Ayub Khan 1958-1969

On October 7, 1958, President Iskander Mirza abrogated the Constitution and declared Martial Law in the country. This was the first of many military regimes to mar Pakistan’s history. With this step, the Constitution of 1956 was abrogated, ministers were dismissed, Central and Provincial Assemblies were dissolved and all political activities were banned. General Muhammad Ayub Khan, the then Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, became the Chief Martial Law Administrator. The parliamentary system in Pakistan came to end. Within three weeks of assuming charge on October 27, 1958, Iskander Mirza was ousted by General Ayub Khan, who then declared himself President.

General Ayub Khan gave himself the rank of Field Marshal. Corruption had become so widespread within the national and civic systems of administration that Ayub Khan was welcomed as a national hero by the people.

Soon after coming to power, the new military government promised that they would carry out reforms in the entire government structure and would cleanse the administration of the rampant corruption. A thorough screening process of all government servants was conducted and service records were closely scrutinized. Public servants were tried for misconduct by tribunals consisting of retired judges of the Supreme Court or High Court. If charges were proven, disciplinary action such as dismissal or compulsory retirement of the public servant could take place. A public servant could also be disqualified from holding any public office for 15 years.

About 3,000 officials were dismissed and many others were reduced in rank as a result of these measures. The rest of the government servants were provided with an incentive to working hard. Similarly, a law called the Elective Bodies Disqualification Order, popularly known as E. B. D. O., was promulgated for the disqualification of politicians. Under this law, a person could be disqualified from being a member of any elective body till December 31, 1966. Under this harsh law, several politicians like Suhrawardy and Qayyum Khan were disqualified. The E. B. D. O., particularly its application, was severely criticized in the legal and political circles throughout Pakistan.

After taking over, Ayub Khan focused on the long-standing question of land reforms in West Pakistan. The land reforms included the reduction of land ceiling to 1,000 acres for non-irrigated land and 500 acres for irrigated land and with ownership rights granted to the tenants. The land in excess of these limits was taken over by the government to be distributed amongst the deserving persons.

Ayub Khan also introduced a comprehensive scheme of local government, popularly known as Basic Democracies. This scheme was enforced through the Basic Democracies Order on October 27, 1959. Basic Democracies was a pyramidal plan enabling the people to directly elect to Local Council men they knew, who would in turn elect the upper tier of the administration. Altogether there were 80,000 Basic Democrats elected. To lend legitimacy to his rule, Ayub Khan used the Basic Democrats as an electoral college, holding a referendum to seek a mandate to continue in office as President and to have the authority to frame the future Constitution of Pakistan.

The referendum held on February 14, 1960, asked the voters “if they had confidence in President Field Marshal Muhammad Ayub Khan, Hilal-i-Jurat” With the results of the referendum, Ayub Khan was elected

not only as President of Pakistan for five years, but also got the mandate to give Pakistan a Constitution of his choice.

Ayub Khan set up a Constitution Commission which was not only given the responsibility to make recommendations on the future Constitution, but was also to examine the causes of failure of parliamentary government in Pakistan. The report of the Constitution Commission was presented to Ayub Khan on May 6, 1961. Ayub Khan was not satisfied by the findings. The 1962 Constitution was very different from the recommendation of the Constitution Commission, as Ayub Khan favored a presidential form of government. The 1962 Constitution was promulgated on March 1. This ended the three-and-a-half-year Martial Law regime of Ayub Khan. A civilian constitutional government under Ayub Khan replaced his previous military regime.

This was actually welcomed in Pakistan as the nation had experienced a very unstable political climate since independence. Despite economic growth, continuing economic and social inequalities, the disadvantaged position of East Pakistan, and limitation of civil liberties provoked increasing discontent with his regime. Ayub Khan used two main approaches to governing in his first few years. He concentrated on consolidating power and undermining the opposition. He also aimed to establish the groundwork for future stability through altering the economic, legal, and constitutional institutions. The imposition of martial law targeted “antisocial” practices such as abducting women and children, black marketeering, smuggling, and hoarding. Many in the Civil Service of Pakistan and Police Service of Pakistan were investigated and punished for corruption, misconduct, inefficiency, or subversive activities. Corruption had become so widespread within the national and civic systems of administration that Ayub Khan was welcomed as a national hero by the people. The new military government promised that they would carry out reforms in the entire government structure and would cleanse the administration of the rampant corruption. A thorough screening process of all government servants was conducted and service records were closely scrutinized. Public servants were tried for misconduct by tribunals consisting of retired judges of the Supreme Court or High Court. Disciplinary actions such as dismissal or compulsory retirement of the public servant could take place against corrupt officials. A public servant could also be disqualified from holding any public office for 15 years. About 3,000 officials were dismissed and many other were reduced in rank as a result of these measures. A law called the Elective Bodies Disqualification Order, popularly known as E. B. D. O, was promulgated for the disqualification of politicians. Under this law, a person could be disqualified from being a member of any elective body. Under this harsh law, several politicians like Suhrawardy and Qayyum Khan were disqualified. The E. B. D. O, particularly its application, was severely criticized in the legal and political circles throughout Pakistan. Moreover, Ayub Khan focused on the long-standing question of land reforms in West Pakistan. It was meant to reduce the power of groups opposing him like landed aristocracy. The Land Reform Commission was set up in 1958. In 1959, the government imposed a ceiling of 200 hectares of irrigated and 400 hectares of unirrigated land in the West Wing for a single person. In the East Wing, the landholding ceiling was raised from thirty-three hectares to forty-eight hectares. Landholders retained their dominant positions in the social hierarchy and their political influence. Four million hectares of land in West Pakistan was released for public acquisition between 1959 and 1969.It was sold mainly to civil and military officers. It created a new class of farmers having medium-sized holdings. These farms became immensely important for future agricultural development, but the peasants benefited scarcely at all. In addition, a legal commission was set up to suggest reforms of the family and marriage laws. Ayub Khan examined its report and issued the Family Laws Ordinance in 1961. It restricted polygamy and “regulated” marriage and divorce, giving women more equal treatment under the law. It was a humane measure supported by women’s organizations in Pakistan. The ordinance could not have been promulgated owing to opposition from the ulema and the fundamentalist Muslim groups. This law like family planning was relatively mild and did not seriously transform the patriarchal pattern of society. Furthermore, Ayub Khan adopted an energetic approach toward economic development. It soon bore fruit in a rising rate of economic growth. Ayub Khan period is credited with Green Revolution and economic and industrial growth. Land reform, consolidation of holdings, and strict measures against hoarding were combined with rural credit programs and work programs, higher procurement prices, augmented allocations for agriculture, and, especially, improved seeds put the country on the road to self-sufficiency in food grains. This is popularly known as the Green Revolution. The Export Bonus Vouchers Scheme (1959) and tax incentives stimulated new industrial entrepreneurs and exporters. Bonus vouchers facilitated access to foreign exchange for imports of industrial machinery and raw materials. Tax concessions were offered for investment in less-developed areas. These measures had important consequences in bringing industry to Punjab and gave rise to a new class of small industrialists. Moreover, Ayub khan introduced certain reforms in the field of education. It was meant to raise the literacy level and trained manpower in Pakistan. He made technical education mandatory. Two year degree program was extended to three years. Civil Defense training was made mandatory in the schools and colleges. Last but not the least, Ayub khan introduced labor reforms. Ayub showed interest to work for the betterment of the labor class. It was made mandatory for the factory owners to recognize the elected union council and to consider its opinion in all the issues. The government provided the security to the leader and members of the union council from any revengeful activity of the factory owner. In September 1961, a law was passed about the basic daily wages of the laborers. Social security scheme was promulgated by which the labor were to be facilitated in case of any emergency. Ayub’s policies of concentrating political power in his own hands, his control over the press and media, imposing state of emergency in the country, and his interference in religion were also responsible for his downfall. By the end of 1968, the public resentment against the Ayub’s regime touched a boiling point and an anti-Ayub movement was launched by the urban-middle class; including students, teachers, lawyers, doctors, and engineers. Law and order broke down and Ayub was left with no other option but to step down.