

## GENERAL YAHYA KHAN

On 25th March, 1969, Ayub Khan addressed the nation on radio and announced that he had decided to step down. He declared that he would not seek re-election and decided to hand over power to General Yahya Khan, C-in-C of the army.

Before abdicating Ayub Khan tried his best to avert his down fall. He had conceded most of the demands put forward by the politicians in his last bid to save his regime. Despite his illness, Ayub did not want to step aside. The politicians did not agree to his concessions and were bent upon pulling him down from his high pedestal. Ayub, greatly peeved, feeling humiliated and disgraced, made up his mind not to hand over power to the ambitious, incompetent and disgruntled politicians. He decided to hand over power to another military dictator who, by his unwise tactics and imprudent behaviour, pushed the country on to the brink of collapse. May be, Ayub, in this way wanted to take revenge from his people and the political leaders who had severely condemned him. **President Ayub Khan's lust for power prevented him from leaving his high position with grace after his heart attack in 1968. His directive to Gen. Yahya Khan to take control of the country was illegal and unconstitutional. He should have allowed the constitutional process to prevail after his exit. If Gen. Yahya Khan imposed the decision on him, then Ayub showed a moral weakness.**<sup>1</sup>

Yahya Khan abrogated the 1962 Constitution, banned all political activities, dissolved the National and Provincial Assemblies, dismissed the central and provincial cabinets and proclaimed Martial Law throughout the country. Yahya assumed the supreme command of the armed forces on 31st March, 1969, and declared himself as

the President of Pakistan. Yahya Khan in his address to the nation claimed that his sole objective was to protect the life, liberty and property of the people, to pull the country back to sanity and to put the administration back on the rails.

**Yahya's rule was a horrendous failure.**<sup>2</sup> His regime is said to be the worst of all the military regimes in Pakistan because there was no improvement or progress in any sphere during Yahya's Martial Law. There was a visible decline in the already decadent political, social and economic structure of the country. Worst above all the country was dismembered and the Eastern part separated to emerge as an independent sovereign state of Bangladesh.

Yahya Khan began anew. He did not try to make any significant socio-economic reforms or to introduce a new political order. His only aim was to transfer power to an elected body by holding a free and fair elections. Yahya lived upto his promise of holding fair and free elections which were held in 1970. But unfortunately, instead of paving the way for the smooth transfer of power, these elections, first and last in the undivided Pakistan, sowed the seeds of country's disintegration to give way to the emergence of Bangladesh out of the old East Pakistan.

Bhutto made a befitting comparison of Pakistan when Yahya Khan ascended the power in 1969. To him Pakistan was like a **patient in the last stages of tuberculosis.**<sup>3</sup> Although Bhutto made these remarks two years after Yahya had come to power and when the country was already heading towards break-up, the remarks was very

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2. Ibid p.11.

much truthful which presented the dismal picture of country's situation. Apart from complicated political and constitutional issues, the country was beset with enormous problems in the socio-economic sphere.

Yahya Khan inherited disastrous conditions. The explosive and vital problem on the economic front was that of regional distribution between East and West Pakistan. An antagonistic movement in East Pakistan was going on demanding more rights for the Bengalis in the political and economic set up. The movement was manifesting the signs of secession as the Bengalis were not prepared to wait for an evolutionary process to eliminate economic disparities by **step by step** concessions. The political climate in East Pakistan in 1969 did not show the signs of compromise or hoping for any happy change to emerge. Yet there was no magic lamp to remove disparity by simply launching one or two developmental plans.

Yahya, in order to solve the problems, rallied on his predecessor ML regime. Martial Law regulations were issued. Provisional constitutional order was issued which provided that until the new constitution was enforced, the constitution of 1962 will provide the guideline to govern the country. Fundamental rights were suspended.

The situation in East Pakistan, particularly posed serious threats to the ML authority. Few weeks after the imposition of ML, the ML regulations were openly defied by students and some other miscreants. The ML regime took lenient view of this defiance which was taken as a weakness on the part of the ML regime. Maulana Bhahshani, a prominent leader of East Pakistan, held political meetings and rallies in total disregard for the ML regulations. The students of Dhaka University were very hostile who held open meetings on the campus which demonstrated tremendous disregard for the ML regulations.

Despite serious problems of law and order, Yahya's ML regime took a number of steps to restore normalcy. As a first step the ML regime took up the labour problem which had created difficulties for Ayub's regime. Air

Marshal Nur Khan was entrusted with the job of formulating the labour laws afresh. Air Marshal Nur Khan, after consultations with various labour leaders, announced a labour policy. The labour policy recommended a number of steps which to a great extent pacified the labour community. It restored the right of collective bargaining, the right to strike and lock out if the talks failed and conciliation efforts brought no results. It simplified the trade union set up, their organization and provided legal protection to the trade unionists. It fixed the minimum wages for the skilled and unskilled labourers and workers.

Yahya's regime, alive to the injurious impact of Ayub's economic policies on the East Pakistan, took up a number of steps to dissipate wide-spread resentment and to ensure a more equitable distribution of the economic benefits. **A financial institution called Equity Participation Fund was set up with its headquarter at Dhaka. The responsibilities of the Equity Participation Fund included supplementing the capital resources of small sized and medium sized enterprises in the private sector in East Pakistan and in the less developed areas of West Pakistan. The Fund was managed by the Industrial Development Bank.**<sup>4</sup>

The serpent of corruption had slithered in the administrative machinery during the last phase of Ayub regime. The bureaucracy, police and other superior services of Pakistan indulged in the most gruesome acts of corruption, nepotism, misuse of authority and rolling of national wealth during Ayub's regime. The bureaucracy had assumed insurmountable position as Ayub's regime heavily depended on bureaucracy to give strength and longevity to its hold on power.

Yahya's ML regime, being aware of the anathema of bureaucratic autocracy, decided to purge the administration of the vices of nepotism and misuse of official authority. ML regulations were issued to effectively check the growing trends of nepotism, favouritism

4. Pakistan News, London, 15th Jan. 1970.

and corruption in the civil administration. By these regulations severe punitive actions were recommended against those who were involved in corruption, nepotism, hoarding and misuse of official authority. Public was induced to lodge complaints against government officials and private entrepreneur who indulged in the above said malpractices. Under the ML regulation No. 58, 303 civil officers were suspended on charges of corruption, misuse of official position and accumulation of illegal wealth and assets.

### STEPS FOR TRANSFER OF POWER

Yahya Khan, in order to fulfil his promise of smooth transfer of power, appointed a Chief Election Commissioner on 28th July, 1970. The CEC was directed to proceed with the preparation of electoral rolls and demarcation of constituencies. The princely states of Dir, Swat and Chitral were merged in the province of the West Pakistan. One Unit scheme was dissolved and the four provinces of Punjab, NWFP, Sindh and Balochistan were re-constituted. The principle of one man one vote was accepted for the general elections. It was done with the objective of eliminating the principle of parity and providing representation on the basis of population thus acknowledging the numerical superiority of East Pakistan.

PROVINCE	GENERAL SEATS	WOMEN SEATS	TOTAL SEATS
East Pakistan	162	7	169
Punjab	82	3	85
Sindh	27	1	28
NWFP	18	1	19
Balochistan	4	1	5
Tribal Areas	7	0	7
Grand Total	300	13	313

The next step towards the transfer of power was the issuance of Legal Framework Order on 30th March, 1970. The LFO was intended to serve as a guide to future line of

action with respect to transfer of power. The LFO set up National Assembly with 313 seats. Three hundred seats were to be filled by general elections while 13 seats were reserved for the women candidates. The 313 seats of the National Assembly were distributed among the five provinces and the Centrally administered Tribal Areas as follows:

There was to be a provincial assembly for each province consisting of the elected members as was set out in Schedule II of the LFO. The allocation of seats for each assembly was as follows:

Province	General Seats	Women Seats	Total Seats
East Pakistan	300	10	310
Punjab	180	6	186
Sindh	60	2	62
NWFP	40	2	42
Balochistan	20	1	21

The National Assembly was to frame the constitution within 120 days of its meeting. After the expiry of this period the National Assembly would stand dissolved automatically.

### General Elections of 1970

Despite a few objections on the LFO the political parties welcomed the decision of the military regime to hold elections. All the political parties jumped into the election arena with their programmes and manifestoes to test their political muscles. The prominent political leaders made hectic tours of both the wings of the country to muster support for their candidates.

The Awami League under the leadership of Sh. Mujib-ur-Rehman issued its election manifesto based on Mujib's six point formula which was aimed at drastically curtailing the federal authority and converting Pakistan into a loose confederation. In West Pakistan Z.A. Bhutto had launched his PPP which sought to contest elections purely on economic issues.

He issued the manifesto of his PPP which promised the economic uplift of the masses and 1000 years of war with India.

Both Mujib and Bhutto adopted agitational tactics to push their election campaigns. They threw mud on their rival politicians and provoked deep hatred toward other political parties. Particularly Awami League was highly antagonistic towards pro-Pakistan political parties and politicians. The workers of Awami League disturbed the political meetings of other parties, beat up the audience and the speakers. The hooliganism of the Awami Leaguers made it impossible to organize peaceful and orderly election campaigns.

In West Pakistan, Z.A. Bhutto cleverly exploited the economic weakness of the ignorant masses by raising false slogans. The PPP's slogan Roti, Kapra aur Makan was an unrealistic promise which touched the hearts and sensitivities of the less privileged masses and presented Bhutto as the saviour of the impoverished. Bhutto also exploited the Tashkent agreement and the prevailing hatred against the army.

Mujib erected his election campaign on the basis of the rights of the East Pakistanis. The Awami League, confined to East Pakistan, contested the elections on Mujib's six points manifesto and heavily played up the grievances of East Pakistan. Mujib, a secessionist to the core, acquired wide scale popularity and strength during his election campaign for his advocacy of the rights of the Bengalis. He shrewdly played up the wounded pride of the East Pakistani people and constantly told them that West Pakistan have denied their rights and that there was no alternative except to vote for the Six Point programme of Awami League.

In seclusion Mujib kept on expressing his loyalty for the united Pakistan. He assured the authorities and the pro-Pakistan elements that the six point programme was open to negotiations and that once he is elected he will deal firmly with the separatists in the Awami League. ***In private, Mujib gave assurance to the government that he believed in the United Pakistan and that***

***the six point programme was negotiable, that he had flexible approach and that after the elections his hands would be strengthened to deal firmly with those hard-liners within the Awami League who wanted to secede from Pakistan.***<sup>5</sup>

On the verge of elections the Bengalis had made up their mind to vote for six point programme of the Awami League. Meanwhile the fiery speeches of East Pakistan politicians, like Maulana Bhashani, Taj-ud-Din Ahmed and Dr. Kamal Hossain shoved the people of East Pakistan to the point of no return. They flared the emotions of the innocent people on whose shoulders they sailed triumphantly through the elections. All other political leaders decided to give an open field to the Awami League and did not put up their candidates in the elections. The Awami League won all the seats except two which were won by Nur-ul-Amin and Raja Tridev Roy, the Buddhist leader.

In West Pakistan Bhutto's charismatic and demagogic bearing immensely lured the people to vote for the PPP in large number. The PPP emerged as largest party in the western wing with 82 seats which put Bhutto in the bargaining position. The election results showed how much powerful were the regional forces in both the wings. The Awami League secured 75.11% total votes cast in East Pakistan but it did not secure a single seat in West Pakistan's four provinces. The PPP did not contest election in East Pakistan.

The results of the elections were a stunning set back for the older political parties. Particularly the Jamaat-e-Islami, the two factions of the Muslim League and NAP (Wali) had to face humiliating defeat. For them the elections of 1970 were a nightmare.

### YAHYA, MUJIB AND BHUTTO SQUABBLE OVER POWER SHARING

According to the LFO, the National Assembly was to frame the Constitution within 120 days. After the elections there

5. Gen. K.M. Arif 'Working with Zia', Op. Cit., p. 20.