

Arbitrary decisions

The PM has recently ordered some senior-level appointments which, in my view, are in violation of both merit and transparency. First, the removal and then appointment of the governor of the State Bank of Pakistan. Tariq Bajwa, an outstanding and honest to the core civil servant, was asked to leave his position in an arbitrary manner. This was a constitutional position with a fixed tenure. The tenure was fixed under the constitution to ensure the autonomy of the State Bank in implementing a monetary policy to steer economic development. Bajwa could have contested this decision but like a gentleman he decided to resign rather than contest. This decision reflects the whimsical governance style of the PM. The former chairman of the Federal Board of Revenue, Jehanzeb Khan was also considered an upright and outstanding civil servant. I had known him as chairman of the planning department in Punjab. He was known for giving professional advice, regardless of whether it was liked or not by the former CM. He was also known as a reformist. His removal also reflects the governance style of the PM. Forgetting about whether due process was adopted or not in the above two changes, questions are being raised about the manner the new appointments had been made. First, it is rightly being pointed out why we have an SBP governor whose institutional loyalty lies with the IMF and who is expected to negotiate a favourable package for Pakistan. Also, since it is a constitutional appointment can the PM appoint someone arbitrarily, ignoring constitutional requirements – especially someone whose nationality is also under question?

As regards the appointment of Shabbar Zaidi as the new chairman of the FBR. He is no doubt an outstanding professional with deep knowledge of the tax machinery. But even his appointment raises questions of due process and merit. While wishing him good luck, I doubt that, given the present culture of the FBR, he will succeed in reforming this behemoth. In concluding, I wish to highlight that the PTI leadership was relentless in criticising the earlier government about its governance practices but now when in power itself the party is ignoring merit, transparency and due process in making senior-level appointments.

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