**[Growing distrust](https://www.dawn.com/news/1767818/growing-distrust)**

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THE government may be on its way out but it seems it plans to leave Ishaq Dar behind. Indeed, as the rumours about the possible caretaker prime minister swirl around, his name has been mentioned more than once, and despite the [denials by allied parties](https://www.dawn.com/news/1766633) including the [PML-N itself,](https://www.dawn.com/news/1767513) no one seems to think his name has been dropped altogether. (Those who matter within the party are apparently standing behind him; whether others, who also matter, agree or not is a different story.) Had he not enjoyed the support from within his party ranks, why would he continue to insist humbly he is ready and willing to accept any responsibility or important post coming his way?

But it seems as if the idea of putting a politician in charge is gaining traction. More and more views (or are they just gossip?) are coming forward, suggesting the shortlisted names are those of politicians. What is perhaps left unsaid is the adjective appended to politician. A loyal politician is apparently in demand — not just a politician.

Does this feverish search for a loyal politician hint at some distrust between the establishment and the parties in power? Why else would there be this sudden interest in bringing in a politician in an entire edifice put up to keep politics out?

Distrust is in the air. Now that the parties seem convinced they no longer face a potential threat from the PTI, the differences among them are sharpening. What happened to the plans to ensure the PPP would win the next election, anointing Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari as prime minister? The trickle of leaders into the party seems to be just a trickle and little more. Does this cause any concern within the party? Perhaps.

With parties believing the PTI threat is over, their differences are sharpening.

In KP, the allies’ disgruntlement with each other is now eclipsed only by the security threat. The [storm of criticism](https://www.dawn.com/news/1763913) launched against the domination of the caretaker set-up by JUI-F and the governor’s antics, who is not just a senior party member but also a relative of the maulana, erupted too quickly to just be random. Intriguingly, it came after months of the government being in place — as if till now making hay was acceptable but with elections ‘approaching’, priorities have changed. Whose priorities have changed? It is hard to tell. But it seems more than just a storm in a teacup, raging on talk shows only to be forgotten within days.

More than the performance of the governor, the criticism of him has also made clear the lines within the PDM alliance. The criticism of the JUI-F came from PPP and ANP; the PML-N seemed distant. Is it because of its light presence in KP and the fact that it would rather keep the maulana happy than worry about corruption and misgovernance in a province which isn’t Punjab? Whatever the reason, the lines in KP are at least drawn, with the ANP and PPP on the one side and the JUI-F and PML-N on the other.

But as the party leading the government, disquiet (if not distrust) within the PML-N is also simmering. Despite reiterating that Nawaz Sharif will be the next prime minister, the current prime minister is now on a media blitz. He is attending multiple events every day, giving speeches and even interviews, which he stayed away from earlier; it seems to be the launch of an election campaign or a prime ministerial bid. Couple this with the rumours of *‘dulhan wohi jo piya man bhaaye’* (a bride is one fancied by the groom) and it is hard not to wonder what the party and the elder brother feel about this spree.

If one is able to continue with such uncharitable thoughts about family and party unity, rumours about Dar and his stay at Prime Minister House are easier to understand. In addition, his name implies distrust of part of the PML-N leadership of other power holders. That the latter may have other plans appears to be worrying some of the political leadership, perhaps even beyond the N. After all, now that the PTI has been reduced to size, there are fewer incentives to babysit an unwieldy coalition. Why not simply keep a caretaker in charge, as in Punjab and KP? Who will object?

The precedent has now been set, not just of a delay in holding elections but also to run provinces (and eventually the centre) through unelected governments, by focusing on constitutional requirements other than the one mandating elections within three months. For instance, when the two provincial assemblies were [dissolved](https://www.dawn.com/news/1732291), it was said the Constitution required caretaker governments in all the provinces at the time of all elections, national and provincial. If elections in Punjab and KP took place earlier, it would mean the two provinces would hold National Assembly elections without caretaker governments. This, we were told, was not possible; the caretakers were deemed more important than the limit of how quickly elections had to be held after dissolution.

And now it seems the census issue may prove more important than the three-month limit. (The courts seem to have been sidelined now that the power of giving the date lies with the Election Commission.) Perhaps someone, somewhere felt a loyal politician could prevent such delays, as ‘neutral’ caretakers obviously will not.

The other reason being put forward for Dar’s name was perhaps bought by no one but himself. It was argued that disinterested, neutral people wouldn’t be able to make the right decisions to keep the economy on an even keel. Only politicians could do so. Enter the Dar Man!

But as we well know, other than the parties, we are still wedded to the idea of technocrats being the best people to run the economy. And if, once the caretakers’ choice is made, and a technocrat is visible, it will be obvious that Raja Riaz got his way and not the PML-N. As an analyst on a talk show pointed out the other day, he is critical to the final choice. And she was dead serious.

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*Published in Dawn, August 1st, 2023*