

Knives are sharpened in Pakistan

Will Zia ul-Haq be the next casualty of the 'Great Game'? Susan Maitra reports from New Delhi.

Pakistan's Chief Martial Law Administrator Zia ul-Haq has perhaps rung his own death knell with his Dec. 19 national referendum asking the population whether they support the policies initiated by his military government and the steps taken for the "Islamicization" of the country. Not unexpectedly, Zia won the referendum by an overwhelming 98%, with most of the opposition boycotting, and has reiterated his pledge to hold national and provincial elections next March.

But this apparent mandate for the Zia regime could rapidly go up in smoke. Whether it is part of a superpower deal over Afghanistan or the result of secessionist resurgence and internal political revolt, with the inspiration and support of gamemasters in foreign capitals, or a combination of both, Zia's regime is headed for crisis, not the least indication of which is the fact that Zia's name was on the hit list of Libyan terrorists in Cairo in mid-November.

The referendum

The reaction of the combined opposition group, the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), to the call for the referendum was predictably negative. MRD spokesman Arshad Chaudhuri called for boycotting the referendum, stating that the opposition's participation in such a referendum would be counterproductive since the hands of the opposition were already tied with no access to the state-controlled media and a total ban on political activity. Chaudhuri also pointed out that the referendum would provide the opportunity for Zia to legitimize his rule for five more years as President.

Zia was able, however, to garner support for his proposed no-party elections in March from the religious opposition. The Tufail Mohammad-led faction of the pro-Saudi Jamaati-Islami and the Pir Pagaro-led Muslim League have agreed to participate in the elections. Their argument is that any kind of election is better than martial law, and hence the parties should accept the non-party election format even if it means exclusion from the polls. The MRD leaders, on the other hand, maintain that any election held under martial law will not be fair and will only help to legitimize military rule.

On the face of it, the MRD argument is sound. The military regime exerts control over the media, has curbed the inter-province movement of political leaders, and has banned political rallies against the government. These are interpreted

by the opposition as indications that the military is not yet ready to go back to the barracks and wants to institutionalize its role in state affairs.

However, the MRD's opposition to the election is but one aspect of a larger plan to spur a revolt inside the country. An attempt to revive the secessionist movement which pitted the Sindhis against Zia's military in 1983 is now a constant preoccupation of both the exiled and domestic opposition groups. In mid-October, reports of gun battles between soldiers and students in and around Karachi, Pakistan's largest city and capital of Sind, filled the newspapers. The police used tear gas and electrically charged batons to disperse frenzied students. Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader based in Pakistan, was prevented by the government from traveling to the scene in early November.

The growing domestic crisis takes place as the country's economic difficulties are also reaching a crisis point. The government was forced in November to suspend the new Five-Year Plan and implement a series of revised annual "rolling plans." Severe austerities have been imposed and investments were cut when it was acknowledged that the GNP and trade revenue projections on which the Sixth Plan was based were disastrously inflated. Compared to projections of 6.5% GDP growth in the first year of the plan, output rose only by 4.6%. More significant, the farm sector output fell, for the first time in five years. Foreign remittances, which were projected for a 10% rise this year, fell by 3%, and exports rose only 4%, half the annual projection. Finally, the Pakistani rupee collapsed against the U.S. dollar by about 60%.

Soviet pressures

Meanwhile, the Soviets in Afghanistan have mounted pressure along the Pakistan border areas. On Nov. 21, a bridge on the Indus River was destroyed by intruding Afghan soldiers, cutting off one of the routes the Pakistani army uses to patrol the border areas. The Pakistan government carefully sidestepped an attack on the Soviets for the action and instead leveled its charge on Al-Zulfiqar, a terrorist organization run by the former Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's son, Mir Murtaz Bhutto, from Kabul and Tripoli.

Islamabad claimed that the terrorists entered Pakistan to "sabotage" the March national elections. In spite of such

efforts to appease Moscow, it is becoming increasingly clear that new plans are being hatched abroad to disintegrate Pakistan, and that Moscow holds at least some of the cards in this game.

In London, the newly formed Sind-Baluchistan Association (SBA) is calling for the secession of both Sind and Baluchistan from Pakistan. Sardar Ataulah Mengal and Khair Bux Murri, the two Baluch tribal leaders based in London, are spearheading the SBA as representatives of Baluchistan. The leadership from the Sind side is being provided by such PPP luminaries as Hafeez Pirzada; Jam Sadiq Ali, a close friend of the Bhutto family; Dr. Nasir Sheikh; and Dr. Khalid Legari. B. C. Raj, a Hindu Sindhi originally from Pakistan, is the information officer for the new group.

The Indian press also reports that Benazir Bhutto, who is generally regarded as the first leader of the PPP, is now being actively wooed by Jam Sadiq Ali and others to formally cast her lot with this gambit.

Secessionists versus autonomists

The nominal opposition to the secessionists comes from well-known Soviet assets in Pakistan such as Khan Abdul Wali Khan of the National Awami Party and Gaus Baksh Bizenjo, another Baluch. This latter group, supported by the originator of the secessionist Jiye Sind movement, the 86-year-old G. M. Syed, and the Sind-based leftist group, Sind Awami Tehrik, led by Paleezo, has urged the opposition leaders to direct all their efforts to persuade Zia to hold free and fair elections. Their contention, made publicly, is that, once such an election takes place, the Constitution can be amended to give the four Pakistani provinces full autonomy.

The secessionist gang, however, doesn't buy the argument, and is imploring the autonomists to join the break-up-Pakistan bandwagon. The secessionist faction is reportedly courting the Libyan hit-man Qaddafi for money. One K. N. Abassi, a self-proclaimed PPP loyalist, is acting as the point man between Tripoli and the PPP in London and Pakistan. It has also been reported that the same Abassi is making contact with the leaders of the Khalistan movement, another secessionist operation aimed at splitting up India.

Both the Moscow and British gamemasters are playing both hands in the game. The Soviets would not like to publicize the secessionist tendencies too much for more than one reason. First, Moscow still believes, with reason, that Zia can be arm-twisted into submission on the Afghanistan question, either into accepting a separate peace or through part of a "spheres of influence" deal with the United States that might result from Moscow's present flexing of the Central America card. Moscow would also not want to make its support for the secessionists too loud since it might irritate their ally, India.

New human-rights broadside

While the London pot is boiling, in New York something called the Pakistani Democratic Forum (PDF) has published

a report attacking the military regime for violation of human rights and for its pursuit of Islamicization. PDF, a left-oriented overseas Pakistani organization with the odor of association with Ramsey Clark and his ilk, has developed a close link-up with the London-based Amnesty International. The PDF is specifically opposed to the persecution of the Amdiyya sect, a group of heretics who function as a political mafia in Pakistan.

Both Benazir Bhutto and Amnesty International have come out swinging in support of the PDF campaign. At a press conference in Bonn, West Germany, on Nov. 28, Benazir Bhutto, who has developed a friendship with Club of Rome Associate Claiborne Pell and his aid, Peter Galbraith, lambasted the Zia regime for meting out death sentences to the four PPP cadre convicted of hijacking a Pakistan International Airlines plane in 1981. In coming to the defense of the terrorists, Benazir was merely echoing the Amnesty International appeal on Nov. 27 to the Pakistani government to allow an open trial of the four hijackers before an independent jury and impartial court. The group has stated that it is in the process of investigating reports that the Islamabad government's case against the four hijackers rested on statements acquired under duress.

Amnesty International not only speaks for the leftist side of things; on its board is Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former National Security Council adviser who this spring informed Zia that he must escalate against the Soviets in Afghanistan or face a cut-off of funds from the United States and Saudi Arabia.

The Pentagon factor

The Soviet pressure on the northwestern borders of Pakistan, articles penned by Western analysts forecasting an imminent war between India and Pakistan, and secessionist movements have kept the pot boiling as never before. Moreover, a shift by a section of the American Pentagon may be signaled in the recent departure from the Zia cabinet of Minister of Interior Mahmoud A. Haroon. Scion of the super-wealthy Haroon family, Haroon stated as his reason for resigning his opposition to the decision to expand the election committee, of which he was a member. However, Haroon is a close friend of all those who are on the committee, including the newly inducted member. Haroon has consistently been a supporter of the military regimes, starting with his long stint as minister during the Ayub Khan regime (1958-68), and by implication has close links with these regimes' U.S. backers.

Haroon is a close friend of PPP leader Jatoi, and on more than one occasion has been used by Zia as a government liaison to the MRD. Before his departure for Dubai, Haroon told reporters he believes that, since the country is passing through a most critical period, national conciliation rather than confrontation is the need of the hour. In an interview, Haroon quipped, "After all, there should be someone who resigns over a difference of opinion"—but declined to say what the difference was.