

## Scenario 200

### **DAWN LEAKS ENIGMA**

#### **– CYRIL ALMEIDA NEWS STORY:**

**On 6<sup>th</sup> October 2016;** an article titled ***Exclusive: Act against militants or face international isolation, civilians tell military*** was published in Daily 'Dawn' which was authored by CYRIL ALMEIDA – updated next day, on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2016, at 12.58pm.

Here is that story placed *verbatim*:

**“ISLAMABAD: *In a blunt, orchestrated and unprecedented warning, the civilian government has informed the military leadership of growing international isolation of Pakistan and sought consensus on several key actions by the state.***

*As a result of the most recent meeting [...the said meeting was held on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2016], an undisclosed one on the day of the All Parties' Conference on Monday, at least two sets of actions have been agreed.*

*First, ISI DG Gen Rizwan Akhtar, accompanied by National Security Adviser Nasser Janjua, is to travel to each of the four provinces with a message for provincial apex committees and ISI sector commanders [what message – see next].*

*The message: **military-led intelligence agencies are not to interfere if law enforcement acts against militant groups that are banned or until now considered off-limits for civilian action.** Gen Akhtar's inter-provincial tour has begun with a visit to Lahore.*

*Second, **Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has directed that fresh attempts be made to conclude the Pathankot investigation and restart the stalled Mumbai attacks-related trials in a Rawalpindi anti-terrorism court.***

*Read: India links talks resumption to Pathankot probe*

***Those decisions, taken after an extraordinary verbal confrontation between Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif and the ISI DG, appear to indicate a high-stakes new approach by the PML-N government.***

*The following account is based on conversations with Dawn of individuals present in the crucial meetings this week.*

*All declined to speak on the record and none of the attributed statements were confirmed by the individuals mentioned.*

#### ***Foreign Secretary's presentation***

*On Monday, on the day of the All Parties' Conference, Foreign Secretary **Aizaz Chaudhry gave a separate, exclusive presentation** in the Prime Minister's Office to a small group of civil and military officials.*

*The meeting was chaired by Prime Minister Sharif and included senior cabinet and provincial officials. On the military side, ISI DG Rizwan Akhtar led the representatives.*

*The presentation by the foreign secretary summarised the results of the recent diplomatic outreach by Pakistan, **the crux being that Pakistan faces diplomatic isolation** and that the government's talking points have been met with indifference in major world capitals.*

*Examine: What should determine Pakistan's foreign policy?*

***On the US***, Mr Chaudhry said that relations have deteriorated and will likely further deteriorate **because of the American demand that action be taken against the Haqqani network. On India**, Mr Chaudhry stated that the **completion of Pathankot investigation and some visible action against Jaish-i-Mohammad were the principal demands.**

*Then, to a hushed but surprised room, Mr Chaudhry suggested that while **China** has reiterated its support for Pakistan, it too has **indicated a preference for a change in course by Pakistan.** Specifically, while Chinese authorities have conveyed their*

*willingness to keep putting on technical hold a UN ban on Jaish-i-Mohammad leader Masood Azhar, they have questioned the logic of doing so repeatedly.*

### **Extraordinary exchange**

*The foreign secretary's unexpectedly blunt conclusions triggered an astonishing and potentially **ground-shifting exchange between the ISI DG** and several civilian officials.*

*In response to Foreign Secretary Chaudhry's conclusions, Gen Akhtar asked what steps could be taken to prevent the drift towards isolation. **Mr Chaudhry's reply was direct and emphatic: the principal international demands are for action against Masood Azhar and the Jaish-i-Mohammad; Hafiz Saeed and the Lashkar-e-Taiba; and the Haqqani network.***

*To that, **Gen Akhtar offered that the government should arrest whomever it deems necessary**, though it is unclear whether he was referring to particular individuals or members of banned groups generally. At that point came the stunning and unexpectedly bold intervention by Punjab CM Shahbaz Sharif.*

***Addressing Gen Akhtar, the younger Sharif complained that whenever action has been taken against certain groups by civilian authorities, the security establishment has worked behind the scenes to set the arrested free.** Astounded onlookers describe a stunned room that was immediately aware of the extraordinary, unprecedented nature of the exchange.*

*To defuse tensions, Prime Minister Sharif himself addressed Gen Akhtar and said that policies pursued in the past were state policies and as such they were the collective responsibility of the state and that the ISI DG was not being accused of complicity in present-day events.*

### **PM's Strategy?**

*Several eyewitnesses to the incredible events of Monday believe that **the foreign secretary's presentation and Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif's intervention were orchestrated by the***

***prime minister to stir the military to action***, leading to the decision to dispatch the ISI DG on an inter-provincial tour.

*Yet, according to the accounts shared with Dawn, the sparring between the ISI DG and civilian officials did not degenerate into acrimony.*

*Earlier in the meeting, ISI DG Gen Akhtar stated that not only is it the military's policy to not distinguish between militant groups, but that the military is committed to that policy prevailing. The ISI chief did mention concerns about the timing of action against several groups, citing the need to not be seen as buckling to Indian pressure or abandoning the Kashmiri people.*

*Gen Akhtar also readily agreed to tour the provinces at the direction of the prime minister, issue fresh orders to ISI sector commanders and meet with provincial apex committees to chalk out specific actions that need to be taken in various provinces.*

*According to several government officials, **Monday's confrontation was part of a high-stakes gamble by Prime Minister Sharif to try and forestall further diplomatic pressure on Pakistan.** In separate meetings with the army chief, participants describe an animated and energised Mr Sharif, who has argued that Pakistan faces real isolation if policy adjustments are not made.*

*Government officials, however, are divided about whether Prime Minister Sharif's gamble will pay off. According to one official, commenting on the ISI DG's commitments, "This is what we prayed to hear all our lives. Let's see if it happens."*

*Another government official offered: "Wait till November to see if action will be taken. By then a lot of things will be settled." Military officials declined to comment.*

*Published in Dawn, October 6th, 2016"*

**Clarification [through 7<sup>th</sup> October 2016 update]:**

***The spokesman for Prime Minister Office on Thursday denied a story appearing in Dawn on Oct 6 regarding "purported deliberations" of a meeting held on security issues. The***

*spokesman termed contents of the story not only speculative but misleading and factually incorrect, describing it as an "amalgamation of fiction and fabrication".*

*Dispelling the impression created by the report, headlined "Act against militants or face international isolation, civilians tell military", he said that intelligence agencies, particularly the ISI, are working in line with the state policy in the best interest of the nation, both at the federal and provincial levels to act against terrorists of all hue and colour without any discrimination.*

***Indeed the Army's and ISI's role and contributions towards implementation of NAP have been proactive and unwavering***, the spokesman said. Meanwhile, the office of the chief minister of Punjab also denied the comments attributed to Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif in the news story.

*Dismissing it as a baseless table story, he emphasised that besides his respect for the institution of the armed forces, on an individual level he also had the highest respect for the present ISI DG for his professionalism, commitment to duty and sincerity of purpose.*

The last paragraphs under heading '**Clarification**' was again repeated later in daily '**Dawn**' dated **9<sup>th</sup> January 2017**.

[Earlier, **10<sup>th</sup> May 2016**'s video footage of the prime minister's meeting with the army chief at PM House was also leaked out in a similar fashion, which had raised eyebrows because of its rare audio content and timing of release. News TV channels aired the footage of one-on-one meeting between the two, one telling the other that a "**.....date has been given**".

*While such high-level meetings between the civil-military leadership are routinely recorded by the state TV crew on camera, the audio is always muted – but here it was not so.]*

### **INTERESTING DAYS AGAIN?**

**On 8<sup>th</sup> October 2016**; in the same daily '**Dawn**' in his article titled **Interesting days again** Cyril Almeida wrote:

*"The message has been delivered; it has been received coolly; so we're left with two questions: why now and what next?"*

*Nawaz and the N-League are wrong on militancy. They've been wrong since they got back Punjab in 2008 and they've been wrong since they captured the centre in 2013. Either they don't get it or they refuse to get it....."*

On Afghanistan, Gen Raheel had been serious and sincere, but Afghan governments' response was not found encouraging; its President Ashraf Ghani went totally inclined towards India. Gen Raheel also kept India at a distance; Modi's madness and bullying tones had played more vital role to go for that decision.

PM Nawaz's wish for regional stability could be appreciated but the means and stakes he deployed to fulfil that hope was detrimental for the national security of Pakistan. When army jumped in to put the things right – PM Nawaz's cronies didn't guide him with the true nationalist approach.

But the things were changed. Firstly, Gen Raheel had snatched foreign policy from PM Nawaz and screwed it up. Secondly, militancy had become a threat to the core agenda of economic growth – dangers and hazards to the CPEC projects were shaking bells with disturbing sounds.

Some alleged that PM Nawaz had business and monetary considerations with India whereas the critics always doubted the army as rightful nationalism oriented entity. The army thus kept PM Nawaz little away from core decisions – but he wanted back in. PM Nawaz Sharif was seen adamant to go his direction; the army was clearly told that *'doing nothing is no longer an option'*.

Pak-Army wanted action against anti-Pakistan militants in Punjab, with major military operations in FATA winding down, but the PML[N] never allowed *the Army* considering it their eventual political demise. CM Shahbaz Sharif himself could ask the Rangers to launch operations in Punjab like Sindh but his Law Minister Sanaullah Khan provided the militants safe havens – Chotoo Gang Case of Rajanpur is referred.

The Rangers wanted to scrap militancy in Punjab by takeing the fight to the militants whereas the PML[N] kept the policy that militant's attacks should become a reason for the army to force themselves into that particular pocket on their terms.

***The possibility of a drift towards isolation was not a real threat***, as the most intelligentsia opined — it was all because the US had found a new ally in India. Simultaneously, the US had made a high shift in its policy – seeing Pakistan through Afghan prism while keeping India on its right side.

Once the army suggested to get the parliament involved for a resolution against some of the groups, but PM Nawaz Sharif didn't approve the option "*— the groups weren't created with parliament's consent, so why involve parliament now,*" was a straight and strange logic popped up from the civilian chief.

At the same moment, in getting stern action against some groups, the prime minister didn't want to encourage Rangers to open the doors into Punjab; no doubt, he was pushing for some quick actions.

**[Cyril Almeida, an assistant editor with Pakistan's most-reputed English daily *Dawn*; was officially barred from leaving the country. His fault: breaking a story on an "undisclosed" meeting between the country's civil and military leadership including the ISI.**

*Cyril's name was put on country's Exit Control List [ECL]; a system of border control maintained by the Government of Pakistan. Those persons on the list are prohibited from leaving Pakistan.*

*Not many people on this side of the border knew that Almeida belongs to the micro-minority of Goan Catholics living in Karachi. His ancestors migrated to the port city almost a hundred years ago and made it their home. According to historical documents, under the Portuguese rule Goan Catholics started migrating to Karachi more than 150 years ago. After partition, a few of them held high posts in Pakistan Army, police, railways, courts and the hospitality industry.]*

**On 10<sup>th</sup> October 2016;** the Office of the Prime Minister issued another statement, strongly denying the contents and rejecting it as a fabrication. This was the third contradiction issued by the PM office. The ISPR categorically stated that they had not named Cyril Almeida to be put on the ECL. Rather they were not interested in knowing about Cyril's role; the ISPR wanted to know the real names of those persons in the PM House who had fed Cyril Almeida to publish that story.

The PML[N] government immediately offered names of Federal Information Minister Pervaiz Rashid and top bureaucrat Fawad Hassan Fawad. The army

knew the real culprit(s) thus a tug of war started on the issue that why the two ponies were being sacrificed.

On the same day of **10<sup>th</sup> October 2016**; Gen Raheel Sharif and ISI chief Gen Rizwan Akhtar called on PM Nawaz Sharif and the participants of the meeting expressed concern over the fabricated story in Dawn. The prime minister's official release was the third denial of the story from Pakistani civilian masters.

While the first denial had said the army and ISI were working in accordance with the state policy on counter-terrorism, the third release especially noted the army and intelligence agencies had a lead role in doing so. Clearly, PM Nawaz Sharif was the one on the back-foot over the said notorious story – trying to hit the Army below the belt.

The fact remained that civil-military conflict in Pakistan turned into Cyril-military conflict but the army sought to deflect focus away from Cyril and back to civilians. ***The army wanted action not against the reporter but against those who leaked or fed the story to him.*** Notably, the unnamed sources did not tell media that the story was fabricated, only that it was distorted.

Cyril's allegations in '**Dawn**' were all the more inflammable because of their timing. Just weeks before, a deadly militant attack on an Indian military base in the disputed territory of Kashmir that Delhi had blamed on Pakistan-based *jihadis*; which the Pakistan government and the military had discussed and denied. **Thus the DAWN's story was incorrect.** In a statement, PM office vowed for:

*".....stern action for those responsible who risked the vital state interests through inclusion of inaccurate and misleading contents which had no relevance to actual discussion and facts".*

However, the same night DAWN's editor, Zaffar Abbas, issued a statement on an official Facebook page standing by the story which he said had been **"verified, cross-checked and fact-checked.** The editor also said in his **Editorial Note:**

*[Dawn would like to clarify and state on record several things. First, this newspaper considers it a sacred oath to its readers to pursue its reporting fairly, independently and, above all, accurately. The story that has been rejected by Prime Minister's Office as a fabrication **was verified, cross-checked and fact-checked.***



*Second, many at the helm of affairs are aware of the senior officials, and participants of the meeting, who were contacted by the newspaper for collecting information, and more than one source confirmed and verified the details.*

*Therefore, the elected government and state institutions should refrain from targeting the messenger, and scape-goating the country's most respected newspaper in a malicious campaign. – Daily 'Dawn' dated 11<sup>th</sup> October 2016 is referred]*

**FOREIGN PRESS CRIED LOUDER:**

**BBC** dated 11<sup>th</sup> October 2016 repeated the same above development made public by the Pakistani newspaper saying that:

*"[The Dawn story] claimed that the prime minister, Punjab's chief minister and other members of the government raised concerns about a lack of military action against certain militant groups because of their ties to the spy agency. They allegedly warned military chiefs present that Pakistan risked facing international isolation.*

*The prime minister's office and the Punjab chief minister's office strongly denied the report saying there was no conflict of that nature at the meeting.*

*However, Dawn stood by the story; saying it had repeatedly fact-checked it."*

However, **Al-Jazeera** of the same date 11<sup>th</sup> October 2016 held that:

*"The participants were unanimous that the published story was clearly violative of universally acknowledged principles of reporting on national security issues and has risked the vital state interests through inclusion of inaccurate and misleading contents which had no relevance to actual discussion and facts.*

*[Albeit] Earlier in 2016, Reporters without Borders ranked Pakistan 147th out of 180 countries for press freedom, the lowest position in South Asia."*

**Huffington Post London** dated 12<sup>th</sup> October 2016 particularly pointed out towards another new dimension while saying:

**".....The attention the story got in India was in particular upsetting for Pakistanis who thought national interest was being compromised by the leak. When India is threatening military action against Pakistan, is it really the right to highlight civil-military disjunction before the world?"**

*The talk of Pakistan getting isolated is a bogey - a chance to get back at the army command for all the acute discomfort caused to the government over **the last three years by Gen Raheel Sharif's public standing... his popular hero status.**"*

**On 14<sup>th</sup> October 2016;** in the Corps Commanders meeting at GHQ Rawalpindi, the participants expressed serious concern over the said leak while *"feeding of false and fabricated story of an important security meeting held at PM House and viewed it as breach of national security."*

Chief of Army Staff [COAS] Gen Raheel Sharif presided over the meeting attended by all corps commanders and principal staff officers especially considering *Dawn's* clarification that the story **"was verified, cross-checked and fact-checked"** and especially the editor's claim that ***the senior officials, and participants of the meeting were contacted by the newspaper for collecting information.***

The Corps Commanders held a comprehensive review of the internal and external security situation with a particular focus on prevailing environment at the Line of Control [LoC]. Participants rejected the Indian claims of **'hoax surgical strikes'** as an attempt to divert the world's attention away from brutalities being committed by the Indian Army against Kashmiris in held Kashmir; the COAS reiterated the army's resolve to defend Pakistan against a full spectrum of threat.

Moreover, Foreign Office spokesman Nafees Zakaria told a press briefing that the story by the Cyril was based on assumptions; **"Pakistan is not being isolated internationally. It is just propaganda."**

The story later confirmed by other media resources told that:

*"....about a week ago, during a meeting of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, a lawmaker from the ruling party, demanded action against non-state actors, especially the chief of Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), Hafiz Saeed.*

*The lawmaker had questioned the logic behind inaction against **Saeed: Which eggs are Hafiz Saeed laying for us that we are nurturing him?***

[Inamullah Khatak's report in the '**DAWN**' dated **6<sup>th</sup> October 2016** is referred]

As per Cyril's original reporting, the prime minister had instructed the ISI chief that "***fresh attempts be made to conclude the Pathankot investigation and restart the stalled Mumbai attacks-related trials in a Rawalpindi Anti-Terrorism Court.***" However, the Pak-Army's stance was clear.

- Is there any country in the world which had ever started investigations at home for occurrence happened beyond its own borders?
- ISI had tens of proofs of killings and bombing events in FATA, Balochistan and Karachi in which India was surely involved; Pakistan had launched protests also – had India ever started investigations at their end and reported back.
- It is the international practice that the affected country starts investigations at its end; if the lead comes in the blamed country; the further investigations are held and informed back. It is common diplomatic practice.
- Why the PM asked ISI to start investigations into ***Pathankot affairs*** on the basis of mere allegations from India – why not the specified civilian investigation agencies.

When **Dawn's** report became public, the international media jumped in to the story, which had, of course, annoyed the military establishment. For the military, the government's demand of "non-interference" in civilian law enforcement agencies work was because politicians and ministers like Dr Zulfiqar Mirza and Rana Sanaulah had been seen protecting saulat Mirza, Uzair Baloch and Maulana Ishaq.

Referring to the '**Business Standard**' dated **16<sup>th</sup> Oct 2016**; Cyril Almeida wrote in his later comments:

***"The story had arrived fairly quickly after the fateful meeting on October 3, but it was only published on October 6. The gap was all about verifying, double and triple-sourcing and seeking official comments.***

*For me, and for the paper, there were only two questions that mattered. Did the meeting take place? Could I verify through*

*multiple channels what was said? Yes, the heart races a bit faster when you do something out of the ordinary. Yes, there is always some concern for the self.*

*The second part is trickier than it would appear, but it is also not as hard as it is made out to be. Stick around long enough and you get a sense of how this place works. And the place gets a sense of you. You know the camps, you know the divisions and splits, and you know at any given time who may be interested in selling what. They exist in civilian as much as they do in military.*

*.....that with a meeting like this and a story like that, you sniff around until you get a bunch of overlapping facts from camps that have no obvious reason to overlap; there was one underestimation on his part.*

*In writing the story, I was aware that a grenade was being dropped in the news cycle. It has since turned out to be a surgical strike followed by a nuclear attack. I do not regret doing this story. In a place like this, that is a two-way street: in return for not exposing your sources, you get a fair reading of the land.*

*A combination of two things rescued me. First, the global coverage, the system here ultimately responds to local concerns. Second, the wider media, battered and fractured by violent convulsions of its own in recent years, mostly united - perhaps as much out of self-preservation than indignation."*

**On 28<sup>th</sup> October 2016;** Inter Services Public Relations [ISPR] told that Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, Interior Minister Ch Nisar and CM Punjab Shahbaz Sharif had called on the COAS at the Army House to brief him on the progress of investigation related to the Dawn Leak story. The meeting was also attended by DG ISI Gen Rizwan Akhtar.

However, on the same day, at **ARY News TV**, Dr Shahid Masood in Sami Ibrahim's program told that PML[N]'s above named three top notch officials had called upon Army Chief Gen Raheel Sharif's residence to discuss the said issue but with another goal in mind.

***[ The three delegates wanted to save PM's daughter Maryam Nawaz's name from Cyril's case because army's own inquiry into the matter had concluded that the news was 'planted' with Cyril Almeida by Maryam Nawaz and Pervaiz Rashid, the Federal Information Minister.]***

The fact remained that in the security meeting of 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2016, DG ISI Rizwan Akhtar was told Pakistan could only avoid international isolation if it took action against Jaish-e-Mohammad [JeM], Lashkar-e-Taiba [LeT] and the Haqqani network.

Allegedly, JeM and LeT were *jihadi* groups dedicated to fighting against India in Indian Occupied Kashmir, while the Haqqani network was a Taliban affiliate responsible for deadliest attacks against NATO forces in Afghanistan. India and the US had consistently alleged that all three groups receive clandestine ISI support; a claim Pakistan denied vehemently and many times in the past.

**A FEDERAL MINISTER RESIGNED:**

**On 29<sup>th</sup> October 2016;** Parvaiz Rasheed resigned from his position as Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage. A statement issued by the Prime Minister's office said:

*"Evidence available so far points to a lapse on part of the information minister, who has been directed to step down from the office to enable holding of an independent and detailed inquiry."*

The published report of the high-profile security meeting forced the government to initiate an inquiry to identify the person responsible for its leak. Rasheed's portfolio was taken away after a preliminary inquiry was launched by his fellow Federal Interior Minister Ch Nisar Ali Khan followed by the approval of the premier.

A committee was formed for the investigation of Dawn's story and investigations entered the final phase; ***Pervaiz Rashid was only temporarily suspended from his post until investigations concluded.***

PM House, meanwhile, announced details of the **inquiry committee:**

*"An inquiry committee including senior officers of ISI, MI and IB is being formed by the government to apportion the blame, identify interests and motives and expose all those responsible for this episode of stern action in the national interest."*

Initially, the Prime Minister's Office had rejected the story, but the military maintained the story had not only been 'leaked' but '**falsely fabricated and fed**' to the media. Thus the GHQ demanded a probe into the matter as it viewed the matter as a breach of national security. Cyril's name was already placed on the Exit Control List [ECL] but was later removed by the Interior Ministry as a "**goodwill gesture**".

On the same day of **29<sup>th</sup> October 2016**, Defence Minister Kh Asif left for Dubai with his family; in a tweet, Asif said he was in Dubai to attend a wedding and will return next day.

The prime minister's Principal Information Officer [PIO] Rao Tehseen was also suspended from his post and made an officer on special duty [OSD] the same day; he was barred from leaving the federal capital since the past eight days by the interior ministry.

*[It was beyond comprehension that a PIO was being held responsible for failing to prevent stories from appearing in newspapers. A PIO can request better display for pro-government stories but it is for the editor to decide whether to entertain him or not. It is impossible for him to ensure even that happens, let alone whether stories are stopped or not.]*

PTI chief Imran Khan congratulated the nation after Minister Pervaiz Rashid resigned; he tweeted:

*"Mubarak to nation! One darbari sacked, the other flees & the rest start trembling as they look over their shoulders! NS's darbar disappearing. If they [government officials] are involved in the leak, they should be tried under the Army Act."*

Adviser to the CM Sindh Moulana Bux Chandio of PPP urged the government to accept the demands of accountability while adding:

*"Government by scape-goating the Information Minister [Pervaiz Rashid] has accepted that the PML[N]'s democratic government was responsible for the information leak."*

**On 30<sup>th</sup> October 2016**; Imran Khan gave a call for Islamabad to be shut down. The protests, he had announced, could continue until Nawaz Sharif was unseated. Khan's grouse was the Panama Papers leak that showed Nawaz Sharif's family owning offshore wealth. The protest was called exactly one month before Gen Raheel Sharif's retirement.

Najam Sethi, in his '**The Friday Times**' of the same week wrote:

*"This time round, however, there is a powerful sense of disaffection in the military with the prime minister, suggesting that the establishment is egging on Imran Khan and wouldn't mind weakening the prime minister if not seeing his back even if there is no covert conspiracy to seize direct power."*

The intelligentsia held that WVIPs like Maryam Safdar and her cronies at PM House were involved in this issue, a probable reason for hesitation and frustration of PML[N] leadership to announce the suspects. Army knew that how the image and reputation of Pak-Army was let down many times, even on the Parliament's floor by several PML[N]'s members.

**On 7<sup>th</sup> November 2016;** the MoI notified a seven-member committee – headed by a retired judge Aamer Raza Khan – to probe the controversy. The panel was supposed to submit its report within 30 days. However, later on it was given one-month extension by the ministry to complete its laborious and stinking task.

One member each from the ISI, Military Intelligence [MI] and Intelligence Bureau [IB] were included in the panel. Establishment Secretary Tahir Shahbaz, Punjab's Ombudsman Najam Saeed and the FIA's Director Usman Anwar were also part of the committee.

The committee was assigned the job to establish the identity of those who allegedly planted the story. Former information minister Pervaiz Rashid had already lost his portfolio on grounds that he failed to play his role to restrain the journalist from running the controversial reporting.

**On 9<sup>th</sup> January 2017;** '*security threatening news*' dated 6<sup>th</sup> October 2016 was again published in the same newspaper [DAWN] under the title '**Clarification**' and in the column of the same columnist Cyril Almeida and with the same wording as has earlier been noted in the opening paragraphs of this chapter.

#### **FINAL ROUND OF PLAY STARTS:**

**On 24<sup>th</sup> April 2017;** Dawn Leaks inquiry committee report was sent to the Ministry of Interior which was placed before PM Nawaz Sharif the same day. The Pak-Army had demanded to unveil the names of elements

involved in the leaks. The report suggested removing Prime Minister's Special Assistant on Foreign Affairs Tariq Fatemi and Principal Information Officer [PIO] Rao Tehsin while the Information Minister Pervaiz Rasheed had already been sacked six months earlier.

Tariq Fatemi called on PM Nawaz Sharif immediately to discuss the report. It was expected that the PM's Special Assistant would resign soon but he loudly denied the media expectation saying that **'why should I; where does I matter in the said media concerned issue.'**

**[On 24<sup>th</sup> April 2017; Pakistan's Foreign Office rebutted news stories against Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs [SAPM] Tariq Fatemi as "irresponsible and malicious allegations." The FO held that:**

*"The SAPM, Fatemi, is in the Foreign Office performing his official duties. Irresponsible and malicious allegations by an anchor of an electronic media is not only a serious attack on the person of Fatemi, a high office holder, but also this ministry, which deals with the matters related to relations with foreign countries. The FO reserves the right to take legal action."*

The said inquiry report also included forensic analysis of Senator Pervaiz Rasheed's mobile phone; evidence available had pointed to a lapse on part of him as the in-charge information minister. Cyril had sent 11 messages to the minister seeking his response but most of them were not responded by the senator, the findings concluded.

**On 27<sup>th</sup> April 2017;** in a meeting the PM Nawaz Sharif directed Interior Minister Ch Nisar Ali Khan to implement recommendations of the committee, which probed Dawn Leaks, in letter and spirit. The interior ministry spokesperson told that:

*"During the next 24 to 36 hours, work on matters including legal and administrative formalities to implement the recommendations of the committee would be completed. After completion of these formalities, a formal announcement would be made to properly implement those recommendations."*

The recommendations of the report were made unanimously by all members of the inquiry committee. The report was completed in a period of over six and half months during which the committee met six times.



The committee initially constituted a sub-committee which was headed by the Establishment Secretary. The sub-committee met 16 times for examination of witnesses and scrutiny of all record.

The federal government, on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2016, had formed this 7-member committee, notified by the Ministry of Interior [MoI] and was tasked to submit its report within next 30 days. However, later on more time was given to it to complete its task.

*[Earlier, on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2017, the Corps Commanders in a security meeting at GHQ had once again discussed this issue with reservations and concerns. The army had expressed serious concern over the '**feeding of false and fabricated story**', **terming it a 'breach of national security'**.*

**On 29<sup>th</sup> March 2017;** *Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said in a live TV talk show that **the Dawn leaks' inquiry report** would be published, unlike findings of other commissions in the past.]*

**On 29<sup>th</sup> April 2017;** the Prime Minister's Office issued directives to remove Syed Tariq Fatemi, special assistant to the prime minister on foreign affairs, from his post for his alleged role in 'Dawn leaks'; a notification in this regard was issued.

The directive came after the said inquiry committee's report was seen by the prime minister and given a thought for three days. The report — the contents of which were not made public till then — also contained the committee's recommendations on the matter; the four recommendations were in addition to the committee's suggestions in paragraph 18 of the inquiry report.

See an eye-opening 'frustrated reality' narrated in Haroon Rasheed's column dated **29<sup>th</sup> April 2017** appeared in Urdu daily '**Dunya**'; later the writer himself explained the whole conspiracy in Moeed Pirzada's live TV discussion at '**Dunya News' TV** on the same day:

*"The Army Chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa argued the said 'DAWN LEAKS' case many times before PM Nawaz Sharif that the report be got expedited because wherever he goes in garrisons, he is questioned about the outcome of the issue.*

*The General told the PM each time that in army, he asks for the lives of the officers and men; he never got refused – so they have*

*right to question their General to ask about the dignity, honour and the reputation of their institution.*

*It was settled in the first meeting [during first week of October 2016] between Gen Raheel Sharif and PM Nawaz Sharif that **'ladies of PM Sharif family would not be mentioned anywhere – especially the real instigator Maryam Safdar'**; then what was the hitch in lingering the report. Pak-Army always honoured their words.*

*[The real issue was of Tariq Fatemi, PM's advisor. Mr Fatemi was very dear to the PM; since the days of ending 1999 when he was being sent to Washington as Ambassador but could not be availed due to Gen Musharraf's coup on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1999.*

*Fatemi was compensated by all means by the PM; Advisory slot plus an MNA's seat for his wife plus issuance of funds of millions to her NGO which is never heard of by any.]*

*But now the PM wanted to get ONE LINE DELETED from the DAWN Leaks Final Report and that was concerning Fatemi. He was not being dis-respected like Information Minister Pervaiz Rashid [Fatemi got the only 'punishment' of getting change in portfolio] but even that was not being tolerated by the PM."*

Pak-Army's reaction was obvious.

Just within two hours [**29<sup>th</sup> April 2017**], the Pakistan Army rejected the federal government's notification on the Dawn Leaks inquiry, saying it was **"incomplete and not in line with recommendations by the Inquiry Committee"**. The Pak-Army announced the rejection in a tweet sent out by DG ISPR Maj Gen Asif Ghafoor from his official account:

***"Notification on Dawn Leak is incomplete and not in line with recommendations by the Inquiry Board. Notification is rejected 10:52 AM - 29 Apr 2017."***

The tweet came shortly after the prime minister's office announced, vide Notification No: 1707/M/SPM/2017, that PM Nawaz Sharif had approved the recommendations of the Dawn Leak inquiry committee; the order said:

***".....it was withdrawing the portfolio of Foreign Affairs from PM Nawaz Sharif's Special Assistant Tariq Fatemi and Rao***

***Tehsin Ali***, the principal information officer at the Information Ministry, **will be proceeded against under the E&D rules 1973** on the charges based on the report findings.

***....that the role of the editor of Dawn Newspaper, Zaffar Abbas, and reporter Cyril Almeida would be referred to the All Pakistan Newspaper Association [APNS] for necessary disciplinary action to be taken against them.***"

The order also required the APNS to develop a code of conduct for the media, *"especially when dealing with issues relating to security of Pakistan and to ensure that stories on issues of national importance and security are published by abiding to basic journalistic and editorial norms"*.

On the same day of **29<sup>th</sup> April 2017**; Interior Minister Ch Nisar, while addressing a press conference at Governor House Karachi, said that the notification regarding Dawn Leaks was supposed to be issued by his ministry and not the PM's Office. Addressing a press conference, the interior minister said:

*"We have not released the notice so far. We will release the notification, which will be in line with the recommendations made by the committee; neither any attempt was made to save anyone in the past nor it is being done now."*

The Interior Minister further held that a notification was yet to be issued and the PM Office had just issued a reference letter; emphasizing that:

***"Our state institutions should not communicate with each other through tweets. It is lethal for democracy. An unnecessary hype is being created by highlighting a non-issue. This is my department's job. The PM Office has nothing to do with it."***

**On 30<sup>th</sup> April 2017**; a special meeting of Nawaz Sharif's close aides was held in PM's Raiwind Palace Lahore. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, Interior Minister Ch Nisar, and CM Punjab Shahbaz Sharif along with other PML[N] leaders attended to discuss the DawnLeaks issue.

**On 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2017**; Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Tariq Fatemi rejected the allegations levelled against him in connection with the inquiry. In a farewell letter addressed to his officials in the Foreign Office, Fatemi said:

***"I reject recent allegations, insinuations and innuendos.***

***Such suggestions are particularly hurtful to someone who has served Pakistan for nearly five decades with honour and dignity."***

Fatemi's response came as PM Nawaz Sharif **on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2017** had got issued directives for his removal as his Special Assistant. In the aforementioned letter, which was endorsed to his colleagues at Pakistan's foreign missions, Fatemi further said:

*"Over the years, I have had to deal with many sensitive matters, becoming privy to some of the most highly classified information, on issues of national security.*

*I have also had the honour of working directly under distinguished diplomats, both professional as well as political appointees, all of whom reposed their highest trust in my abilities and particularly so, in my lifelong commitment to discretion. You would appreciate that taking due care and caution become a second nature in our professional careers.*

*His nearly four years long stint at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs enhanced the esteem and respect that I've always had for our country's diplomats... who bear the rigors of serving with limited resources in difficult environments, defending and promoting the nation's interests, against huge odds".*

Tariq Fatemi, 72, was born in Dhaka in 1944; joined the Foreign Service at the age of 29 in October 1969. His career as a diplomat spans 35 years, with a number of high-profile appointments in Moscow, New York, Washington and Beijing; last appointment from 2002 to 2004 as Ambassador to the European Union [EU] in Brussels.

Upon retirement, Fatemi joined the PML[N], assisting the party on foreign policy matters.

**On 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2017;** in a live talk show with Kamran Shahid at '**Dunya News' TV**, Nabil Gabol of the PPP told the audience that:

*".....he had told the media just after ONE MONTH of the episode that Maryam Safdar had released the said news to Dawn's Cyril from her Media Cell working from within the PM House Islamabad....*

*Zafar Abbas [Editor Dawn]'s recorded voice is also available on record in which he had further quoted Maryam Safdar concentrating on that '**...the PM wants this release to be published immediately**' so we had to do it."*

In the same TV talk show, the anchor ran an earlier day's interview clip of Senator Aitzaz Ahsan telling the media that '**why the PML[N] government has sacrificed four innocent dignitaries like Fatemi – while every one knew that Maryam Safdar was the actual originator and thus culprit.**'

**On 4<sup>th</sup> May 2017;** in another live talk show with Arshad Sharif at '**ARY News**' TV, PML[N]'s own Senator Anwar Beg surprised the audience while saying that:

*"I'm really upset that why Maryam Safdar indulged so deep in tweeting and thus interfering in government affairs while she holds no official or public portfolio or status.*

*Not only me, the other senior persons in the party, are also in distress over Maryam Safdar's tweeting play. We've already suffered much loss on this account."*

#### **SUDDEN DROP SCENE:**

**On 10<sup>th</sup> May 2017;** suddenly and surprisingly the standoff between the military and the PML[N] government over the Dawn story ended after the army's spokesperson Maj Gen Asif Ghafoor's retreat. The interior ministry released a statement, recounting the recommendations of the committee and concluding that the issue had been '**settled**'. It said that:

- ***ISPR DG withdraws tweet rejecting PM Office notification.***
- ***Announcement preceded by lengthy meeting between COAS, PM and aides.***
- ***Interior ministry issues fresh statement; the issue 'stands settled'.***

The developments were preceded by a meeting between COAS Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa and PM Nawaz Sharif during earlier hours of the day. The 45 minutes meeting was also attended by DG ISI Lt Gen Naveed Mukhtar, Interior Minister Ch Nisar Ali Khan and Finance Minister Ishaq Dar.

The DG ISPR told reporters during the briefing that:

***"Recommendations, as contained in para 18 of the inquiry committee report, duly approved by the prime minister, have been implemented, which has settled the Dawn leaks issue. Accordingly, the tweet of April 29 stands withdrawn."***

Defending himself against criticism faced in the wake of the tweet, Maj Gen Ghafoor explained that the tweet was not directed against any institution or individual. He said the military expected the notification to be in line with the recommendations of the inquiry committee, but it was not, which prompted the press release and tweet. Then he remarked:

***"What followed it was something regrettable."***

Regretting how society had become polarised over the issue — with some backing the army and others calling for the DG ISPR's resignation over 'insubordination' — Maj Gen Ghafoor said the interior ministry's latest order had filled in the gaps in the recommendations; he, however, praised the government for removing the misunderstandings that had prevailed over the past few weeks.

Gen Asif Ghafoor avoided a volley of questions about the alleged involvement of the prime minister's daughter, Maryam Safdar, saying the committee had deliberated thoroughly and named all those responsible, keeping all aspects in mind.

The DG ISPR explained: ***"Tweets [are] the fastest means of communication in today's age; my tweets should be treated as press releases."***

Same day, the statement issued by the Interior Ministry said that since action on orders of the prime minister had already been completed by the respective ministries and divisions, ***"the issue of Dawn [leaks] stands settled"***. In a series of messages from his Twitter accounts, the PTI chief Imran Khan said:

***"The issue was never [about] army & government, but rather of national security. The whole nation now needs to know what was 'settled'; the nation is being kept in the dark over how the matter of a national security breach was resolved."***

***Manner in which [the] issue [was] resolved shows clearly there is one law for the powerful and another law for the weak; inquiry commission report must be made public."***

Senate Opposition Leader Aitzaz Ahsan minced no words in his criticism of the decision, saying that the DG ISPR should have resigned rather than withdrawing his tweet; he was speaking on a TV channel in a live talk of that day.

**On 11<sup>th</sup> May 2017;** the Interior Minister Ch Nisar at a press conference in Islamabad also claimed that: ***"It wasn't as big of an issue as it was made out to be."*** He claimed there was complete consensus on the inquiry report despite there being ***"....some procedural issues when it was announced; the government had nothing to hide."***

However, such abrupt but conclusive end to the Dawn leaks controversy had some obvious positives. The national decision-making system, not exactly exemplary in the best of times, was not seen hostage to useless squabbling - over pointless event of the story itself.

The only loser in case of gulf in civil-military ties was Pakistan. Those who insisted on seeing Dawn leaks as two-way dagger in the Nawaz-military context were blind to reason. Their ignorance or ill-will was profoundly detrimental to Pakistan's strategic interests. But there were concerns and other dimensions that could not be ignored just because the issue was declared resolved.

One aspect concerns state-level communication – not personal but institutional; the responsibility was with the Sharif government. This was the third time it was in power; had dealt with seven army chiefs. Its leadership had cut their political teeth during Gen Zia era. They ought to know how to engage with the army and create a decision-making process with mutual confidence.

The Dawn leaks saga highlighted how little the Sharif government had learnt about the value of positive interaction with the army. It continued to skate on the thin ice of bare minimum mutual trust; it could have ended in disaster any day and any time.

For the army, the misleading theory of civilian incompetence mostly spawned a culture of contempt, triggering fruitless conspiracy theories; the army suffered the tremors of a constant tug of war with the civilians. In all media snaps, the impression conveyed was to show how the brass outshines the waistcoat; expending national energies on trivial pursuits was

meaningless. The army continued to enjoy national prestige but sometimes seen over-emphasized; the battle amongst institutions could end in mutual respect for the sake of Pakistan.

Referring to Syed Talat Hussain in '**the News**' dated **15<sup>th</sup> May 2017**;

*"...When the DG ISPR's tweet came out, a vast group of politicians, media-persons, and anchors declared early Christmas. That one tweet could set off a tsunami of wild joy tells how shameless this [Pakistan's political] tribe has become. Their glee was obvious: the PM must resign because the army has rejected its take on Dawn Leaks. And then came May 10.*

*The tweet issue returned the system to its normal functioning, but for the dance party this was no less than 9/11. They mourned and wailed, bleated and cursed.... Ridiculed....."*

Aitzaz Ahsan wanted the DG ISPR to resign and Imran Khan stoked suspicions; thus demanded explanations - it was unbelievable. Ironically, almost all of these so-called critics belonged to the establishment's media assets or were retired servicemen; seemed directed at perpetuating the civil-military divide come what may - a dangerous game it was.

The interior minister cautioned the media that they shouldn't make a joke of civil-military relations; it was a sensitive area.

BUT for all practical purposes, the Dawn Leaks matter was declared ***settled.***