Changing Power Dynamics in Pakistan

Why in news?

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Government has proposed an amendment in the oath by Members of Parliament.

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What is the ongoing problem?

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- The changes made in the oath reportedly moderated the mention of Prophet Muhammad.
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- The protesters are alleging that this would amount to blasphemy, a highly contentious issue in Muslim Pakistan.
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- They also claim that the oath was softened to enable the participation of Ahmadis, a long-persecuted Islamic minority sect.
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- The Prime Minister withdrew the proposed amendment in the wake of Islamist protests, hoping that it would pacify them.
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- However, Islamist groups, led by the chief of Tehreek-i-Labaik, continued to demand the resignation of Pakistan's law minister.
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- The Government of Pakistan closed down all television news channels for a day and shut down Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.
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- Moreover education institutions have had to be closed for few days in parts of the country.
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How was the problem resolved?

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- The protest finally ended following an agreement between the protesters and the government.
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- The agreement was mediated by a Major General of the Inter-Services Intelligence, and the Law Minister resigned.
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- The signed agreement concludes with crediting the Army Chief and his representative team for their “special efforts” in mediation.
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- However, the Islamabad High Court has criticised the Interior Minister for giving the military the role of “mediator”.
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- This is notably since the military had turned down the civilian government’s request to intervene earlier.
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- The judge bravely noted that this was “proof of the military’s involvement”.
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What is the larger concern?

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- **Military** - Various evidences clearly suggest that dharnas were supported by very senior members of Pakistan’s Army.
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- They are suspectedly using the agitation as a means to dismiss the democratic governments.
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- In the current standoff, for a small and insignificant group to be so well coordinated across diverse cities adds to the above speculation.
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- Also, the military did not respond to the earlier call by the civilian government to render law and order duty according to the Constitution.
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- This was a clear act of disobedience and of destabilising further a weak government.
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- **Government** - Ever since the return to democracy in 2008 in Pakistan, the threat by extra-democratic means of destabilising democracy has loomed large.
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- Particularly, now Pakistan is in a vulnerable condition trying to stabilise itself under a new Prime Minister, after earlier PM Nawaz Sharif was disqualified

on charges of corruption.
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- Given this, the recent protest by a minuscule political entity of unarmed men has created such a major crisis for the government.
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- The government is criticised for its delayed response and certainly letting the organisation consolidate to gain strength and support.
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- **Democratic Politics** - The cause of the current stand-off could be that non-mainstream parties now do politics outside the rules of democratic politics.
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- Or the rules of democratic politics have changed to include disruptive activities which might completely destabilise democracy itself.
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- Clearly, religious groups and parties are far better organised and committed than the liberal organisations and the civil society.
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- On the other hand, the military overrules its chief executive and the civilian government.
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- Military has become indispensible to ensure agreements between the government and protesters.
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- All these are indicative of the changing nature of democratic politics in Pakistan, the continuing erosion of executive authority and the rising instability of the government.
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Source: The Hindu

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