

Jamali's sins

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IT is difficult to remember a period in Pakistan's short and eventful history when there hasn't been a crisis. If it wasn't a case of men in uniform leaping into instant action, then it was a case of civilians, enlisting the help of other civilians, to ensure that no government could complete its term and no system should be allowed to work.

The essential difference is, of course, that the men in uniform have the clout, and one of them behaved as if he also has the authority of scripture. But the end result of it all is that nothing has really changed.

The country is once again in a crisis, which is nothing new. But this time the civilians are not to blame. The sudden resignation of Mr Zafarullah Khan Jamali will nevertheless remain something of a mystery, for the general perception is that he was, what the English refer to as, muddling through. He was seen as a family man who threw his fishing line on the port side and didn't want to rock the boat. That is, until he decided one fine morning to assert himself.

One of the theories that has been aired in Punjab, the heartland of Pakistan, and which has started to flicker into view in other provinces, is that Mr Jamali was guilty of gross indiscretion. He is supposed to have passed certain disparaging remarks about the national accountability bureau, which the president holds in high esteem. And his public utterance, that the issue of the uniform had been settled, while it temporarily stilled the barrage of questions hurled at him by a newspaperman at a press conference,

probably sealed his fate.

While it might have been construed as an ambivalent statement, one which could have been taken either way, the president had no doubt about its meaning. It has also been alleged that Mr Jamali made an off-the-cuff remark to a confidant, which centred on the theme that once the president took off his uniform, he would be sorted out. This was the last straw.

It is now being seen that the undertaking to doff his uniform on December 31 was a ploy to get the MMA to give a collective nod to the passage of the controversial LFO and that the president never had any intention of addressing any sartorial changes which might have occurred. In the long run this might be in the interest of the country, but it doesn't alter the feeling of uncertainty and deprivation that exists. Mr Jamali will soon be forgotten, and it is doubtful if too many people will miss him. There are more pressing matters engaging the attention of the policy makers.

Currently the whole machinery of government appears to be involved in ensuring that Mr Shaukat Aziz wins his National Assembly seat in the by-elections, either in Tharparkar or Attock, preferably in both constituencies. What makes the episode a little distasteful, however, is the way the Muslim League is setting about organizing the caucus.

Mr Shaukat Aziz, accompanied by the chief minister of Sindh, Dr Arbab Ghulam Rahim, flew to Thar in the chief minister's official Cessna. And the prime minister, Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, did his bit by addressing a huge public meeting in which he extolled the virtues of the man who has promised to turn the blighted region of Thar into an oasis of prosperi-

ty. A few journalists in the crowd were curious to know why this generous gesture hadn't been made by the federal governments in the past, when the local people suffered abominably from droughts.

There appears to be such a great sense of urgency and desperation about getting Mr Aziz elected, that a newspaper wag suggested it might be because the president doesn't want to get stuck with Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain for longer than necessary, for fear of his coming up with a fresh string of jejeune sentiments like the one he uttered in a joint statement with the president about stamping out terrorism.

One wishes that Mr Aziz had been competing under different circumstances. He is urbane, suave, likable, modest, good at his work, and respected in financial circles abroad. He is also a man of independent financial means, and there is no scandal attached to his name. In a civilized country, he might have made a good prime minister. But Pakistan is not an easy country to govern.

To start with, Pakistan never had in its early years a prime minister like Jawaharlal Nehru who, in one fell swoop, took care of the feudal problem in his country. Instead, Pakistan has bred and continues to breed a succession of pirs, sardars, tamundars, khan sahibs, khan bahadurs, landlords and tribal chiefs, each of whom is a one-man fantasia to his people.

To complicate the issue, the retrogressive element in Pakistan, already deeply entrenched in the business class and the bureaucracy, has spread its tentacles into the ranks of the military, the police and certain sections of the clergy. That is why when it was reported in this newspaper ten days ago that a

13-year old peasant girl was gang-raped by five men in Rahim Yar Khan, and the station house officer refused to register a first information report, nobody was surprised and nobody took the slightest notice. It was just another miserable statistics. Just another case of letting sleeping dogs lie.

There were no protests, no hunger strikes, no placard carrying demonstrators storming the local press club, no angry letters to the local editors. People have just lost the will to stand up and fight. They have lost faith in the system.

How nice it would have been if the governor or the chief minister of Pakistan's largest province, instead of continuously drivelling goodwill and worrying about things like the movement of wheat from one province to another, had, just this once, hauled the SHO over the coals and demanded that the culprits be caught and publicly whipped.

Does a victim have to be the daughter of an air commodore or the chief executive officer of a leading multinational, before the police is jolted into action? Or does, as a cynic pointed out to this writer, the matter have to be aired over CNN, Fox News, Sky News and the BBC before the president gets involved, as he did in the notorious Meerwalla case?

On July 6 the Sukkur circuit bench of the Sindh High Court put its foot down on the parallel justice system which operates in the country, and served notices to a provincial minister, zila nazim Sukkur and sardar of the Bulu tribe for holding a jirga to settle a tribal dispute. There appears to be a stirring in the political wind. All it needs is for an enlightened prime minister to ensure that the process continues.