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Explained: Why The Government And Military In Pakistan Are At Loggerheads, Again

May 3, 2017

In a country which has seen three coups since its birth, any conflict between the civilian government and the military is enough to cast a shadow on democracy

Relations between Pakistan's government and military, already at a low, seem to have hit an even lower phase with the military rejecting the government's sacking of a top advisor following the 'Dawn Leaks' case.

The case refers to leaks around a series of meetings between the government and the military. These meeting were on matters relating to banned terrorist organisations operating freely across the country. Following the leaks, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Special Assistant on Foreign Affairs, Tariq Fatemi was expected to be shown the door for facilitating the leaks to the newspaper Dawn.

On Saturday (29 April), the Prime Minister's Office had issued a directive to remove Fatemi from his post. The same, the military stated that it had 'rejected' the dismissal, calling it incomplete. This rejection was made in a tweet by Major Asif Ghafoor, Director General of Interservices Public Relations (ISPR), the media arm of the military.

Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan later dismissed these reports, terming them ‘unnecessary noise’.

Let me first say that I believe that tweets, sent out by whichever institution, are a deadly poison for Pakistan’s democracy, system and justice.

Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan

He later termed the entire incident unfortunate.

Fatemi’s sacking was a result of an inquiry committee report that was probing a story by Dawn on 6 October 2016. In it’s official communication, the PMO did not give a reason for the sacking. The PMO further recommended that ‘necessary disciplinary action’ be taken against Dawn and its editor as well as journalist Cyril Almeida (who wrote the story) by the All Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS), but did not specify any reason for it. The APNS in turn has been tasked with developing a ‘code of conduct’, especially for matters dealing with “issues of national importance and security”.

The first action that was taken after the story broke out was the sacking of Pervaiz Rasheed, then the Information Minister for ‘allowing’ Dawn to publish it. Following this, Almeida’s name was placed in the Exit Control List (ECL), thereby prohibiting him from leaving Pakistan, however his name was removed by the interior ministry following its condemnation by human rights groups.

The military rejecting the civilian government’s move in Pakistan can be seen as a serious issue. Since it’s formation in 1947, Pakistan has seen three successful military coups in 1958, 1977 and 1999, with incumbent Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif’s government being overthrown by General Pervez Musharraf in the last one. The country has spent 33 years under military rule as a result of these three coups.