

PAK PRIME MINISTER'S OUSTER

WHAT HAPPENS NOW

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has been ousted from power by the Supreme Court, an unceremonious end to his third term in power ahead of general elections next year.

HOW TO FILL THE VACUUM?
Although Sharif has been disqualified as prime minister, he remains the head of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), the largest party in the National Assembly. As such, Sharif will oversee the nomination of his successor who will then be rubber stamped in a parliamentary vote, where his party and coalition partners command a 209-seat majority in the 342-seat house. The opposition is also expected to field a candidate for the premiership, though the nominee has almost no chance of getting sufficient votes. The vote will likely happen in a matter of days -- if not hours -- of Sharif's disqualification.

IS THERE ANY PRECEDENT FOR THIS?
Yes, in 2012 then-prime minister Yousaf Raza Gilani was disqualified over contempt of court charges for refusing to reopen a corruption case against the sitting president Asif Ali Zardari. After Gilani was ousted by the Supreme Court, President Zardari, the then-head of the ruling Pakistan People's Party, led the negotiations to find a consensus candidate for the premiership. Following three days of intense horse-trading within the fractious coalition government, PPP-loyalist Raja Pervaiz Ashraf was eventually elected prime minister by the National Assembly.

COULD THE COURT'S DECISION BE CHALLENGED?
In theory, yes -- but it is highly unlikely. Sharif's legal team could file a review petition but only on very limited grounds, such as a mistake in the judgement. "The Supreme Court is the interpreter and final arbiter of what the constitution means, so if the Supreme Court says that's how it's supposed to be done then for all practical purposes that is what it is," said constitutional lawyer Yasser Latif Hamdani.



COULD AN EARLY ELECTION BE CALLED?
An early election is unlikely because according to the constitution it can only be called by the president on the advice of the prime minister, meaning a successor to Sharif would have to be chosen first. Elections are currently due in 2018.

COULD THE MILITARY TAKE OVER (AGAIN)?
The military has been in charge of Pakistan for half of its 70-year history, but few expect the army to make an explicit bid for power again. The military already exerts control over foreign policy and defence, leading to accusations from some that it is carrying out a "creeping coup." "The military doesn't need to take over because it already enjoys so many trappings of power from behind the scenes," said Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Program at the Washington, DC-based Wilson Centre. In addition, Kugelman points out, public opinion in Pakistan does not favour a return to martial law.

No Pakistani prime minister has ever completed a full five-year term. Most have seen their tenures cut short by the powerful military or by the Supreme Court. Others have been ousted by their own party, forced to resign -- or been assassinated.



Israeli border guards keep watch as Palestinian Muslim worshippers pray outside Jerusalem's old city overlooking the Al-Aqsa mosque compound yesterday. Israel barred men under 50 from prayers at the sensitive Jerusalem holy site, with more clashes feared after Palestinians ended a boycott of the compound and entered for the first time in two weeks. In West Bank, Israeli troops shot dead a Palestinian teenager and wounded three others yesterday during clashes.

PHOTO: AFP

HOW A 'FONT' OUSTED A PM

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Pakistan's Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, has been forced to resign after he was disqualified from office by the country's top court. The Supreme Court dismissed Sharif after a damning corruption probe into his family wealth.

The investigative panel claimed his family was unable to account for its vast wealth, leading to the court to order a criminal investigation.

Interestingly the use of a Microsoft font has played a huge role in Sharif's downfall.

The Calibri font was at the heart of the scandal that engulfed Sharif and his daughter, Maryam Sharif, after the 2016 Panama Papers revealed a string of offshore companies linked to the family had been used to purchase a number of luxury properties in London.

Documents submitted in defence of the Sharif family appeared to show that Maryam Sharif was only a trustee of the company that bought the flats.

However, the declaration, dated February 2006, was typed in the Calibri font, which was not introduced until 2007 - raising suspicions that the document may have been forged.

That conclusion was also reached by Pakistani investigators tasked with

looking into the case. They dismissed the documents, which were assessed by the Radley Forensic Document Laboratory in London, as "falsified".

"He is no more eligible to be an honest member of the parliament, and he ceases to be holding the office of prime minister," Judge Ejaz Afzal Khan said in court.

Sharif, 67, has denied any wrongdoing and has claimed the investigation is biased and inaccurate. His



allies have alleged this is just a conspiracy to unseat him.

Corruption allegations against Sharif date back as early as 1993 when investigations began to look into 13 separate allegations of corruption and money laundering. The criminal charges against members of the Sharif family were dismissed in the Pakistan High Court after Sharif returned to power in 1997.

Russia hits back at US

Orders Washington to cut diplomats in response to sanctions, seizes American property in Moscow as retaliation

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Russia's foreign ministry yesterday announced counter measures in response to tough new sanctions proposed by the United States, ordering Washington to reduce its diplomatic staff.

Moscow ordered the US to reduce its diplomatic presence in Russia to 455 diplomats and staff and also said it was seizing some US diplomatic property as retaliation.

The ministry said that this was in response to the passing of a new bill on sanctions by the Senate late Thursday. US President Donald Trump will now have to decide whether to accept or veto the measures.

US Ambassador John Tefft "expressed his strong disappointment and protest" at the development, the US embassy spokesperson told AFP, adding that "we have passed the notification back to Washington for review."

The embassy spokesperson declined to comment on the current number of US diplomats and staff in Russia.

President Vladimir Putin on Thursday slammed what he called "anti-Russian hysteria" in Washington and said that Russia could not "endlessly tolerate this kind of insolence."

Moscow complained that the "new sanctions bill showed with all clarity that relations with Russia have fallen hostage to the domestic political struggle in the US."

It warned that it "reserves the right to carry out other measures that could affect the interests of the US" while acting in a reciprocal fashion.

The move comes after Russia has repeatedly expressed anger at Washington barring its diplomats access to two compounds in the US in December last year, under Barack Obama, in response to suspected Russian meddling in the US election.

Obama at the same time expelled 35 Russian diplomats for spying.

President Vladimir Putin initially held off from retaliating, saying he would wait to see how

Trump reacted after he came into the White House.

Trump and Putin discussed this diplomatic spat at their first meeting at the G20 in Hamburg this month.

Russia's deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov had said after subsequent talks in Washington that the matter was "almost" resolved.

Meanwhile, Germany warned yesterday that it would not accept any new US sanctions against Russia that targeted European companies at the same time.

PUTIN SLAMS 'ANTI-RUSSIAN HYSTERIA' IN WASHINGTON
GERMANY WARNS US OVER RUSSIA SANCTIONS



Japan defence minister quits over scandal

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's hawkish defence minister resigned yesterday over a long-brewing scandal involving the handling of military documents, in a major political blow to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Abe, who has seen his popularity plummet in recent weeks over several controversies, apologised for the saga.

"I apologise from the bottom of my heart to the people for this situation in which a minister resigns," Abe told reporters after Tomomi Inada quit.

Abe added he "must seriously accept the people's severe criticism".

Inada's nearly year-long stint was characterised by controversy, but she resigned over criticism of her ministry's handling of log reports filed by Japanese peacekeepers in South Sudan showing worsening security.

Inada told a press conference where she announced her resignation: "I feel a keen responsibility."

The prime minister this week dodged opposition questioning in parliament over claims of favouritism in a business deal, an accusation he has vigorously denied.

His government's public support ratings have fallen precipitously over the summer, with voters punishing the LDP in local Tokyo elections early this month.

The party suffered a drubbing in the vote for Tokyo's municipal assembly that media and analysts chalked up to a growing perception of "arrogance" on the part of his government.

KNIFE ATTACK IN GERMANY SUPERMARKET

1 dead, 4 hurt in Hamburg

AFP, Hamburg

A man killed one person and wounded four others in a knife attack at a supermarket in the German city of Hamburg yesterday before being detained by police.

"There is no valid information yet on the motive" of the man, who "entered a supermarket and suddenly began attacking customers", said police.

German daily Bild published a picture of the attacker in the back of a police car with a white, blood-soaked bag over his head, and reported that he cried "Allahu Akbar" (God is Greatest) in the supermarket.

This account was not immediately confirmed by police.

The suspect, who has not yet been identified, fled the supermarket after the attack. But witnesses gave chase and overpowered the man, who was slightly injured.

"It was definitely a sole attacker. The first reports about a possible motive of a robbery have not been confirmed," Hamburg police tweeted.

Germany has been on high alert about the threat of a jihadist attack, especially since last December's truck rampage through a Berlin Christmas market that claimed 12 lives. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the carnage in which a Tunisian rejected asylum seeker and ex-convict, Anis Amri, 24, ploughed the stolen truck through a crowd.

Top Trump aide rips into colleagues in obscene rant

AFP, Washington

White House communications director Anthony Scaramucci has launched a searing foul-mouthed attack on his most senior colleagues, describing one as a "paranoid schizophrenic."

In an eye-watering exchange with a New Yorker reporter late Wednesday, the fast-talking Scaramucci ranted about chief of staff Reince Priebus and chief White House strategist Steve Bannon.

"Reince is a fucking paranoid schizophrenic, a paranoiac," Scaramucci was quoted as saying in an expletive-filled tirade in which the 53-year-old accused the chief of staff of damaging information leaks.

"They're trying to resist me, but it's not going to work," he said, adding that Priebus would soon resign and using language that American television networks refused to repeat.

Turning his sights on Trump's chief strategist, Scaramucci made it very clear he believes Bannon is working in the White



Scaramucci

House to serve his own interests, using particularly offensive language.

"I'm not Steve Bannon, I'm not trying to suck my own cock," he said.

"I'm not trying to build my own brand off the fucking strength of the president. I'm here to serve the country."

Scaramucci, a millionaire New York financier, has arrived at the White House vowing to serve Trump's interest and right a badly faltering administration.

His appointment gives Trump not just a high-profile surrogate, but one cut from the same wheeling-dealing New York cloth as himself.

Since taking on the role, Scaramucci has run to the cameras, firing up the charm and enthusiastically hawking the administration's wares, breathing new energy into Trump's faltering White House.

The brash Long Island native also has vowed to root out the "leaks" that have infuriated Trump, threatened to fire anyone who fails to fall in line and signaled he is not afraid to mix it up with the big players in Trump's inner circle.



A riot security force member aims his weapon at a rally during a strike called to protest against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's government in Caracas, Venezuela, on Thursday. Venezuela was heading towards a showdown yesterday between anti-government protesters and security forces, as the death toll from months of demonstrations against embattled President Nicolas Maduro mounted -- as did international concern about the spiralling violence.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Sri Lanka to sign China port deal

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka will proceed with the billion-dollar sale of a deep sea port to China despite protests in an effort to slash its foreign debt, the prime minister said yesterday.

Hambantota port straddles the world's busiest east-west shipping route and several countries, including neighbouring India, had raised concerns China could use it for its own military needs.

The port, built in 2010 with a massive loan from China and named after former president Mahinda Rajapakse, has failed to generate enough business to even pay staff salaries.

Port workers had called for a strike Friday to protest the deal, but cancelled it after the government used tough laws to outlaw industrial action.

Qatar wont change foreign policy

AGENCIES

Qatar refuses to bow to Saudi-led demands to "outsource" its foreign policy to resolve the Gulf crisis, its government spokesman told AFP in an interview.

Sheikh Saif bin Ahmed Al-Thani, who holds ministerial rank, accused Doha's adversaries in the crisis -- Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Egypt -- of meddling in Qatar's internal affairs.

"What's behind this crisis of course is Qatari sovereignty and independence to put it very simply. It is about... outsourcing our foreign policy so that decisions are not made in Qatar, and that is something that will never be acceptable," he said.

Sheikh Saif said the Saudi-led bloc had laid down a new "ultimatum" on Tuesday by publishing a list of individuals and "terrorist" entities allegedly linked to Doha.

This "list, it's still an ultimatum, it's still something that is stalling resolving the crisis", the official said. However, "we have said it from the start, we are open to dialogue, we are open to negotiating... The first step should be lifting the illegal blockade."

In the region's worst diplomatic crisis in years, Riyadh and allies have been boycotting Doha since June 5.

They have sealed the emirate's only land border, ordered its citizens to leave, and closed their airspace and waters to Qatari flights and shipping.

MALDIVES CRISIS

UN calls for end of parliament blockade

AFP, United Nations

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Thursday urged the government in the Maldives to lift a blockade of parliament where troops have barred the opposition from taking their seats.

Guterres called on the government to uphold free speech, the right of assembly and "refrain from all acts that result in the harassment and intimidation of members of parliament, political parties, civil society and the media."

For the past days, soldiers have barred the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) from entering the parliament complex, with witnesses reporting shoving as MPs were forced back from the barricade.

Lawmakers who tried to enter the compound were hit with pepper spray and forcibly evicted.

NEWSIN brief

Boko Haram attack killed 50 in Nigeria

AFP, Kano

More than 50 people were killed in a Boko Haram attack on an oil exploration team in northeast Nigeria earlier this week, military, medical and humanitarian sources told AFP on Thursday. "The death toll keeps mounting," said one source involved in dealing with the aftermath of Tuesday's attack near Magumeri, adding: "Now we have more than 50 and... more bodies are coming in."

Barcelona train crash hurts 56 people

AFP, Barcelona

A commuter train slammed into the end of the platform during the morning rush-hour at a busy Barcelona station yesterday, leaving 56 people injured, one of them seriously, emergency services said. Fifty-three of the injured, including the driver, were taken to hospitals in the Spanish city while paramedics treated the remaining three at the scene, emergency services said on Twitter.

Baby survives being buried alive in India

AFP, New Delhi

A week old baby boy in India survived several hours in a grave after being buried alive by his teenaged rape victim mother, police said yesterday. Cries heard by villagers produced the miracle rescue of the infant now recovering in hospital in the central state of Madhya Pradesh. The 16-year-old mother buried the boy in a graveyard in an attempt "to get rid of him" a few days after secretly giving birth at her parents' house in Barwani district, a police official said. Police said the mother could face attempted manslaughter charges.