

Exit of Nawaz Sharif

Let extraneous influence not hamper democracy

PRIME Minister Nawaz Sharif has been disqualified by the Pakistan Supreme Court from holding the office of the prime minister on the issue of the Panama Papers leaks. We appreciate the verdict for two reasons. It has demonstrated the independence of the judiciary in Pakistan as well as the assertion of the rule of law. At the same time we laud the executive's respect for the judiciary in accepting the verdict of the court and avoiding a potentially politically destabilising situation had Sharif chosen not to accept the ruling. Ironically, no prime minister of Pakistan has been able to complete his full term in office; for Nawaz Sharif, who has been haunted by allegations of corruption during all his three tenures, and chose to take no notice of it, this is his third unceremonious exit from office. Pakistan is going through a crucial phase in its politics, and we hope the political transition will follow the democratic norms and that democracy will not be subverted, despite the situation created by Sharif's departure, by any extraneous influence. The Panama leaks were an international affair that went beyond the former Pakistani premier. It toppled Icelandic prime minister from office and the former British prime minister had to face severe scrutiny about tax disclosures. And it is here that we would like to take note of the fact that some Bangladeshi citizens and corporations were also named in the exposé. We wonder if there has been any progress of the probe into the disclosure, because it reconfirms the allegation of money laundering from Bangladesh by people with huge amount of illegally amassed money.

Shifting exam venue for AL meeting

A flagrant disregard for students' interests

IT is absurd that a master's exam centre at a college in Gazipur was shifted without prior notice to let the local branch of Awami League hold a public meeting in the college premises. How would the college administration have ensured that none of the examinees had been left uninformed about the change beforehand? This is a flagrant disregard for students' interests that any educational institution is duty-bound to protect. An educational institution is supposed to be used for educational purposes only. How could an outside meeting outweigh a crucial educational event like a public exam? Had the college been closed, the meeting could have been allowed to take place. It was not only open but also reserved for a crucial exam. As many as 1,600 students were poised to sit for the exam at Bhawal Badre Alam Government College, but had to take their exam in different centres. We appreciate the fact that the meeting was later postponed, but it was too late and the students had still to go to the changed venues. Even as the exam venue was shifted in nearby schools and colleges, if the event had continued, it would have disrupted the exam process. It was originally not just an unethical decision but also a reckless one. The fact that the event was permitted in the first place highlights the helplessness of the college authorities in the face of such demands from the local wing of the ruling party. It also demonstrates a tendency among local ruling party members to treat every government property as their own.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Shade over Kamalapur overbridge

The Kamalapur foot overbridge plays a very important role in ensuring easy access for pedestrians of Mugda, Bashabo, Goran, Ahmadbagh and Motijheel. The overbridge helps office-goers reach work on time. But it's unfortunate that there is no shade over the bridge, which creates inconvenience for pedestrians during the rainy season or on sunny days. We are requesting the authorities to consider the sufferings of the mass people and build a shade over the Kamalapur foot overbridge as soon as possible. Md. Shahid Ullah Advocate, Dhaka Judge Court



PHOTO: FLICKR

Removal of Nawaz Sharif and the future of Pakistan



IT'S an important question if the removal of Nawaz Sharif from office is just another Pakistani Prime Minister's meeting his nemesis, or it's another unceremonious removal of a head of government for all the wrong reasons and excuses! We know, since the assassination of the first Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan in 1951, no Pakistani Prime Minister has been able to complete his or her full term in office. However, someone's stating this becomes clichéd or worn-out unless one discerns the different circumstances leading to each removal and dismissal. The Supreme Court of Pakistan in its judgment on July 28 declared the Prime Minister unsuitable for holding his office, and also disqualified him for life from holding any elected office in the country because of his failure to remain truthful and trustworthy—a constitutional requirement—to remain in office. There were charges of corruption to the tune of several million US dollars against the PM and his immediate family members, alleged to have owned properties in Britain bought with money stolen from Pakistan. It's noteworthy, under Articles 62 and 63 of the Constitution of Pakistan, a person becomes disqualified to remain a member of the national or provincial legislatures, if he/she is not “*sadiq and ameen*” (truthful and trustworthy). Ironically, while military dictator Zia ul-Huq had inserted these articles into the Constitution, his protégé Nawaz Sharif later opposed its removal from it. As a Pakistani judge has argued, as long as the said provisions were a part of the Constitution, the courts are obliged not only to decide matters in accordance with them, but are also obliged to enforce them whenever called upon to do so; and that the so-called moral provisions of Articles 62 and 63 were meant to be enforced even against those who claim to have popular support, or who have already demonstrated their popular endorsement. There's a lot more to say in support of the judgment, which was about his family members' direct involvement in money-laundering, as revealed by the Panama Papers in April 2016. The Panama Papers revealed that three of Nawaz Sharif's children owned offshore companies and assets not shown on his family's wealth statement. They allegedly acquired foreign assets, including expensive apartments in London's Mayfair area. His daughter Maryam Nawaz claimed that she was only a trustee and her brother was the beneficial owner, and that the money to buy the properties didn't come from Pakistan. According to BBC: “To prove her point, Maryam Nawaz produced a trust deed signed by both her and her brother dated February 2006. But a British forensic expert later said the document was ‘fake’ or had been ‘falsified’ because it was typed in the Calibri font, which was not commercially available until 2007. The insinuation that the offshore companies were meant to hide or launder ill-gotten wealth or to avoid taxes called Mr Sharif's credentials into question.” So far so good! There can't be any question about the veracity of the BBC story. In the backdrop of Pakistani media reports, arguments by government lawyers, and the unanimous decision by the five judges who declared Nawaz Sharif guilty, there's also no room for any speculation about the fairness of the trial. Then again, as BBC reports, while some Pakistanis think the Supreme Court has started a process of cracking down on corruption, which augurs well for democracy, others see this as part of a long history of political manipulation through which the country's powerful military establishment has sought to control civilian



MALDIVES is once again witnessing political turbulence as the effort to remove President Abdulla Yameen was pre-empted by the ruling party with the help of a willing judiciary. The Maldives United Opposition (MUO) had submitted a no-confidence motion against the Speaker Abdulla Maseeh Mohamed on July 3, with 45 signatories including ten parliamentarians who had defected from the ruling Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM). The PPM challenged the validity of the no-confidence motion in the Supreme Court, asking for the court's intervention in this matter taking into account whether the former MPs of the party would be subjected to anti-defection measures. Interestingly, in March, a similar motion was defeated as 48 members of the People's Majlis voted against the motion while 13 opposition members were expelled from the Majlis. This incident had forced the government to change the law for moving a no-confidence motion in the Majlis. Instead of 15 signatures, 42 signatures are now required to move a no-confidence motion. Pronouncing its decision on the plea of the attorney general, the Supreme Court of the Maldives said that such defection undermines multiparty democracy, disqualifying all the 10 MPs from parliament and asking the government to enact a new anti-defection law to further multiparty democracy and protect sovereignty. Interestingly, this anti-defection ruling was not applied to those MPs who had joined the ruling PPM in 2014 and 2016. The government has also used police and the army to prevent the opposition parliamentarians from demonstrating in front of the Majlis demanding the no-confidence motion against the Speaker to be taken up. The Maldives, which transitioned to democracy in 2008, has been witnessing political instability and growing authoritarianism since the forced exit of President Nasheed in a “coup”. The election of 2013 was controversial. President Yameen put his main political opponent Nasheed behind the bar and the judiciary convicted him of terrorism, which debars him from contesting any future election. He also silenced the

decision-making. Nothing could be more prophetic than what BBC reveals about many Pakistanis, who “believe that while across-the-board action against corruption may remain a pipe dream, this verdict will open the gates of power for a new set of politicians - as has often happened in the past”. His third removal from office was neither that surprising for Sharif himself, nor for analysts, and his countrymen. First the President, then a general, and this time the judiciary showed him the door. And he remained a survivor. Some analysts believe he will bounce back. He was less than a year away from becoming the first Pakistani PM to complete a full term in office. Some other speculations are: a) his younger brother Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif will succeed him as the next PM; b) according to a prosecution attorney, Shahbaz is going to lose his office for his involvement in the money laundering case, however, there's no ambiguity in the law that convicted the PM, that he will not be able to remain an MP, nor will be allowed to remain the chief of any political party in Pakistan. Now, whether Sharif is politically “finished” or not isn't an important issue. What's going to happen to



A supporter of Nawaz Sharif passes out after the Supreme Court's decision to disqualify Sharif from the prime ministership in Lahore, Pakistan, July 28, 2017. PHOTO: MOHSIN RAZA/REUTERS

Pakistan is also irrelevant. Pakistanis seem to be very resilient to manmade and natural disasters. Despite losing around 50,000 people in terrorist, sectarian, and ethnic violence during the last three decades, Pakistan is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. If Pakistan would remain a stable democracy; if the Islamist-right under Imran Khan's Tehrik-e-Insaaf, the Jamaat-e-Islami, and the Taliban would play an important role within and beyond the country, especially in India, Kashmir, and Afghanistan; if civil-military relations would deteriorate; and on what terms Pakistan would relate to the US, India, Saudi Arabia, and Iran in the coming days are the most important questions today. One may consider the Pakistan Supreme Court's decision to dismiss PM Nawaz Sharif, and disqualify him for life to hold any elected office in Pakistan, as a “judicial putsch” or a covert military intervention, if not an overt takeover of the country, like the past. Nevertheless, one may simultaneously congratulate the judiciary for taking necessary action against the PM, for his financial irregularities. One may, however, argue that not only some rightist Islamist politicians like

Imran Khan and the Jamaat-e-Islami of Pakistan put pressure on the judiciary to take action against Nawaz Sharif for money-laundering, but one has reasons to believe the Army also played a very significant role in the outcome of the judgment. We know, there are three dominant political forces in Pakistan: a) The Army and the ISI; b) Ultra-Rightist Islamist groups like the Tehrik-e-Taliban, Jamaat-e-Islami, and Imran Khan's Tehrik-e-Insaaf; c) Islam Pasand or Soft-on-Islam groups like the Muslim League (N) and its offshoots; d) the Liberal and “Left” parties like the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and the Awami National Party (ANP). Nawaz Sharif's removal signals the victory of the Army/ISI, Ultra-Right Islamist groups which indirectly is the victory of Saudi Arabia and its main patron, America. Nawaz Sharif had to go as he was not fully cooperating with the Trump-led coalition of the 51 Muslim majority countries (also touted as the “Muslim NATO”), formed against Iran and Yemen, in the name of fighting terrorism. One *New York Times* analyst has aptly appraised it with no ambiguity: “During his most recent tenure, Mr. Sharif had an uneven relationship with the military. His overtures of more openness toward India, Pakistan's longtime foe,

backfired as generals spurned his efforts. More recently, relations with the military took a darker turn after news reports detailed how civilian officials confronted the military over what they called a failure to act against Islamist groups. Mr. Sharif had to fire his information minister and two top aides to placate the army.” In sum, Pakistani and foreign analysts know what the Panama Papers revealed about the Sharif family's corruption is nothing but the tip of the iceberg. They also know although Asif Zardari, aka “Mr Ten Percent”, is a fabulously rich and corrupt politician in Pakistan, thanks to his “right connections”, and pervasive corruption among the ruling elites, military, judiciary, and law-enforcers, he's a freeman. Corrupt politicians in various corruption-infested countries, including Bangladesh, have lessons to learn from the Nawaz Sharif episode. Everybody doesn't enjoy impunity forever; some pay hefty price for their misdeeds, at the end of the day. Taj Hashmi teaches security studies at Austin Peay State University. He is the author of several books, including his latest, *Global Jihad and America: The Hundred-Year War Beyond Iraq and Afghanistan* (Sage, 2014). E-mail: tajhashmi@gmail.com

Maldives: Political trouble in the nascent democracy

opposition and crippled it by arresting many of its prominent leaders on charges of terrorism and corruption. Vice President Ahmed Adeeb was arrested on the charges of conspiracy to assassinate the president when a bomb went off on the boat that Yameen was travelling. Former Defence Minister Mohamed Nazim was arrested for keeping a weapon in his flat which is widely believed to have been planted to make his arrest and detention possible. Another opponent, the chairperson of Jumhoory Party, Qasim Ibrahim, who had been arrested in a bribery case, was given few hours to hire a lawyer to defend him in this case. Yet, Abdulla Yameen succeeded in emerging as a formidable political force until he had a dispute with his half-brother and former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, also the founder of the

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PPM, who is now expelled. In August last year, Gayoom withdrew support to the government apparently due to his differences with Yameen over the government's decision to sell islands without competitive bids. His son who voted against this bill and was expelled from the party was followed by the resignation of his daughter, foreign minister Duniya Mamoon who has now re-joined the government. Apparently, the political rift had more to do with who would control the party. This was crucial as presidential election is not far. The rift came out in the open after Gayoom refused to nominate Yameen as the next presidential candidate of the party in 2018 election and declined to convene the Council. Gayoom's decision was challenged in the court and the judge found him “incapable of attending to the duties

of his job” and handed over the party leadership to President Yameen. Gayoom was expelled from the internal committees of the PPM in June. Judicial decisions have become arbitrary since the last presidential election when the court interfered in the process and suspended the Election Commission and the Deputy Election Commission. Contempt of Court is used as a tool to silence those who criticise the judiciary's proactive policy and its open siding with the government. A bill criminalising defamation was passed by the parliament undermining free speech and media freedom. In March this year, five political leaders—including former Presidents Maumoon Abdul Gayoom and Mohamed Nasheed, along with Jumhooree Party leader Gasim Ibrahim and Adhaalath Party leader Sheikh Imran Abdulla—came together under the umbrella of Maldives United Opposition (MUO) and signed a pact to “restore democracy” in the country. Since then, there has been a tussle to upset the majority that Yameen enjoys and remove him from the presidency. PPM and its coalition partner Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) have 45 MPs in the 85-member Majlis. However, the MUO does not have the number in the parliament. And a politically motivated judiciary that is packed with supporters of the regime will not allow the opposition to succeed. Although it appears that President Yameen will use his influence to utilise the judiciary for his political purpose, the next election is not going to be a complete cakewalk for him as the Maldives await a turbulent politics with opposition stepping up their activities. The internal division within the party and the consolidation of a united opposition would make it difficult for the Yameen government to have a smooth sailing. The regime has attracted international condemnation and was expelled from the Commonwealth, but its strategic location in the context of the Indian Ocean will make many countries to take a cautious approach towards Yameen's regime. Yameen also knows how to play the big powers and use the judiciary to override the constitution to have a smooth political sailing beyond 2018. But the question is if the opposition, including his half-brother, will allow this smooth sail.

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