

From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

Portents for the partyless poll

General Zia's election procedure will only fan Pakistan's fragmentation into feuding tribal, ethnic, and religious sectors.

In July, Pakistani President Zia ul-Haq announced that the Nov. 16 elections for national and state assemblies would be held on a non-party basis. While a new ordinance spelling out the rules and regulations for campaigning is now being drafted, it is generally understood that, as in the 1985 election where the "partyless poll" was pioneered, candidates will stand for office as individuals, not as representatives of a party. The parties are free to assist individuals in campaigning, but the government will not be formed on a party basis.

According to General Zia, who dismissed the previous government for, among other things, failure to push for the country's Islamization, political parties have no place in an Islamic state.

"There could only be two parties in Islam—the party of God and the party of Satan," General Zia said.

Though all of the major political parties have announced their intention to participate in the elections, there is a near unanimous rejection of the "partyless poll" concept. While some of the flutter can be discounted as posturing, there is one concern which, interestingly, has been voiced almost across the political spectrum, which strikes a deeper chord. And that is the charge that the practice of non-party elections will further ethnic, tribal, and regional tensions that are already a clear and present danger to the future of Pakistan.

It is a concern that is all the more compelling in the shadow of Afghanistan, where a desperate communist regime in Kabul flexes the "Pakthoon-

istan" card against its neighbor.

Spokesmen for the Tehrik-e-Ishtiqal, a generally pro-American party headed by retired Air Marshal Asghar Khan, have charged that the 1985 round of non-party elections showed a number of ethnic groups campaigning for their candidates, and that new ethnic groupings were cropping up in anticipation of this system.

Unless the non-party election practice is stopped, they insist, the country will be divided by ethnic hostilities.

This view was echoed by Qazi Hussain Ahmed, head of the Jamaat-i-Islami, the pro-Saudi party dominated by orthodox Sunnis. The Jamaat chief told a meeting in Quetta, Baluchistan, that Pakistan was being pushed into a situation of uncertainty due to the decision to hold nonpartisan elections, because it will further fan regionalism, ethnicism, and individualism.

Indeed, the steady rise and influence of ethnic, ethno-religious, and tribal-based pressure groups in the past 10 years since the 1977 imposition of martial law is undeniable. Over the past several years, with new pressures from the directions of Iran and Afghanistan, this process has deepened dramatically.

The continuing bloody rioting in Karachi and other major cities of Sind province is just the tip of the iceberg. There, the Mohajirs (Indian Muslims who chose to relocate to Pakistan at the time of partition) dumped the generally pro-government Muslim League and organized their own group to battle Sindhis and the Afghan immigrants

who threatened their status in the province.

Press reports from Pakistan indicate that the "Mohajir Community Movement" has already supplanted the mainstream national political parties—the Jamaat-i-Islami, Pakistan People's Party, and Muslim League—among the urban populations of Karachi and Hyderabad.

Sindhi "nationalists," celebrated in the Jiye Sind movement of G.M. Syed for the separation of Sind province from the rest of Pakistan, have gotten a fresh boost in the process. Syed's "Sind National Alliance" now includes a number of prominent national figures, such as the caretaker chief minister of Sind.

In the Northwest Frontier Province, the Pakthoon tribal-based party of Wali Khan is alive and well, and in Baluchistan, the country's most backward province, the population by all accounts retains its allegiance to tribal affiliations. Some Pakistani commentators assert that, in fact, tribalism rather than party loyalty continues to dominate local body elections throughout the country.

The fuss and fury over the recent murder of Allama Arif Hussain al-Hussaini; head of the Shia party Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-Fiqah-e-Jafria (TNFJ) (see *International Intelligence*), points to another aspect of the fragmentation process: the emergence of highly politicized, fundamentalist sectors of both the Shia and Sunni variety. Just a year ago, Hussaini, a follower of the Ayatollah Khomeini, had transformed his religious pressure group into a militant political party. Shia-Sunni strife has emerged in a serious way since the recent riots in Gilgit, in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, that took hundreds of lives. The Hussaini assassination, on the eve of the Muslim religious holiday Moharram, will certainly fuel this fire.