**[Nawaz Sharif active again](https://www.dawn.com/news/1831584/nawaz-sharif-active-again)**

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NAWAZ Sharif seems to be recovering from the [shock](https://www.dawn.com/news/1813434) of the February election result and asserting himself, perhaps, realising that just as his party can’t do without the support of the establishment, the latter isn’t exactly spoilt for choice either when it comes to civilian partners.

Against the backdrop of diehard PTI and Imran Khan supporter retired Lt-Gen Naeem Khalid Lodhi’s multiple-point ‘reconciliation proposal’ — which received considerable [traction](https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1184869-gen-r-lodhi-s-reconciliation-proposal-has-reached-military-authorities) in the media, with two major broadsheets carrying his bylined piece on consecutive days — came his jailed leader’s [article](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2024/05/02/imran-khan-pakistan-jail-not-afraid-die-general-asim-munir/) in UK’s conservative *Telegraph* newspaper.

Imran Khan’s piece blew to smithereens any idea of reconciliation that the retired general was pushing which, according to the latter, had reached the right military quarters even as he conceded he had not heard back from them. Even if he was being presumptuous, it was a well-meaning move.

In his nine-point [proposal](https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1183842-ex-defence-secretary-launches-effort-for-reconciliation), Gen Lodhi called for a ceasefire between all the warring parties in the country and a period of calm reflection. He suggested bringing down the boiling temperature by letting the incumbents stay in office for two years under protest of just black armbands and avoiding more dramatic, potent or disruptive such as public demonstrations.

The politically astute politician scents an opportunity to create more elbow room for his party.

He called for the winding up of court cases, an end to the imprisonment of PTI leaders and cessation of harsh verbal exchanges between rivals. His party leader had other ideas and named the army chief as the person responsible for his continued imprisonment, claiming that if anything were to happen to him, or his wife, the most powerful man in the country would be directly responsible. He also called on his supporters to stand up and be counted or be content with a life of ‘slavery’.

This article went way beyond Imran Khan playing the bad cop to, for example, Naeem Khalid Lodhi’s good cop. It was indicative of the fissures that now define his party’s relationship with its erstwhile benefactor, the establishment. These fissures have grown into an ever-widening gulf.

Although the Imran Khan article came later in the week, Nawaz Sharif seems to have read the situation correctly ahead of its publication, as he pushed through two decisions via his brother’s office. The first was the appointment of [Rana Sanaullah](https://www.dawn.com/news/1830602) as a prime ministerial adviser with a seat in the cabinet. He is a diehard Nawaz loyalist who has been critical of the establishment and its chosen interior minister [Mohsin Naqvi](https://tribune.com.pk/story/2464102/naqvi-breaks-silence-on-criticism-from-detractors).

The other decision which came in for a considerable amount of stick in these pages and beyond was the [elevation](https://www.dawn.com/news/1830191) of Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar as the deputy prime minister. He was Nawaz Sharif’s first choice as finance minister but the establishment preferred Muhammed Aurangzeb over him. The appointment, it seems, was steamrolled.

Coupled with Mohsin Naqvi’s control over the interior ministry and a host of federal investigation, law-enforcement and intelligence agencies and, of course, the federal capital administration, the PML-N saw the forcing away of its finance minister candidate as a setback in no uncertain terms.

When the two decisions were notified, Nawaz Sharif himself was on a [private visit to China](https://www.dawn.com/news/1829099) and Shehbaz Sharif was [in Saudi Arabia](https://www.dawn.com/news/1830291) for the World Economic Forum’s special edition being held in Riyadh. One of the pro-PML-N spinners on YouTube, who also articulates the establishment’s position, tried to explain the Dar elevation as something triggered by the Chinese being unhappy with CPEC progress and liaison.

But that wasn’t the case. Nawaz Sharif is said to be on a visit to China with his grandson and one of his sons to look at steel plants and negotiate with suppliers, as his son’s plant in Saudi Arabia needs to be upgraded, even expanded. Thus far, there is no indication he has met any Beijing official of note.

It was left to TV anchor Najam Sethi to let the (Dar appointment) cat out of the bag. He told his co-anchor that given the former caretaker prime minister, Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar’s ‘invaluable services’, the establishment was keen to reward him with an important position in the new government.

The PML-N, which had apparently agreed reluctantly to give two key ministries of interior and finance to the establishment nominees, was not keen on inducting another one of its loyalists to a senior cabinet position. Therefore, first Dar was made foreign minister and then quickly elevated to deputy prime minister on a weekend, as that was the office likely to be sought for the former caretaker prime minister soon, there were suggestions.

Earlier, the PPP’s decision to stick with Yousuf Raza Gilani as its successful candidate for the Senate chairman had narrowed down the number of ‘befitting’ roles for the Balochistan politician, whose caretaker government is now coming in for considerable criticism for allowing the import of hundreds of million dollars of wheat when a bumper crop was a near certainty at home.

The PML-N’s Hanif Abbasi has [gone public](https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/1185347-ex-pm-kakar-pml-ns-abbasi-engage-in-verbal-spat-over-wheat-import-scandal) with the details of a heated exchange with Mr Kakar over alleged irregularities in the wheat import decision. This exchange took place at the door of a five-star hotel’s gym in Islamabad, across the road from the ministers’ enclave, where the caretaker prime minister was given a house on moving from the Prime Minister’s House after the election, in anticipation of an office in the new government.

From Mr Abbasi’s account, it seems clear that the usually calm and composed Mr Kakar lost his cool. Normally, he can talk a lot but does not say much apart from [high praise](https://www.dawn.com/news/1817769) for the intelligence agencies and criticism of the protesting loved ones of the Baloch ‘missing’. The loss of high office and criticism of his handling of the wheat import seems to have rattled him.

The politically astute Nawaz Sharif who, many observers said, was well past his ‘sell-by’ date is active again because he scents an opportunity to create more elbow room for his party so he can steer a safe path through tough economic decisions that could dent, even decimate, his support.

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