

From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

President Zia dismisses the government

What the abrupt move means for Pakistan and the region remains to be seen.

On May 29, just as Pakistani Prime Minister Mohammad Khan Junejo finished briefing the press on his just-completed tour of Southeast Asia, President Zia ul-Haq took to the airwaves and announced the dismissal of the two-year-old democratically elected National Assembly, the Junejo cabinet, and four provincial assemblies.

The stunning move, which took most, including the denizens of the foreign ministry here, by surprise, comes in the wake of mounting reports of disagreements between Zia and Junejo—over India policy, Afghanistan, Islam, and the military. In an address to the nation May 30, as in an April speech to the joint session of the Assembly, Zia cited the civilian government's failure on economic policy, the breakdown of law and order, and the sidelining of Islamization.

Zia has stated that as per the Constitution, a caretaker government will be formed and new elections held in 90 days. He has constituted a committee to accelerate the process of Islamization, and ordered an inquiry into the assets acquired by Assembly members and their families during their tenures.

Though it will be some days before the real story becomes clear, the suddenness of the move cannot be explained by adding up the known factors. According to some, only the need to counter an active coup plot would warrant such precipitous action, to which President Zia's own planned nine-day visit to China, for instance, was sacrificed. reports of Junejo's bid to cultivate a section of the military

brass have been making the rounds in Pakistan.

Several hours before Zia's announcement, troops were deployed in key areas of Karachi, where ethnic rioting involving Afghan refugees has careened out of control in recent months, and, according to Indian press reports, troops were also stationed along the roads leading to Junejo's office and home in Rawalpindi.

Pakistan is in turmoil, and government policies have not been able to stem the tide. At the same time, with the new situation unfolding in Afghanistan, shifts in Pakistan would not be surprising. In this context, the growing gulf between the President and prime minister could become intolerable.

Many facts about these differences have already surfaced. In India policy, for instance, Junejo has long been an outspoken hawk. In an interview in *India Today* that was given at a time when India and Pakistan had finally revived dialogue on the border and other disputes, Junejo declared, "India has no right to come into Siachen . . . you come into a territory that's not yours and then say there should be a ceasefire."

Further, Junejo had openly blamed the Karachi riots on Indian meddling, when Zia charged Afghan Secret Service agents with fomenting the strife.

More recently, it was Junejo who scuttled Indian Foreign Secretary K.P.S. Menon's proposed visit to Pakistan for consultations prior to signing the Geneva Accord. And, when Menon did go to consult with officials in Islamabad prior to Afghan

Prime Minister Najibullah's visit to Delhi, Junejo played sick.

The visit of Pakistani Foreign Secretary Abdul Sattar to Delhi May 31—which may well have been expected to be a casualty of the recent drama—was kept on schedule.

The Zia-Junejo differences over Islamization are also well known. For three years, Zia has complained to the National Assembly that the process of Islamization he started in 1978 had come to a halt with the civilian government. Zia contends democracy should flow from Islamization; Junejo, the opposite. Not merely an academic dispute, the stalemate resulted in mounting pressure on Zia from his backers among the Jamaat-e-Islami.

Undoubtedly the most serious dispute, however, revolves around the military. It is a dispute which Junejo chose to put on center stage during his recent tour when, in Hong Kong, he criticized the Army for covering up its responsibility for the devastating explosion recently at the Ojheri arms dump.

From the beginning, Junejo has twitted Zia's authority in military matters. He summarily removed an Army officer and confidant of President Zia's from the important post of Secretary for Information and Broadcasting, and opposed Zia's appointment of another confidant to the position of Vice Army Chief. He even asked that Zia himself resign as Chief of Army Staff.

There are also reports here that the violent Shia-Sunni clashes in Gilgit, in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in April, also figure in Zia's dismissal of the Junejo government. Reportedly, the police and Army took a "passive" stance when a group of Shias stormed a Sunni mosque shouting "Down with Saudi Arabia! Down with Pakistan!" As many as 300 were killed, and the area is still tense.