**Change of guards**

Lt-Gen (r) Abdul Qayyum

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The Inter-service Intelligence Agency (ISI) is the premier agency of Pakistan operationally responsible for gathering, processing and analysing strategic information relevant for national security from around the world.

It was founded on January 1, 1948 by Sir Robert Cawthome, a two-star general who became its first director general. He served first in the British India Army and later after Partition, became part of the Pakistan Army. He also had the honour to be the cofounder of Pakistan Army signals. He was a Pakistani national born in Australia but died in England and was buried there.

There is no denying the fact that ISI is among the top few intelligence agencies of the world. It consists primarily of tri-service officers, both serving and retired, and also has a sizable civilian contingent of lower staff. The agency is headed by a serving three-star general appointed by the prime minister on the recommendation of the chief of army staff. The DG ISI reports to both the PM and the COAS besides interacting with the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, and the air force and naval chiefs.

The agency gained global recognition and fame when it supported the Afghan Mujahideen to oust Soviet invaders from Afghanistan. The present incumbent Lt-Gen Faiz Hameed will vacate charge on November 19 and assume command of the Peshawar Corp along our western Borders with Afghanistan the very next day. Due to his rich experience, he will be of immense value to the government and the armed forces leadership on Afghan issues.

A one-year command experience is mandatory for all three star generals to become eligible for consideration for elevation to any four star post. One wishes him well in his new very challenging command assignment since of late our western borders have become very active and we have lost some trained soldiers and officers which should not be acceptable in any case.

Lt-Gen Nadeem Anjum HI (M) has been posted as the next DG ISI to assume charge with effect from November 20, 2021. He undoubtedly has a daunting task because of the current highly charged both regional and global geo-politico-strategic environments.

Traditionally, such transitions for the change of guards have been done very smoothly based on GHQ recommendations. The present change, however, unfortunately became the talk of the town and unnecessarily created a state of uncertainty in the country because the PM showed certain reservations about the process for selection followed. Thankfully the PM finally reconciled with the selection and only made small changes in the dates for implementation of the orders – for reasons best known to him.

This uncalled for controversy could have been avoided because, first, ISI is a military establishment and its entire staff are approved and posted by the GHQ without any reference to the PM Secretariat. Summaries for postings are however sent to the PM Secretariat along with specific recommendations; these are invariably honoured by the PM. Second, promotions in the army beyond a major’s rank are all recommended by the service selection boards and invariably approved by the PM when forwarded through the Ministry of Defence without any change. This unwritten understanding between the office of the chief executive and the service chiefs is to preserve the institution from politicisation. Unfortunately, the only one promotion which is left to the whims of the elected PM more often than not gets politicised. History bears testimony that the motivation for selection must therefore only be professional considerations and not at all political ambitions.

It is an unfortunate fact that almost all civil institutions have been, to a great extent, politicised – the bureaucracy, police service, NAB, civil service, FIA, PIA, Steel Mills, railways, PM Secretariat and even the Parliament House establishments. Every party leadership demands personal loyalties and not merit or professional competence. Under these circumstances, it is a miracle that the institution of the armed forces has been preserved because political authorities, despite legal powers, refrained from interfering.

A few things that must be noted: first, state institutions have to follow the constitution and not any political party’s manifesto. Second, through proactive intelligence all designs against our nuclear deterrence and CPEC must be thwarted. Third, terrorism incidents are unfortunately on the rise; terrorist nests both inland and even across our borders must be busted. Fourth, our intelligence focus on Kashmir must never be diluted. India must be forced to pay for the atrocities in Kashmir.

The writer is former chairman Senate Standing Committee on Defence Production.