

Pakistan: What should Imran Khan do?

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Prime Minister Imran Khan says he wants a welfare state like that of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) in the seventh century. Many Pakistanis want to believe him and in a Riyasat-i-Madina. At a preparatory meeting ahead of the Prophet's birthday, Khan [announced](#) the creation of the Rehmatul-lil-Alameen Authority (RAA) and appointed himself its patron-in-chief. This organisation, he said, would bring the goal closer.

How RAA will achieve its mission is unclear. What actions can ensure that the Prophet's message of equality lives in every Muslim's heart? End Islamophobia in the West? Everyone understands why gas and electricity authorities, or the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), exist. But what can an 'authority' named after the Prophet do?

Khan's answer: once he appoints a religious scholar as head (the search has already begun) the RAA will monitor school curricula, check social media content, ferret out blasphemers, and organise research in universities for spreading the true message of Islam. President Alvi has now signed the required ordinance.

What a damp squib! No school textbook in Pakistan — even science ones — is exempt from rigorous religious censorship. For the news media, multiple monitoring organisations already exist. As for researching the Prophet's life: let's have more. But didn't we learn about Musawaat-i-Muhammadi in our school days and of the Prophet's sense of justice? RAA's purpose is plainly political, not religious.

Making a mishmash of religion and politics won't turn Pakistan into a welfare state.
Here's what can.

Khan's RAA speech suggested exactly this. At first he spoke passionately like all religious preachers do (his laudations of Winston Churchill and British courts were hard to fathom) but quickly switched to politics. After pillorying his predecessor and decrying electoral fraud, he made a pitch for [electronic voting machine](#). Smuggled in between was a reference to Caliph Hazrat Umar as having (twice) sacked his valiant general, Khalid bin Waleed, although the general never lost a war.

The ongoing [Khan-Bajwa tiff](#) on the ISI DG's successor suggests some implicit messaging here: I'm the boss and generals better obey me. Even if Khan is right here, using a religious occasion for a political purpose is wrong. Two worlds that rightfully should be kept apart are conflated here. Countless power-hungry politicians in history have exploited religion, promising people the moon but delivering exactly nothing.

Promises of Riyasat-i-Madina have also brought nothing — except promises followed by still more promises. To paraphrase Marx: when you can't feed the masses, try opium. The [2021 UNDP report](#) details how Pakistan has gone oppositely. Wealth disparities have massively multiplied. Elite groups, says the report, have captured the state and become richer. A staggering \$17.4bn was given in the form of subsidies to the military, corporate sector, feudal landlords, and the political class. Among others, the Fauji Foundation and Army Welfare Trust are now tax exempt.

The report concludes: “The poorest and richest Pakistanis effectively live in completely different countries, with literacy levels, health outcomes, and living standards that are poles apart.” It wryly notes that those doling out privileges receive the same. This could be a veiled reference to the rich men who surround PM Khan today. When UNDP presented its report to him in April, he and his cabinet promised to look at it. End of matter!

Khan wants a welfare state, right? Well, here’s how to make it:

Experts estimate the market value of Pakistan’s real estate around \$300-400 billion. Yet the declared value is around \$16-20bn, 20 times lower! Let the reader research Wikipedia for the declared value of properties owned by Imran Khan, Nawaz Sharif, Pervez Musharraf or Asif Ali Zardari and compare these to their true market worth. All are honest men.

The first step: set up an authority (not RAA) to properly estimate the current market value of urban and rural properties owned by every citizen. Add to this his/her income plus other items of worth held both inside and outside the country. Once a fair picture emerges, tax the rich hard but the middle class sparingly. Does this happen in other countries? In some, yes, in others, no. Can it happen in Pakistan? Probably, but the system could go into a tailspin. If this cannot be done, say so. But if you don’t plan to even try then please stop promising.

Khan has pledged again and again to break the back of Pakistan’s thieving elite. But his universe of bad guys stops at political opponents or only slightly beyond. Excluded are generals, PTI stalwarts, feudal lords, property developers, bankers, and the super-rich provided they pledge fealty to him. Perhaps he realises that the only way to stay on top is to work with the forces he once pledged to eliminate.

You want to stop Islamophobia? Here, sir, is how to do that:

Don’t squeeze non-Muslims in Pakistan further. Most have escaped the country while others wait in line. Instead of endless ‘research’ from the RAA, simply enforce the Quranic injunction: *la ikraha fi-din* (there is no compulsion in religion). Today even a 13-year-old (or younger) Hindu or Christian girl can be kidnapped and legally converted to Islam. A parliamentary committee has rejected the anti-forced conversion bill. Europe’s Islamophobia will be better handled by getting this bill passed instead of threatening to expel the French ambassador — and then shying away.

PM Khan has emphasised the youth’s “moral degeneration” in every other speech he gives. But are Pakistanis divorcing more often, marrying less, or dressing more liberally? Far from it, contends Lums professor and sociologist, Umair Javed. Compared to earlier decades, statistical data suggests more lifestyle conservatism today and more overt religiosity. Whether this has made Pakistanis more honest in personal dealings or kinder and more law-abiding is for the reader to judge.

Instead of crying that the skies are falling and demanding more moral policing, a Pakistani leader should concentrate upon the country’s economic distress, poor quality of education, massive youth unemployment, chronic inability to create technology and, now, political isolation after the Taliban victory (which the world sees as Pakistan assisted). Creating the bogey of moral decay and giving fake solutions to a non-existent problem won’t ever make Pakistan a welfare state.

Pervez Hoodbhoy is an Islamabad-based physicist and writer.

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