

ISAS Brief

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Forthcoming Pakistan Elections: A Profile on Nawaz Sharif

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Nawaz Sharif (complete name, Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif) is the leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), a nationwide party with its main support in the Punjab. Mr Sharif was born in Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan, on 10 December 1949 in a family of Kashmiri descent that fled to Pakistan at the time of the partition of India in 1947 from Jatti Umra, a village in Amritsar district of the undivided Punjab, now part of the Indian East Punjab. His father and uncles jointly owned an iron foundry. Starting from humble circumstances, they expanded their business and became prosperous and affluent. Mr Sharif is married and has two sons and two daughters.

In 1972, the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1971-77) embarked upon a policy of nationalisation of industrial units, and the iron foundry of the Sharifs was taken away from them. But General Zia-ul-Haq, who overthrew Mr Bhutto in 1977, de-nationalised industrial takeovers and it was returned to them. The Sharifs re-launched their business with great vigour under the name of Ittefaq Group of Industries. Such an undertaking catapulted them into the higher echelons of the entrepreneurial class of Pakistan.

The Sharifs became close allies of General Zia-ul-Haq – a relationship they shrewdly exploited to acquire economic advantages and concessions. A steel mill, a sugar mill and four textile mills were returning US\$450 million annual income in 1990. Upwards of 10,000 people were employed in those units. They even acquired mills outside Pakistan. There is reliable evidence to suggest that the military encouraged the Sharifs to enter politics.

As a consequence, Mr Sharif was rewarded with the post of Finance Minister in the Punjab Government in 1981. In that role, he established a sound reputation as a business-friendly and free-market politician. In 1985, he was elected as Chief Minister of Punjab. Since the Punjab was not only the most populous province in the Pakistani federation but also the most dominant in terms of economic development and representation in the civil service and military, Mr Sharif became a very powerful politician in Pakistan.

General Zia perished in a plane crash in 1988. In the election that followed, Mr Sharif became the leader of a rightist alliance named Islami-Jamhoori-Ittehad (IJI). He won both

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national and provincial assembly seats in the 1988 general elections but vacated the national assembly seat to become once again Chief Minister of Punjab. A coalition government at the centre was formed by Benazir Bhutto.

A dispute with Ms Bhutto over the distribution of government funds in Punjab brought him into the national spotlight. After Ms Bhutto was thrown out of office on charges of corruption in 1990 and new elections were held, Mr Sharif, who was leader of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML), was nominated as the prime minister candidate of the IJI. He was sworn in as Prime Minister on 1 November 1990. He sold off inefficient and bankrupt state enterprises nationalised earlier by Mr Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and began to liberalise the economy. He introduced easy installment loans to run duty-free imported taxis to unemployed youths and others. Such measures won him praise from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

However, Mr Sharif was dismissed from office on charges of corruption by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan who accused him of corruption to the tune of US\$20 billion during his 30-month term as Prime Minister. He was dismissed under Pakistan's controversial Eight Amendment that gives the president the power to discharge an elected government.

Ms Bhutto was elected Prime Minister once again and Mr Sharif served as opposition leader during her rule. On 5 November 1996, President Farooq Leghari removed Ms Bhutto from office on charges of corruption for the second time. This gave Mr Sharif the opportunity to regain power. On 17 February 1997, Mr Sharif led the PML to a landslide victory. It won 134 seats in the 217-seat national parliament. Mr Sharif formed a coalition government with his smaller allies. His government had a solid working majority of 165 seats.

During his second term, he introduced constitutional changes that would secure the Prime Minister's position vis-à-vis the President's. Thus, the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution was passed so that the President could no longer dismiss the Prime Minister, and the Fourteenth Amendment imposed strict party discipline on members of parliament. This allowed party leaders to dismiss any of their legislators if they failed to vote as they were told. Moreover, he developed differences with the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Syed Sajjad Ali Shah, over various legal and constitutional issues. A mob, comprising cadres of Mr Sharif's PML, raided the Supreme Court premises and disrupted court proceedings. On 28 November 1997, the assertive Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was dismissed by him.

Mr Sharif's popularity rose sharply after his government undertook nuclear tests on 28 and 30 May 1998 in response to India's nuclear tests two weeks earlier. However, afterwards matters started going downhill. The sanctions that were imposed by the United States and other countries to penalise Pakistan for carrying out the nuclear tests began adversely to affect the Pakistan economy. He aggravated the situation further when he suspended many civil liberties, dismissed the Sindh provincial government and set up military courts when the stability of the government was threatened.

During both his terms, Mr Sharif displayed the tendency to combine dogmatic Islamic ideas with a trader's instinct to enhance business interests. Thus, for example, in line with global practice, Sunday replaced Friday as the day of rest but, on the other hand, he introduced the Fifteenth Amendment, which made dogmatic Islamic Law, the Shari'ah, the supreme law of the land. He was overthrown before parliament passed that amendment.

In October 1998, Mr Sharif fell out with the Chief of Army Staff, General Jahangir Karamat, over the latter's advocacy of the creation of a National Security Council. He perceived it to be a conspiracy to return the military to a more active role in Pakistani politics. As their differences grew stronger, General Karamat, in a rare expression of deference to civilian authority by the head of the army, resigned and Mr Sharif appointed General Pervez Musharraf as army chief. However, relations with General Musharraf soon deteriorated.

In May 1999, General Musharraf masterminded the Kargil Operation, whereby militants known as mujahideen and regulars from the Pakistan Army occupied some vacant military posts at Kargil on the Indian side of the Line of Control in Kashmir. Mr Sharif claimed not to have been informed by General Musharraf, while the latter alleged in his autobiography, *In the Line of Fire*, that Mr Sharif had been properly briefed before the operation had taken place.

At any rate, it caused considerable embarrassment to Mr Sharif. Then United States' President, Bill Clinton, persuaded him to order a cessation of hostilities and that Pakistani forces should withdraw from the posts they had occupied at Kargil. At the same time, increasing fiscal deficits and debt-service payments, mainly due to American sanctions, led to a financial crisis. The government narrowly avoided defaulting on its international loans.

On 12 October 1999, Mr Sharif removed General Musharraf as army chief. General Musharraf, who was in Sri Lanka at that time, boarded a commercial airliner to return to Pakistan. Mr Sharif allegedly ordered the Karachi airport sealed off to prevent the landing of the airliner, but General Musharraf contacted top army generals who took over the country and ousted Mr Sharif. General Musharraf assumed control of the government. Mr Sharif was tried by Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism Courts, which in 2000 handed down a life sentence on him for hijacking.

The military government agreed to commute his sentence from life in prison to exile in Saudi Arabia. He reportedly agreed to go into self-exile for 10 years. It can be noted that he made an attempt earlier on 10 September 2007 to return to Pakistan, but was sent back to Saudi Arabia by the government.

He has now returned earlier than the agreed period of exile, apparently through a deal brokered by the Saudi Royal Family who sent him back on their private plane. Because of their vast oil wealth, the Saudis exercise considerable leverage on Pakistan. Hundreds of thousands of Pakistanis work in Saudi Arabia, and the Pakistani state provides many services, including units of the Pakistan armed forces to the Saudi state.

Ideologically, Mr Sharif is undoubtedly a right of centre politician who enjoys a good rapport with rightwing Islamist parties and organisations. The Americans seem to be wary of his Islamist connections but the fact that he is firmly committed to the free market and globalisation, it should not be difficult for them to work out an understanding with him. He has strongly expressed a commitment to the abolition of military rule and the restoration of democracy. He has admitted making many mistakes in the past and promised to function as a democratic political leader respecting the rule of law.

It is important to note the Election Commission has rejected nominations papers from both Mr Sharif and his brother, Shahbaz Sharif, on charges of corruption and abuse of public office. Initially Mr Sharif declared that his party, the PML-N, will boycott the elections, but

he has since then changed his mind, fearing that an absence from the election will mean that other parties will be represented in parliament.

The election manifesto of the PML-N pledges the restoration of the deposed judges of the Pakistan Supreme Court; democracy and the 1973 Constitution; elimination of military's role in politics; provision of security of life and property of the people; promotion of a tolerant and pluralistic society; relief for the poor through poverty alleviation; and provision of employment, education and health facility to the citizens. The PML-N is expected to do well.

It is important to note that after Mr Sharif was overthrown, the erstwhile PML that he had headed split into two factions. Those who remained loyal to him took up the designation PML-N while those who joined hands with the government of General Musharraf renamed their party as Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam) [PML-Q]. Both these parties will be competing for the same type of votes – mainly of conservative sections of the lower, middle-middle and upper middle classes, as well as landowners and the entrepreneurial class. In a fair and free election, the PML-N will undoubtedly emerge as one of the three biggest parties – the other two being the PPP and PML-Q. Mr Sharif has expressed fear of mass rigging of the elections.

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