**[Playing politics with May 9](https://www.dawn.com/news/1858289/playing-politics-with-may-9)**

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THE latest [wave of arrests](https://www.dawn.com/news/1858274/raid-on-national-assembly-gives-rivals-some-common-ground) of senior PTI leaders following the party’s recent show of strength in Islamabad is a reminder of the escalating political tension in the country.

What is happening now had been in the works for some time, with both sides bracing for a showdown. The [Sept 8 rally](https://www.dawn.com/news/1857770) and the harsh speeches made by some PTI leaders provided the trigger.

A [controversial law](https://www.dawn.com/news/1857645) to ‘regulate’ public gatherings in Islamabad, hastily passed just days before the opposition rally, is being used for the crackdown. It has now gone beyond a war of words. And it will not stop here. The opposition’s power show, despite the hurdles in its way, seems to have unnerved the ruling coalition. The arrests of the PTI’s top brass reflect a beleaguered administration’s growing desperation.

Some of the PTI leaders were picked up from inside the parliament building, in clear violation of the rules and the sanctity of the House. It is obvious that the police could not have entered the parliament building without instructions from the authorities. The defence minister justified the action, saying that it was caused by the provocative speeches of the PTI leaders at the rally.

Nothing could be more preposterous than a senior cabinet minister defending an unlawful action. Some of those detained have been charged under antiterrorism laws. Such blatant transgression has little precedent in our checkered parliamentary history.

By allowing the police to [enter the parliamentary premises](https://www.dawn.com/news/1858274/raid-on-national-assembly-gives-rivals-some-common-ground#:~:text=plainclothesmen%20stormed%20the%20building%20just%20after%203am%20%E2%80%94%20disconne%C2%ADc%C2%ADting%20the%20power%20supply%20and%20barging%20into%20the%20Ser%C2%ADvices%20Branch%20of%20Parliament%20House%20to%20whisk%20away%20the%20PTI%20legislators), the government has dealt a huge blow to the democratic political process and strengthened extra-constitutional forces.

The government has dealt a huge blow to the democratic political process.

The order issued by the National Assembly Speaker to release the arrested PTI lawmakers is commendable but not enough to restore the sanctity of the House. It does not absolve those on whose orders the police took action. The events of this week have left the country more polarised than before. Most worrisome was the report of the KP chief minister being allegedly held in Islamabad for several hours. Such action could ignite the already volatile situation in KP. It doesn’t bode well for the unity of the federation.

It is also a testing time for the main opposition party, which faces internal discord. Despite undiminished public support for the party, there is no coherent leadership to take charge.

The [highly inflammatory speech](https://www.dawn.com/news/1858283/deplorable-remarks) made by the KP chief minister and a few others at the rally has greatly harmed the PTI’s cause. Such vitriol will further sharpen the internal divide. The party has stuck together only because its supporters revolve around the incarcerated leader. With little hope of Imran Khan coming out of prison anytime soon, frustration within its ranks is growing.

It’s not just about the legal battle but also the clash with the establishment that may keep Khan in jail. There has also been talk about the former prime minister being tried by a military court for allegedly masterminding the May 9 violence and the attacks on military installations. The statements by some federal ministers hinting at such a possibility has reinforced speculation in this regard.

Meanwhile, the arrest and trial of former spymaster [retired Lt-Gen Faiz Hameed](https://www.dawn.com/news/1851970) has also raised concerns about the noose tightening around Imran Khan and some other senior PTI leaders. Some sections of the media have even reported on the former ISI chief being allegedly involved in the May 9 incidents. It is indeed an alarming situation.

It has been more than 16 months since the [May 9 violence erupted](https://www.dawn.com/news/1752254) after the arrest of Imran Khan. It was seen as a well-planned and highly coordinated attack on military installations across the country including GHQ in Rawalpindi and the corps commander’s house in Lahore. No doubt, the attack on these sensitive security installations was a serious matter. But it seems that the May 9 incident has been used as a political ploy.

Scores of PTI activists were arrested. According to the military spokesman, action was also taken against others in connection with the incident, including [two- and three-star officers](https://www.dawn.com/news/1852429). But no one seems to have been convicted. Many of those implicated were later released by the courts.

Curiously, there has never been any public inquiry conducted into such an important national security matter. Yet it remains a part of the political narrative of the ruling coalition and the establishment against the PTI. Interestingly, the issue keeps surfacing at a time of heightened political tension. The arrest of Faiz Hameed has brought the issue of May 9 back as part of political polemics.

Now there is talk about the [possibility of Khan being tried](https://www.dawn.com/news/1857256) under the Army Act. If it happens it will be the first time that a former Pakistani prime minister would appear before a military court. Any such probability would have serious and long-term consequences for the democratic process and national stability.

It is imperative that the May 9 incident [be probed](https://www.dawn.com/news/1823967) and the perpetrators punished. But the whole episode raises questions about the failure of the security forces to protect important defence installations. How could a relatively small mob of unarmed people breach security around such sensitive places without any resistance? Why could a motley crowd enter sensitive military premises?

According to the military, action was taken against [several officers](https://www.dawn.com/news/1852429), leading many observers to ask if May 9 was part of a conspiracy involving those from within. Action may have been taken against those found guilty but it is unclear whether there was any plot that the disgraced personnel were part of.

It should also be probed whether there was any link between those officers and the PTI leadership. These questions must be answered. The buck must not stop with them though; the responsibility for such a serious breach of security is also linked with those higher up. Rather than playing politics with the May 9 incident, an independent inquiry must be conducted into this extremely serious security matter.

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