Islamabad keep away from Riyadh's attempts towards a regional military bloc.

For Imran, approaching Saudi Arabia was important keeping in mind his rhetoric against approaching the IMF for financial support. In this context, Imran Khan did succeed in gaining substantial financial assistance from Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom has promised around six billion USD; a week before, the State Bank of Pakistan had confirmed that it had received a billion from Saudi Arabia.

However, there were questions with in Pakistan concerning what did Imran agree in return to getting that grant. Did Imran agree to support Saudi Arabia in the latter's disastrous war against Yemen? Will Pakistan's support to Saudi Arabia lead Islamabad getting into the Middle East Cold War led by Riyadh and Tehran? These are serious worries, but he has kept the questions under wrap and refused to answer them. These were the precise questions that he would have asked and called for transparency, had he been in the opposition.

The biggest disappointment for Imran Khan during the first hundred days should have been his China visit. Based on the statements from Imran's team before and after their Beijing trip on the IMF, one could easily sense that China was not too keen to commit to further funds outside the CPEC to bail out Pakistan. Alternatively, perhaps, what China wanted was too much for the new team to commit. One had to wait and find out. A reasonable guess based on China's earlier interests and approaches should for someone to conclude that Beijing asked more than what Islamabad and Imran could chew. China has been insisting on making Yuan a legal tender in Pakistan, and also in signing an FTA; economists in Pakistan have been cautioning against the

provide a similar package that Saudi Arabia has committed to already. Perhaps, Imran Khan was expecting a generous package, helping his government not to approach the IMF.

Perhaps the friendship is deeper than the Ocean, but not the pockets!

Aasiya Bibi and the TLP Trouble

As opposition, Imran bowled multiple bouncers at the PML-N. He made his pitch against Sharif, and before against Zardari, using the containers, he brought Islamabad to a standstill. Both Zardari and Sharif, especially the latter did not know how to respond to Imran's matches under the headlights in Islamabad.

Now it is Imran's turn to be at the receiving end. The greatest bouncer at him came surprisingly not in the Parliament, but outside it. It all started with the Supreme Court deciding to release Aasia Bibi, an innocent Christian woman who has been languishing in jail after being accused of blasphemy. The judicial verdict was clear - to release her.

Imran did not expect that this verdict would create such a storm within Pakistan. However, the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) led by Khadim Hussain Rizvi found it as a tremendous opportunity. The TLP had tasted success in the recent elections; though it had not won seats, it has polled substantial votes and gained more percentage of votes than the leading religious, political parties such as the Jamaat-e-Islami and both the factions of the JUI.

The TLP returned to its protest politics, something Imran Khan and the PTI used successfully against Nawaz Sharif. Imran Khan made a brave speech underlining State's writ and warned the TLP against protests. The people at large were with Imran's warning and against TLP's blackmail. Unfortunately, the TLP went ahead with its blackmail, and Imran Khan retracted to sign an understanding with the protesters in the name of avoiding bloodshed.

For Imran, it should be a shameful retreat.

India and the US: Between Modi and Trump

US-Pakistan relations was at its worst when Imran became the Prime Minister. He was critical of the US and Islamabad-Washington relations when he was at the opposition. Before he could stabilise US-Pak relations, came the recent Trump tweet accusing Pakistan of not doing enough. Imran had to respond with a list of what Pakistan had done. Whether the US is satisfied or not with Imran's replies, certainly the latter has not made the relations better.

On the other hand, vis-a-vis India, in one of the boldest moves, Imran has announced the opening of Kartarpur, thereby unilaterally signalling a peace move. Though the Sikhs have been long asking for a corridor, a unilateral announcement towards the same by Imran has placed the ball on India's court to respond.

However, these are early days. However, the above issues are likely to be the decisive ones, when he finishes his first year in the office.

ruption killed Pakistan's energy production. Musharraf came with tall claims but did not make much amends.
Back to Imran Khan. The clear and present

same. While one may find it difficult to find out what had happened during Imran's China visit, the conclusions are clear. Beijing is not likely to

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