

# Governance sans politics

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By Anwar Syed

POLITICS is competitive pursuit of the authority and power to govern. Rarely, if ever, has it been possible to exclude politics from governance. The courts of absolute kings abounded in intrigues, alliances and counter-alliances among notables to have the king's ear, and to keep rivals away from his presence. This was doubtless politics, albeit, covert.

Democratic politics, too, are no stranger to a degree of intrigue, deceit, and treachery. It is not surprising then that politics, democratic or any other, are often said to be dirty. Nor is it strange that many an idealist, through the ages, has longed for a politics-free society, one ruled by a wise man who would make virtue and justice prevail. But Plato's "philosopher king" has never surfaced and taken the throne.

Classical and medieval Muslim thinkers, and some of their followers in our own time, praised self-effacement, condemned ambition, and rated desire for public office as sufficient reason for the aspirant's disqualification. But their quest for the selfless, and yet competent, ruler has been equally unavailing. Those who rejected democracy, because of its imperfections, did not get government of the wise and virtuous; they got tyranny.

Keeping these trends in mind, let us see how we may interpret our present situation. General Musharraf now appears to think that even the guided democracy he had earlier devised, via the seventeenth amendment to the Constitution, is more than we can handle. All indications are that he does not intend to let this amended Constitution prevail in actual practice.

He has been directing the making and implementation of public policy both in foreign relations and domestic affairs. While in office, Mr Zafarullah Jamali said repeatedly that he worked for the general and under his guidance. Yet, he has been sent away. Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain will serve as prime minister on an "interim" basis, to yield to Mr Shaukat Aziz after the "powers that be" get the latter elected to the National Assembly.

Spokesmen for the present regime have been applauding the transaction as a peaceful transfer of power the like of which has not been seen in Pakistan. This is not true: there were several "peaceful" transfers during our first parliamentary regime. In any case, the more important question is why this transfer was made at all.

Actually, it is naive to call it a transfer of power. Real and final authority and power remain where they were before. It is only the function of the "errand boy" that has changed hands, which makes the move even more puzzling.

Several explanations have been offered in these columns: (1) that Jamali said more than once that the "uniform issue" had

general and his associates in the army feared that extended service as prime minister might mould Mr Jamali into a competent politician with a mind of his own.

In evaluating these explanations, one can proceed from one of two assumptions: either that Jamali was an accomplished politician, or that he was only "fair-to-middling." Those who placed him in the prime minister's office knew that he was no more than fair. They had, then, no right to expect that he would perform miracles, such as swinging the MMA to the general's side on all issues.

Moreover, it was Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, much more than Mr Jamali, who acted as Musharraf's spokesman in negoti-

He is known to excel in the crafts of political intrigue and manipulation, even if he is not credited with any grand vision for the country, qualities of statesmanship, or interest in the making of high policy. Musharraf may have figured that Chaudhry Sahib might nevertheless turn out to be less amenable to presidential guidance than someone who was altogether harmless as a politician. That is why he was bypassed following the elections of 2002, and why he is now placed in the prime minister's post only on a temporary basis.

We are left to wonder why Mr Shaukat Aziz has been designated to replace Mr Shujaat Hussain. By all accounts Mr Aziz is a good and decent man. He is also reputed

to be exceedingly competent in the area of financial management. I do not doubt that the country needs him. But I do wonder why he could not have continued to serve the country and earn our eternal gratitude in his current capacity as the finance minister. Why does he have to be prime minister to bring us greater glory.

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ations with the MMA. If these negotiations failed to produce the desired results, the blame goes to Chaudhry Sahib. General Musharraf could have called in Mr Jamali and told him to stay quiet on the subject of his uniform, and one may be sure that he would have done so. He should not have been expected to campaign for Musharraf's indefinite retention of his army post. The PPP "patriots" initiated such a campaign and accomplished nothing other than opening themselves to ridicule as low-lying sycophants. Note also that the settlement of this issue written into the seventeenth amendment cannot be undone except by another amendment, which will be extremely difficult and messy to push through.

That General Musharraf acted to appease the Punjabi MNAs is also not a good explanation. Punjabi politicians have worked well with non-Punjabi prime ministers (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Mohammad Khan Junejo, Benazir Bhutto) in the past. They will become restive on this account only if the higher orders, so to speak, instigate them to go that way.

It is preposterous to interpret Mr Jamali's civility towards the MMA leaders as a move to build an independent support base for himself. He would have to build such a base within his own party if it was going to be of any use to him. A modest measure of receptivity within the MMA circles could not have done anything to advance his political career.

The seventh explanation noted above (that the general did not want to see Jamali grow up to a higher stature) makes sense, and it may have weighed with him

I dispute the proposition (advanced in these columns a few days ago) that a prime minister is, first and foremost, an administrator, and that a person can therefore function successfully in that post without being an astute and able politician. In my view, Mr Shaukat Aziz is making a serious error of judgment in agreeing to serve as the prime minister of Pakistan. This decision will bring him a lot more grief than satisfaction. He has our good wishes, but I am afraid these will do nothing for him.

The army in Pakistan has been hearing from both foreign and domestic observers, and it has been convinced, that it is the only stable, efficient, and orderly institution in Pakistan. The bureaucracy, in its view, is reasonably well organized but it is not competent enough and, moreover, it is corrupt. Politics and the practitioners of this craft in Pakistan are unspeakably corrupt and deceitful. They are beneath contempt.

In this reasoning the army alone is the right and proper institution to govern this country. But it so happens that during the last twenty years or so military rule has gone out of fashion and democracy has been gaining ground everywhere. It follows that while the army must continue to direct the country's affairs, it has to do so from behind the facade of a democratic

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(5) It is alleged also that he failed to get the four provincial governments to agree on the terms of an NFC award (regarding revenues sharing with the centre); (6) that the Punjabi members of the National Assembly wanted to see a fellow-Punjabi in the prime minister's post; (7) that the

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The seventh explanation noted above (that the general did not want to see Jamali grow up to a higher stature) makes sense, and it may have weighed with him and his army buddies. But a couple of other, but related, factors were also at work to which we should now turn.

First, it is not unlikely that Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, more than the generality of Punjabi MNAs, was restive. He coveted high office even when Nawaz Sharif was around. This time he led the campaign for breaking up the PML and putting together the "Q" faction. He is the leader of this group, which is the largest component in the current ruling coalition. In normal political reckoning he should have been the prime minister to start with. But for reasons, not all of which are known, he was asked to be content with being one of the principal movers and shakers behind the facade of a figurehead prime minister.

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But in this train of reasoning democracy must not be allowed to become real, substantive, or functionally successful; it must never get to be anything more than a facade. It suits the army if democracy in Pakistan continues to fumble, stumble, and fall, and if the political system remains corrupt and dysfunctional. Considering that politics cannot be banished, that it will stay in one form or another, are we to understand that our army would rather have the politics of intrigue than that of an open, democratic variety?

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