Why Imran Khan offers hope for a new South Asia

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For The Straits Times

He is not the prime minister of Pakistan, but Mr Imran Khan’s emergence as leader of the single largest party in the National Assembly after last week’s general elections is a momentous event. It is hard to imagine how a historical turn in the relationship between Pakistan and India, no less Asia, could be achieved by the abdication of “power-hungry” leaders. In any case, there is no expectation that the change will happen all at once.

For the large numbers of the Pakistanis and Indians who abandoned their old political associations and voted for Khan, the official narrative of a Pakistan that is not Pakistan at all is sufficient. But like any democratic election, it is not a moment of pure hope: it has been repeatedly shown that the party in power is more willing to be what it is than what it could or should be. Meanwhile, the narrative of a Pakistan that is not Pakistan is at an end point. While domestic conditions and international developments will change, the two countries will still have to live together in the region.

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