

Downfall of Ayub Khan 1969

After independence and especially the death of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistan was entangled in a web of chaos and confusion. The instability can be seen with having four Governor Generals, seven Prime Ministers and one President in eleven years. Not a single government was stable enough to think and work in the right direction.

General Iskander Mirza decided to abrogate the first constitution of Pakistan and invite General Ayub Khan to impose the first martial law in the country. The intentions of General Iskander Mirza were quite personal in inviting Ayub, as he considered democracy as a useless tool in a country like Pakistan where the literacy rate is low and there is lack of political awareness among the people. The plan which Iskander Mirza had in his mind failed when Ayub overthrew him after a few days of proclaiming the Martial law in October 1958, and sent him in exile.

By and large, the ten-year rule of General Ayub Khan is seen as an era of progress and industrial development. Ayub promulgated mega projects like the construction of Mangla Dam, the Karachi Steel Mills, oil refineries and above all construction of a new capital at Islamabad. He introduced various reforms to improve the state of affairs, like the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961, imposing restrictions on polygamy and reinforcing inheritance rights of women. The Land Reforms initiated by him were a step to reduce the increasing power of the landed aristocracy. He signed a boundary agreement with China in March 1963, which proved to be the beginning of a long-term friendship between the two countries.

The prominent feature of a Martial Law regime is the rapid growth of development, but in the long run the various measures taken by a martial dictator come in the lime light and create disruption among the society. In spite of all the positive steps and development marking General Ayub's Era, the graph of his popularity began declining. The immediate cause was the elections of 1965 and the Tashkent Declaration.

If we minutely study the ten years of Ayub's era we calculate a few things. Like every martial law administrator, Ayub liked to keep the power in his own hands. As soon as he came to power, one of the first steps he took was the passing of EBDO (Disqualification of politicians and political parties under Elective Bodies Disqualification Order), claiming to minimize corruption.

People wanted parliamentary form of government, but General Ayub. presented the nation with second constitution in 1962 which was presidential in nature.

By introducing the system of Basic Democracy (BD), the right of adult franchise was curtailed.

The control on media and press was observed.

The Land and Family Laws were very attractive but they were not fully implemented.

The concept of urbanization was encouraged, but facilities were not provided.

The whole of West Pakistan was made in one unit, with which the small provinces were not happy.

Rumors about his illness in the early 1968, about making Gohar Ayub his successor, withdrawal of military support added more to his unpopularity.

One more aspect which Ayub neglected from the beginning caused a major upheaval in his popularity graph was the case of East Pakistan. It is an atrocious truth that since independence all the governments including that of Ayub Khan had neglected East Pakistan. Like his predecessors, he did nothing to decrease the economic disparity between East and West Pakistan. He was aware of the acute grievances of the Bengalis, but he did not try to tackle it seriously. As Bengal was a densely populated and politicized province, its feeling of deprivation increased by the absence of democratic institutions in Ayub's highly centralized regime. The East Pakistanis also considered Martial law as the rule of Punjabi dominated Army. The issue of provincial autonomy was also an issue which intensified with time and we see that in 1966 Sheikh Mujeeb ur Rahman presented his six points formula for provincial autonomy of East wing. Even then, no heed was paid to the growing discontentment.

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto exploited the Tashkent declaration to turn the public opinion against Ayub. The increasing popularity of Awami League under Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman in East Pakistan and Pakistan People's Party under Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in West Pakistan was alarming for the stability of General Ayub's Regime. Then there was also Asghar Khan's movement and few other political alliances which were creating hurdles for a stable Ayub's government.

Finally, the movement against his government intensified towards the end of 1968 and in the beginning of 1969. The movement was launched by Urban middle class i.e. Students, lawyers, teachers, doctors, labourers, politicians etc.

It became quite difficult for General Ayub to face so much opposition from politicians as well as common people from all walks of life. He ultimately decided to resign in March 1969. In his last radio address to the nation on 25 March 1969, he said, "I cannot preside over the destruction of my country".

This ended a rather stable and progressive era in the history of Pakistan.