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## PAKISTAN

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# Twenty thousand defy dictator Zia ul-Haq

by Ramtanu Maitra in New Delhi

Zia ul-Haq's effort to pre-empt the brewing mass discontent against his dictatorship with a much-heralded pronouncement promising "restoration of democracy in 1985" has failed. Despite hundreds of arrests prior to the Aug. 14 Independence Day announcement of a new pseudo-Islamic "constitution," the eight-party opposition coalition, the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD), mobilized a 20,000-person demonstration, the largest-ever, in the city of Karachi and large protests elsewhere.

The MRD also launched a civil disobedience movement, labeling the new constitution a fraud that Zia is trying to impose unilaterally to disguise his continuing rule by force. Only the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Pir of Pagaro's Muslim League rejected the MRD's call for non-coalition parties to support the movement.

Protests and demonstrations are still rocking Pakistan, particularly Sind province. A demonstration of several thousand in a town north of Karachi was attacked by police. Banks, government buildings, government oil tankers, police stations, and railways have come under attack.

Arrests continue. Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi was arrested during his speech to a crowd of several thousand in Karachi on the second day of protests. Begum Wali Khan and members of her National Democratic Party, part of the MRD coalition, were arrested one day before they were to lead a rally in Peshawar. Benazir Bhutto, daughter of the Zia-lynched Prime Minister Z. A. Bhutto and a leader of the PPP, as well as Asghar Khan, the leader of the Therik-i-Istiqlal, an important constituent of the MRD, were already under house arrest.

As of Aug. 18, five thousand people are reportedly still in jail. Some of the leaders of the marches have been flogged, the first admitted cases of flogging for purely political "crimes." The year-long drive against corruption also announced by Zia on Aug. 14 is already being used to round up opposition politicians. PPP members are being arrested and charged with involvement in terroristic activities of "Al-Zulfikar."

The MRD's ability to sustain or spread the demonstrations in the face of Zia's crackdown will be the test of how

long Zia's regime can survive.

## Zia's 'Islamic constitution'

General Zia's pronouncement that elections will be held on March 23, 1985 is a ploy that has failed to earn unanimous applause even among his allies—he has promised elections five times previously, only to cancel them on the grounds that they were "premature." Under Zia's scheme, the 1973 constitution is to be amended to give the president/commander-in-chief more power, and the new parliament less. The president will have the right to bar candidates regarded as "troublemakers," appoint his own prime minister, veto the national assembly, and prevent all election campaigning as "un-Islamic."

Zia has already declared publicly that he has no intention of transferring power to a civilian setup. He made clear in an interview with the English-language *Arab News* that his concept of democracy does not encompass the existence of political parties. "They are contrary to Islam's mandate for unity," he stated, adding that the PPP would not be allowed to contest an election in any case. "I'm really going to shove all the Islamic values down anybody's throat whether he likes it or not," he told the *Arab News*.

Even the general's handpicked "federal council," the Majlis-Shoora, could not bring themselves to rubberstamp the scheme. The council urged a minimum of changes in the 1973 constitution, which was approved by all parties during Bhutto's reign. They advised that a parliamentary system with political parties in fact accords with Islam.

## The Arabian Gulf gambit

Zia is not only trying to pacify the Pakistani population, but is seeking a public relations gloss for the economic and military aid he gets from the United States, Britain, et al., the ultimate guarantors of his rule. Having received American F-16 long-range fighter-bombers, Pakistan is now acquiring Harpoon missiles, which provide precise targeting of up to 100 miles with no possibility of interception. This addition to Pakistan's \$3.2 billion arms package from the United States was accompanied by a declaration by Foreign Minister Yaqub Khan that Pakistan has by no means given up its claims to all of Kashmir, an Indian state, part of which Pakistan has occupied since 1947, and one of the most sensitive issues between India and Pakistan. The comment was viewed in New Delhi as a deliberate attempt to raise tension in the bilateral sphere to divert Pakistanis' attention from domestic problems.

Reports are simultaneously circulating that Pakistan will soon be invited to join the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) the military alliance of states surrounding the Arabian Gulf, that plays a key role in the U.S. Rapid Deployment Force scheme. According to an Islamic publication in London, Pakistan has denied that it is making bases available to the United States, but it has not yet made any official statement on whether facilities might be made available to the GCC.