**General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988)**

**An overview.**

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General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq was the one who enforced Martial Law for the third time in the brief history of Pakistan. Second child and eldest son of Muhammad Akram, a teacher in the British Army, Zia-ul-Haq was born on August 12, 1924, at Jalandhar. After receiving his early education from Government High School Simla, he did his B. A. Honors from St. Stephen College, Delhi. He was commissioned in the British Army in 1943 and served in Burma, Malaya and Indonesia during World War II. When the war was over, he decided to join the armored corps. At the time of Independence, like most of the Muslim officers in the British Army, Zia-ul-Haq opted to join the Pakistan Army. As a Major he got an opportunity to do a training course in the Commander and Staff College of United States of America in 1963-64. During the 1965 War, he acted as the Assistant Quarter Master of 101 Infantry Division, which was posted at the Kiran Sector. He remained posted in Jordan from 1967 till 1970, where he was involved in training Jordon’s military. He was appointed as Corps Commander of Multan in 1975. On April 1, 1976, in a surprise move the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, appointed Zia-ul-Haq as Chief of Army Staff, superseding five senior Generals. Bhutto probably wanted somebody as the head of the armed forces who would not prove to be a threat for him, and the best available option was the simple General who was apparently interested only in offering prayers and playing golf. However, history proved that General Zia-ul-Haq proved to be much smarter than Bhutto thought. When political tension reached its climax due to the deadlock between Bhutto and the leadership of Pakistan National Alliance on the issue of general elections, Zia-ul-Haq took advantage of the situation. On July 5, 1977, he carried out a bloodless coup overthrowing Bhutto’s government and enforced Martial Law in the country. After assuming power as Chief Martial Law Administrator, Zia-ul-Haq promised to hold National and Provincial Assembly elections in the next 90 days and to hand over power to the representatives of the Nation. However, in October 1977, he announced the postponement of the electoral plan and decided to start an accountability process of the politicians. In a statement, he said that he changed his decision due to the strong public demand for the scrutiny of political leaders who had indulged in malpractice in the past. The Disqualification Tribunal was formulated and many former Members of Parliament were disqualified from participating in politics at any level for the next seven years. A white paper was also issued which criticized the activities of Pakistan People Party’s government under Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. With the retirement of Fazal Ilahi, Zia-ul-Haq also assumed the office of President of Pakistan on September 16, 1978. In the absence of a Parliament, Zia-ul-Haq decided to set up an alternative system. He introduced Majlis-I-Shoora in 1980. Most of the members of the Shoora were intellectuals, scholars, ulema, journalists, economists and professionals belonging to different fields of life. The Shoora was to act as a board of advisors to the President. The idea of establishing this institution was not bad but the main problem was that all 284 members of the Shoora were to be nominated by the President and thus there was no room for dissention. In the mid-80s, Zia-ul-Haq decided to fulfill his promise of holding elections in the country. But before handing over the power to the public representatives, he decided to secure his position. Referendum was held in the county in December 1984, and the masses were given the option to elect or reject the General as the future President of Pakistan. The question asked in the referendum was phrased in a way that Zia-ul-Haqq’s victory was related to the process of Islamization in the country. According to the official result, more than 95 percent of the votes were cast in favor of Zia-ul-Haq, thus he was elected as President for the next five years. After being elected President, Zia-ul-Haq decided to hold elections in the country in February 1985 on a non-party basis. Most of the political parties decided to boycott the elections but election results showed that many victors belonged to one party or the other. To make things easier for himself, the General nominated the Prime Minister from amongst the Members of the Assembly. To many, his nomination of Muhammad Khan Junejo as the Prime Minister was because he wanted a simple person at the post who would act as a puppet in his hands. Before handing over the power to the new Government he made certain Amendments in the Constitution and got them endorsed from the Parliament before lifting the state of emergency in the county. Due to this Eighth Amendment in the Constitution, the powers of the President were increased to an absolute level on the plea of safeguarding national integrity. As time passed, the Parliamentarians wanted to have more freedom and power. By the beginning of 1988, rumors about the differences between the Prime Minister and Zia-ul-Haq were rife. The general feeling was that the President, who had enjoyed absolute power for eight long years, was not ready to share it with anybody else. On May 29, 1988, Zia-ul-Haq finally dissolved the National Assembly and removed the Prime Minister under article 58(2) b of the amended Constitution. Apart from many other reasons, Junejo’s decision to sign the Geneva Accord against the wishes of Zia-ul-Haq proved to be one of the major factors responsible for his removal. After 11 years, Zia-ul-Haq once again made the same promise to the Nation to hold fresh elections within next 90 days. With Benazir Bhutto back in the country and the Muslim League leadership annoyed with the President over the decision of May 29, Zia-ul-Haq was trapped in the most difficult situation of his political life. The only option left for him was to repeat history and to postpone the elections once again. However, before taking any decision, Zia-ul-Haq died in an air crash near Bahawalpur on August 17, 1988. The accident proved to be very costly for the country as almost the entire military elite of Pakistan was onboard. Though United States’ Ambassador to Pakistan was also killed in the misfortune, yet many do not rule out U. S. involvement in the sabotage. They believe that United States could not afford Pakistan to oppose Geneva Accord and thus they removed the biggest hurdle in their way. The remains of Zia-ul-Haq were buried in the premises of Faisal Mosque, Islamabad. His death brought a large number of mourners to attend his funeral, including a large number of Afghanis, which proved to be one of the biggest in the history of the country. During his rule, Zia-ul-Haq tried his utmost to maintain close ties with the Muslim World. He made vigorous efforts along with other Muslim States to bring an end to the war between Iran and Iraq. Pakistan joined the Non-Aligned Movement in 1979 during Zia-ul-Haqq’s term. He also fought a war by proxy in Afghanistan and saved Pakistan from a direct war with Soviet Union.