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The gauntlet is thrown

OP-ED



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What was the whole point in sacking one non-PM and putting in another as a stopgap for a third? Why did those that counsel the General take this country through these contortions when it doesn't know whether it is coming or going as it is

so that he had the authority of the highest in the land to so do. Surely another bright neon-sign that the country is well on the way to good and better governance.

Only two hours after the nomination of the brilliance from Gujrat, and as a sign of even better good governance, we were told that the Wonder Boy-Superman-Batman-Captain Marvel of the Pakistani economy, the private banker turned economist (nobody knows how) Shaukat Aziz would follow Shujaat Hussain as prime minister as soon as a safe seat for his election to the national assembly had been found, but no later than three months from present events! Leaving us gasping for breath because of the prospect of seeing three prime ministers in the space of twelve weekends, and making us

the laughingstock of the world yet again.

For what was the whole point in sacking one non-PM and putting in another as a stopgap for a third? Why did those that counsel the General take this country through these contortions when it doesn't know whether it is coming or going as it is? Poor Mr Jamali was hardly a threat to the General and his unfolding handiwork. Would he have stood in the way of Wonder Boy getting elected from a safe seat and then becoming prime minister? A man who used to reportedly quake in his shoes at every telephone call from the presidency? Would Jamali oppose Superman, for God's sake, did he even have the wherewithal when he was so beholden to the Almighty, the General, the Chaudhrys of Gujrat even Shiekh Rashid of Lal Haveli for his prime ministry?

But seriously, why was this faithful satrap and handmaiden, doormat indeed to the General, treated in this most shabby and shameful way? Was it to show us lay, ordinary Pakistanis that the General and the Praetorian elite that rule the roost in the Land of the Pure, and who while they will happily use politics (why, the General even wore a *Pugree* atop his uniform in direct contravention of the Army Dress Regulations at one of his referendum *jal-sas*, dash it) to further their own agenda of exercising complete power in the country, have utter disdain and contempt for politicians as a class? What does this squalid treatment of a nobody in politics show of the mindset of the ruling junta: that they can use and then dispense with politicians like so many used plastic bags? That a meek Jamali can be dispensed with and an even weaker, meeker Shaukat Aziz can abracadabra (!) be brought in as the nation's chief executive, such is the power of the Establishment?

Even more critically, what lessons is this latest *tamasha* meant to carry for other politicians, even politicians who, unlike Mr Jamali have large political parties at their command? That if even poor old Jamali, lover of the General to boot, could be treated in this fashion they, his nemeses, could expect far worse were they ever to show their faces in Pakistan again?

Here lies the conundrum, the biggest chal-

lenge ever to face democrats and civil society and politicians in the country. What do they do now that the General has thrown an open and most aggressive challenge to them all? Should they not now put up or shut up for good and all? How much space do they think they have left to them? How long do the believers in civil society think they have before the whole damned shoot is wrapped up within a presidential system in which one chief of army staff will follow another, rubberstamps like Jamali, Shujaat, Aziz and Mohammadmian Soomro keeping their seats warm for them? How long do the politicians think they can go on running their parties from thousands of miles away, not showing their faces in the country, but only cashing in on the goodwill of the people?

The time is here, if anyone were to ask me, for Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif to come back post haste and take over their political parties and try and reclaim what they can of their political fortunes. There will be vicissitudes to face, hard times to go through, even jail terms to undergo. There is no easy way out of where the country finds itself: being made a mockery of by people who care not a whit how the world looks at us. The time is here for anyone who cares a jot for the country, to stand up and be counted, and to demand immediate fair and free elections with no political personality excluded.

In the end, and in light of the foregoing, let me give a short comparison of how the world looks at India and us. As of now, the Schengen States do not issue more than a three-month validity visa for those Pakistanis lucky to get one; Indians are allowed, hold on to your chairs, 10-year visas! So much for our front-line state against terrorism status; so much for our major non-Nato ally nonsense.

Well, little wonder when we have three Prime Ministers in different stages of dismissal/resignation/appointment/dismissal/resignation/appointment, all within three months. Little wonder when we are still running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. What bloody monkeys we are.

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THERE THEY GO, THE TWO "TIGHT" buddies, the governments of the United States and the Land of the Pure falling over their own feet, yet congratulating themselves for great plateaus reached: one for an unseemly and hurried so-called handover of so-called sovereignty to the Iraqis, the other sacking out of hand its own nominated prime minister. In the first case the American junta giving the impression of cutting and running, and in the second the Establishment of Pakistan telling us in no uncertain terms what it thinks of us, and making itself more enemies than it already had.

The week that the non-prime minister of Pakistan, poor old lumbering and oh-so-sorry-looking-for-himself, Mr Jamali 'became' prime minister of this luckless country, I had predicted in writing that there was no way he could last more than six months given the fact that he had no legs to stand on save those tentatively and very temporarily lent to him by our ubiquitous, omnipotent and self-serving Establishment; that he was bound to fall off the wall very quickly. In the event he 'lasted' some eighteen or so months, but boy what a 'lasting' it was. From day one the poor chap couldn't even post a section officer of the federal government by his decree; every little step he took had to be cleared by the presidency; every meeting he 'presided' over was also super-presided over by the General. Making them both look mightily ludicrous, for nowhere else in the world have two people ever presided over one meeting. Seeing his own plight, poor Mr Jamali was prompted to say several times that General Musharraf was not only his "Boss", he also loved the General deeply.

Well, the man's agony is over with his quite unceremonious booting out of office, precisely a lay after he was shown on several news channels saying he had not been asked to resign, that he wasn't resigning, that he loved the General as of yore, who loved him right back in turn. Exactly twenty-two hours later, there he was, as large as life, docilely or shall we say 'bovinely', resigning from the office of prime minister of the Islamic Republic, dissolving his cabinet, and nominating Shujaat Hussain of the House of Aghoo as his successor informing us as he did