

News

Rumours, facts and star gazing

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First the rumours. Perwaiz Illahi meets Shahbaz Sharif in London secretly to discuss future collaboration between the Sharifs and the Chaudhrys. In one short meeting, a deal is struck and the details worked out. Ch. Shujaat has flown out without warning to put his stamp of approval on the arrangement.

What was the need for this 'unholy' pact? Chaudhrys are worried that Musharraf is close to cutting a deal with the PPP and they will be left high and dry. Sharifs are worried that Musharraf is close to cutting a deal with the PPP and they will be left high and dry in the opposition. Their mutual fears have brought them together. Against whom? General Musharraf?

Rumour two. Actually Perwaiz Illahi is on a mission on behalf of General Musharraf. He has indeed met Shahbaz Sharif but because Musharraf wants to rope Shahbaz in and create a unified Muslim League that will be led by none other than the General himself. In this scenario, Shahbaz will break with his brother, fracture the PML (N) and join his faction with the Kings party. What does Shahbaz get in return? The Prime Ministership?

What happens to the indispensable banker? Rumour three. The deal between the PPP and the General is almost done. All cases against Benazir and Asif in Pakistan will be withdrawn and Pakistan will also withdraw from being a party in the Swiss case against Benazir. The General has also agreed to call early elections as demanded by the PPP. Peoples Party will win but Benazir will not become Prime Minister as there is a bar against two time Prime Ministers occupying this office. Asif Zardari will become PM instead. Hallelujah.

What happens to the indispensable banker?? Staying with rumour three, what does General Musharraf get after conceding all this? He gets PPP's support and he desperately needs it because the Q party is a dud. It has a few hangers on but no public following. PPP brings the following and when this is combined with the General's excellent executive skills, the two have the potential to make music together.

Rumour four. Actually this is a combination of rumour three and four. Both Shahbaz and the PPP are being brought into the fold. Not just one party with a following but two and the General sitting on top of the heap. The quid pro quo is that PPP will get Sindh and Asif will become Chief Minister. Shahbaz's party will get Punjab and besides Shahbaz himself will become PM because he has proven executive skills.

What happens to the indispensable banker??? Rumour five and this is a real clincher. The General is fed up with everything. He hates the cabinet in which quite a few ministers are

Reality Check



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wanted by NAB. The discord within the ruling party is also getting to him. It is openly visible in Sindh but not confined to it. The Ministers and ruling party MP's are not getting along with the PM. The Chaudhrys are not getting along with Jamali. The patriots are not getting along with anybody.

The General does not need this entire jing bang. He has put up long enough with incompetence and corruption and is now ready to pack up the assemblies and change the system to a Presidential one. The army is with him and so is America. If you have these two A's on your side, then the third A, Allah is surely with you. Besides, he likes being Chief Executive and en-

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joyed his three years in the saddle. He wants more of the same or as my bureaucratic friends would put it, it is status quo ante time.

What happens to the indispensable banker????

Now some facts and a bit of half baked analysis. There is indeed discord in the ruling coalition. The Sindh situation gets uglier by the minute but it is a storm in a tea cup. Who cares if some Arbab does not get along with some Sheikh? It has no bearing on the power structure.

Yes there are divisions between the ruling coalition but that is neither new nor unusual. Power is a zero sum game. There is just so much of it to go around. If one person or faction has it the other does not.

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fundamentally hate each other. They are all after the same thing and only a few will get it. Plenty of reason for competition and plenty of reason for hate.

Why General Musharraf should get tired of this bickering, back biting lot and pack up the entire system is beyond me. This contrivance, this fake democracy has been carefully put together to provide a fig leaf of constitutionality to the General's authoritarian rule. As it is, Bush has started to take his democracy rhetoric seriously. Why should the General invite attention to himself by doing away with this useful charade?

It is true that the General is talking to the PPP. Everyone has acknowledged it and there is no harm in it except that by cutting a deal, the PPP will undermine democracy and strengthen authoritarianism. But, that does not appear to be Benazir's primary concern. She wants the cases finished and wants to return in triumph.

The General is pursuing a deal because he worries about lack of popular support and about restive smaller provinces. With the PPP supporting him, he believes, he will be on a firmer wicket. It is beginning to look like a match made in heaven.

Some more facts and half baked analysis. From all accounts, Shahbaz Sharif has been open to contacts with government emissaries but let this be cast in stone; he will not part with his brother or form his own faction of the PML(N). I say this not because I have any special information it is just common sense.

The political capital of the PML (N) is with Nawaz Sharif. He is the real leader and the vote getter. Shahbaz is the doer, the dynamo of the family but his brother has the vote bank. What madness would tempt Shahbaz to create his own faction of the party?

I have for the moment deliberately discounted the fact that the two brothers are genuinely close to each other in the emotional sense. Only political rationality is being discussed and no one has ever accused Shahbaz of being stupid. Why should he commit an obvious blunder?

Now some star gazing and putting a foot in the proverbial mouth because I could be completely wrong. Nothing much is going to change. The indispensable banker is likely to stay indispensable for a while. The General would like to have the PPP on board but will have difficulty paying Benazir's price. Nawaz Sharif has firmly rejected any deal with the General so no deal with Shahbaz. Army and America will continue to back the General. And thus, God is in heaven and all is well with the world.