# Change of PM and the futu

OP-ED

DR HASAN-ASKARI RIZVI

*An entrenched presidency may manipulate the weak political forces to its advantage but it cannot give enough resilience to the political process to cope with the challenges which range from political alienation, economic deprivation, religious and cultural intolerance and terrorism*

NOBODY WAS SURPRISED AT THE JUNE 26 resignation of Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali. For the last two months, the presidency was planning to replace Jamali with a new favourite. What surprised most observers during this period was that the presidency did not frame any specific charges against the Jamali government. It seems that some key people in the presidency got alienated from Jamali and decided to get rid of him without taking into account the injurious implications of such a move for the polity. The parliament or the ruling coalition was not involved in initiating this move, although they endorsed it when President Pervez Musharraf decided to nudge Jamali out.

Jamali's removal reflects three aspects of Pakistan's current political scene. First, despite the restoration of civilian constitutional rule the president and his army-intelligence affiliates and advisors hold the high cards in the political system. The president occupies a pivotal position in the political system. Strongly believing in the 'unity of command', Musharraf makes sure that there is no doubt about who commands the state power. He became quite active in managing state affairs during the last couple of months. The change of prime minister demonstrates his continuing hold on power.

Second, the ruling coalition played no direct role in deciding Jamali's fate. Although the PML president, Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, was in contact with the presidency and knew about its political agenda, the key leaders of the ruling coalition and most parliamentarians did not know the dynamics of the politics of change. The decision to remove Jamali was made in the presidency and the ruling coalition went along. Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain's nomination as prime minister with the approval of the presidency helped create the consensus on the change. There was hardly anybody in the meeting of the parliamentary party of the ruling coalition that asked Jamali to stay on or give reasons for his resignation.

Third, the national assembly was not relevant to the change. The decision was made outside the NA without the active involvement of the ruling party. However, it would approve the decision when the matter is referred to it on June 28. The irony is that the prime minister had to quit two days after the approval of his government's budget by the NA even though the approval of the budget is always considered a vote of confidence in the government. Many members of the Jamali cabinet are expected to join the cabinet of the new prime minister.

Jamali's removal can be compared with the dismissal of Khawaja Nazimuddin by Governor General Ghulam Muhammad in April 1953 soon after he got his budget approved by the central legislature. The ruling Muslim League did not object to his removal and reposed confidence in Muhammad Ali Bogra who was summoned from the US to become prime minister. Several members of Nazimuddin's cabinet joined the new cabinet. Now, Jamali has got a raw deal at the hands of Musharraf and most of his ministers are keen to join the new cabinet.

Jamali was selected prime minister by the presidency in November 2002 to head the first government under the post-military rule political arrangements. He had the qualifications to become prime minister under these arrangements that protected the centrality of Musharraf (president and army chief) to the political process. Jamali had no independent political base and he openly acknowledged his dependence on the president, whom he described as his boss. He maintained a low profile and did not object to Musharraf's efforts to expand his role in political management and governance. And he did not hesitate to resign when the presidency advised him to do so because he knew that the ruling PML listened to the president rather than to him.

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Jamali's exit can also be interpreted as a setback to the political arrangements crafted by the presidency and its army-intelligence affiliates to civilianise the military rule in October-November 2002. The elections were carefully managed to enable the pro-military PMLQ to emerge as the largest party at the federal level. The presidency was instrumental in creating the ruling coalition led by the PMLQ. Jamali was also its choice. Now, the presidency has abandoned him and wants to bring in a more trusted person.

There was no known political crisis in the country or revolt in the ruling coalition that warranted the change of the prime minister. However, press reports indicated in April 2004 that the presidency wanted to change the prime minister which created uncertainty in Islamabad. The president gradually built pressure on the prime minister and began to spend time in his chamber in the parliament house and held consultations with parliamentarians of the ruling coalition. He also consulted his military colleagues and summoned the first meeting of the National Security Council. The president took these steps to demonstrate that he was in full command of the situation and had the capability to undercut the support of the prime minister, if he defied him.

Initially, the PML leaders like Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain had reservations about the political change. However, he and has close associates could not afford to annoy the president. A dialogue between him and some key personnel of the Presidency removed these reservations and they agreed on Jamali's successor. Press reports indicate that Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain's elevation to premiership is an interim arrangement. The presidency will select a prime minister in a month or so. This means the aspirants for the top political job would be cultivating the presidency and some degree of uncertainty would prevail in Islamabad until a prime minister is finally selected.

This episode removes whatever façade of democracy existed in Pakistan. The civilian institutions that came into existence after the 2002 general elections have not been able to acquire autonomous role and depend heavily on the presidency and its strong army-intelligence affiliates and advisors. This was the main reason that nobody in the ruling coalition questioned the role of the presidency in changing the prime minister. They do not want to alienate the presidency by questioning its political management. Some of them do not hesitate to publicly demonstrate their loyalty to Musharraf in parliament and outside.

In this situation, the future prospects of democratic institutions and processes do not seem bright in Pakistan. It is now firmly established that access to power and influence is possible only through co-optation by the presidency and the army-intelligence establishment. The availability of this option makes it difficult for civilian institutions and processes to acquire salience and sustainability.

An entrenched presidency may manipulate the weak political forces to its advantage but it cannot give enough resilience to the political process to cope with the challenges which range from political alienation, economic deprivation, religious and cultural intolerance and terrorism. When the political institutions cannot address the key challenges and are unable to cope with the participatory pressures, they suffer from the crisis of legitimacy which makes it difficult for them to acquire sustainability. This appears to be the fate of the current Pakistani political system.

*Dr Hasan Askari Rizvi is a political and defence analyst*