

# ISAS Brief

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## **Yousaf Raza Gilani: Pakistan's New Prime Minister**

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Yousaf Raza Gilani (complete formal name: Makdoom Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani), was elected to the Pakistan National Assembly on 18 February 2008 on a ticket of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of Benazir Bhutto. After several weeks of suspense and speculation, during which intense consultations and negotiations within the PPP and between the PPP and its coalition partners, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), the Awami National Party (ANP), the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-F and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) took place, Gilani was nominated on 22 March 2008 as the PPP candidate for the pivotal post of prime minister. On 24 March 2008, he was elected Prime Minister of Pakistan. He secured votes 264 votes of the newly elected legislators while his rival and leader of the opposition, Chaudhri Pervaiz Elahi, of the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q), received only 42 votes. He is to be sworn in as prime minister on 25 March 2008 by President Pervez Musharraf.

Gilani hails from a prominent landowning family of Multan in the Seraiki-speaking areas of southern Punjab. Multan is an ancient city and is known for the very large number of Sufi shrines located in it. Gilani's family are custodians of one of the prominent Sufi shrines, that of their ancestor, Musa Pak. They belong to the Qadri Order which is one of the largest in the Muslim world and subscribes to Sunni doctrines. It was founded in Baghdad by Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (died 1166), from whom Gilani's family trace their descent.

Gilani's elders held important positions during the Mughal and British periods. His father, Alamdar Hussain Gilani, was also a member of the Pakistan National Assembly and served as a minister in the early years after Pakistan became independent. Yousaf Raza Gilani received his early education in Multan and then received his BA from the Forman Christian College, Lahore and an MA in Journalism from the Punjab University (1976), Lahore. He is married and has four sons and a daughter.

Gilani's induction into politics began in 1978 from the platform of the Pakistan Muslim League during the rule of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-88). He was a cabinet member during the government of Prime Minister Juneja (1985-88). He served as Minister of Housing and

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Works from April 1985 to January 1986 and Railways Minister from January 1986 to December 1986.

In 1988, Gilani joined the PPP. He became a close aide of the late Bhutto. In her first government (1988-1990), he served as Minister of Tourism from March 1989 to January 1990 and again as Minister of Housing and Works from January 1990 to August 1990. In her second stint as prime minister (1993-1996), Gilani was elected the Speaker of the National Assembly which he stayed till February 1997. He has been elected several times as member of National Assembly from Multan. In the recent 2008 elections, he defeated the PML-Q candidate, Sikandar Hayat Bosan.

Gilani was arrested on 11 February 2001 by the Musharraf government on charges of misuse of office while he was the Speaker. Allegedly, he hired 600 people of dubious qualifications from his constituency on government payroll, inflicting a loss of Rs. 30 million annually. He was convicted by an anti-corruption court and spent nearly six years in prison. He was finally released on 7 October 2006. He has always maintained his innocence and has blamed the Musharraf regime for victimising him for his steadfast loyalty to the PPP and the late Bhutto.

There is wide speculation that Asif Ali Zardari, chairperson of the PPP, appointed through a written will of his wife, Bhutto, will soon get himself elected to the National Assembly through a by-election and will then replace Gilani but other reports suggest that the PPP wants to retain him as prime minister for the full term until 2013, provided he presents himself as a competent and effective prime minister. His continuation in office will naturally depend also on the stability of the coalition government. His close associates do not see him as a weak person and he is reportedly capable of making independent and bold decisions.

Among the first orders he has issued after being elected as prime minister is the removal of all hindrances on the movement of the deposed Chief Justice of Pakistan, Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhri, and other such judges of the Pakistan Supreme Court. For several months now, these honourable judges of Pakistan's Supreme Court have virtually been kept in detention.

It will be quite difficult for him to work smoothly with President Musharraf. Not only does he head a coalition government in which the two biggest parties, the PPP and the PML-N, have a long list of grievances against the president, Gilani himself was incarcerated by President Musharraf for nearly six years.

One can expect his government to act determinedly to curtail the extraordinary powers acquired by the president through different constitutional and legal subterfuges to dismiss an elected government and other such related subjects. He will most certainly proceed with a resolution being passed by the National Assembly, quashing the removal of the Chief Justice and his colleagues since this has been agreed already by the PPP and PML-N.

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