

# HIS-103: Emergence of Bangladesh

## Lecture 13

### Yahya's Takeover and General Election 1970



Dr. Sadik Hasan

*Course Teacher*

# Yahya's Takeover

- After assuming power, Yahya made very clever and cautious moves. Within 24 hours of his assumption of power he established his credentials as a caretaker government. On 26 March 1969, he announced his mission in the following words:
- [*see AMA Muhith page 178*]
- The role that he envisaged for himself as a caretaker was further explained on 10 April 1969 in a press conference. He said, "My sole aim is to protect the life, liberty and property of people and put the administration back on the rails".
- He was not resisting the national urge for a democratic government. He only wanted to clean the administration, restore law and order in the country and then go ahead with elections and establishment of a democracy. He played his role of delaying the success of democratic forces very well. In the first couple of months, he made some major changes in the top administration positioning a number of Bangalee officials in senior positions of national and provincial government. Then came the new Education Policy followed by the new Labor Policy.

*...continue*

- On 28 July 1969, four months after his assumption of office Yahya Khan made the first move in fulfillment of his stated mission of transferring power to people. He asked political leaders to come up with ideas and some consensus on the constitutional system for the country. He listed three unresolved issues for special attention. He announced the appointment of Justice A Sattar, a Supreme Court Judge, as the Chief Election Commissioner and authorized him to go ahead with preparation of electoral rolls and other arrangements for holding general elections in the country.
- This was a very significant move as positive steps were taken for the first time for holding elections at some yet unspecified date.
- Four months after his July statement Yahya made his most significant speech on 28 November 1969. in this he announced the plan for transfer of power. He indicated four options under which power could be transferred: a) A constitution convention could be elected to give the country a constitution which would then govern the political life of the country; b) The Constitution of 1956 could be revised and the political system of the county would be then based on that fundamental law.; c) Yahya could himself frame a constitution and hold referendum on it; as accepted that constitution would guide the destiny of the people; or d) a provisional legal framework could be prepared under which general elections could be held, a constitution could be framed and powers could be assumed by people's representatives based on that.

*...continue*

- Yahya announced that he personally favored the fourth option and accordingly was making ready a provisional legal framework by 31 March 1970.
- He then gave his assessment of views on the three major issues facing the country. He announced that one unit in West Pakistan would be dissolved and general elections would be based on the principle of 'one man one vote'. Yahya also made an attempt to accommodate the East Pakistanis by abolishing the principle of parity, thereby hoping that greater share in the assembly would redress their wounded ethnic regional pride. He further announced that that resumption of political activities would be allowed beginning 1 January 1970.
- Yahya Khan issued President's Order 1 and 2 on 30 March 1970. PO 1 provided for the dissolution of West Pakistan as one single province and constitution of four new provinces. PO 2 was the introduction of Legal Framework Order which laid down the composition of the National Assembly of 313 seats and five provincial assemblies.
- The Legal Framework Order laid down 5 October 1970 as the date of election for the National Assembly. The Provincial Assemblies however would not be functional till the authentication of the constitution. The National Assembly would be constituted on the day it would be summoned by the President. The 120 day period for constitution-making would then start.

*...continue*

	National Assembly			Provincial Assembly		
Province	General	Women	Total	General	Women	Total
East Pakistan	162	7	169	300	10	310
The Punjab	82	3	85	180	6	186
Sind	27	1	28	60	2	62
North West Frontier	18	1	19	40	2	42
Baluchistan	4	1	5	20	1	21
Centrally Administered Tribal Areas	7	0	7	0	0	
Total	300	13	313	600	21	621

*...continue*

- However, the constitution-making had to be completed not only within the prescribed time-frame but also in a manner so as to secure Presidential authentication. If he refused to authenticate the Constitution Bill, the Assembly would stand dissolved.
- While the preparation along with the campaigning for the election was going on Yahya on 15 August 1970 postponed the election till 7 December 1970 in view of the unprecedented flood situation in East Pakistan. Both the Awami League and the People's Party opposed postponement but as the last resort expected that no further postponement would take place.
- A second natural calamity overtook East Pakistan on the night of 12 November 1970. a cyclone hit the offshore islands and a tidal bore, some 30 feet high, swept the islands as well as the coastal areas of four districts of the country which took a toll of nearly half a million lives and affected some 5400 square miles of East Pakistan inhabited by about 5 million people.
- However, central government did not pay necessary attention to this though President Yahya Khan stopped at Dhaka on 14 November on his way back from China. He took an aerial trip of the affected areas and announced some token grants, ordered administration to meet the crisis and left for West Pakistan.

*...continue*

- News of a horrendous tragedy attracted world attention: saving the survivors was as much a problem as burying the dead. While relief goods from outside Pakistan were hurriedly being rushed to Dhaka, the Pakistan Army could not send its transport planes or helicopters to the scene for almost ten days. The local newspapers reported that relief goods were lying stacked up in Dhaka but no arrangements for air-dropping could be made for want of planes and helicopters. Instead, red-tape held up flight of relief planes into Dhaka.
- Not till 21 November could the relief agency secure two transport planes (C-130) and one helicopter from the Pakistan Armed forces. While the British Navy moved to the affected areas and took up rescue work and burial of the dead. Pakistan Army and navy were busy doing their routine exercises in Dhaka and Chittagong. American and Soviet helicopters were hovering over the area ferrying supplies long before Pakistan Air Force shook of its lethargy.
- The government of East Pakistan with its meagre financial and physical resources could not make much headway. Central government showed complete indifference in seeking and coordinating foreign assistance and funds. In spite of the pressure to declare national calamity, Pakistan government they tried to conceal the whole thing.



*...continue*

- Due to severe criticisms Yahya Khan made a visit to East Pakistan on 24 November and stayed up to 27 November which geared the relief operation. But the attitude of the army in the rural areas offended the poor villagers. They were bossy and disrespectful and had no sympathy to the grieving people. There were pledges of \$75 million as relief from world community but no interest was shown by the central government and bureaucrats in central government would not approve any program drawn up by the provincial government.
- The experience of the disaster was very bitter for the Bangalees. It emphasized once more the need for provincial autonomy. It proved that the central government was not concerned with the welfare of East Pakistan. In a press conference on 26 November in Dhaka Sheikh Mujib commented that the failure of the central government was unforgivable. He concluded that regional autonomy was the only relief to the Bangalees.
- On the next day, Yahya Khan declared that elections would be held according to schedule except in the affected areas.



# Election Campaign

- The continuous public meetings of the Awami League in East Pakistan and the Pakistan Peoples Party in Western Pakistan attracted huge crowds. The then leaders of Pakistan, all from West Pakistan and PPP leaders, strongly opposed the idea of an East Pakistani-led government. Many in Pakistan predicted that the Awami League-controlled government would oversee the passage of a new constitution with a simple majority. Bhutto uttered his infamous phrase "idhar hum, udhar tum" (We rule here, you rule there) – thus dividing the Pakistan first time orally.
- The same attitudes and emotions were also felt in East Pakistan whereas East-Pakistanis absorbed the feeling and reached to the conclusion that Pakistan had been benefited with economic opportunities, investments, and social growth would swiftly depose any East Pakistanis from obtaining those opportunities.
- Some Bengalis sided with the Pakistan Peoples' Party and had voiced no support for the Awami League, supporting tacitly or openly Bhutto and the democratic socialists, such as Jalaludin Abdur Rahim, an influential Bengali in Pakistan and mentor of Bhutto who was later thrown into jail by Bhutto, and Ghulam Azam of the Jamaat-e-Islami in East Pakistan.

# Elections of 1970-1971

- The first nationwide elections in Pakistan were held during December 1970 and January 1971. On 7 December 1970 election to 291 National Assembly seats were held all over Pakistan except in 9 constituencies in cyclone-affected areas of East Pakistan. These postponed elections were completed on 17 January 1971.
- For the National Assembly some 1570 candidates contested. A few days before the election National Progressive League and National Awami Party of Maulana Bhasani boycotted the election. They argued for independent East Pakistan based on the Pakistan Resolution of 1940, i.e. the Lahore Resolution.
- In the National Assembly elections, the votes cast were 57% in East Pakistan, 69% in the Punjab, 60% in Sind, 48% in North West Frontier Province and 40% in Baluchistan. The elections were held peacefully and Yahya himself congratulated the voters for that.
- In East Pakistan, the results were straight forward. The country voted for Six-point Program of Awami League and demonstrate its total confidence in Sheikh Mujib. Out of 162 National Assembly seats, the Awami League won 160 seats and out of 300 Provincial Assembly seats it got 288 seats.

*...continue*

- 82% of the votes cast were in favor of Awami League and as a result most other candidates lost their deposit money. The two non-Awami League members who won National Assembly seats were Nurul Amin—the venerable leader of Pakistan Democratic Party—and Raja Tridiv Roy—an independent leader of the tribes of CHT. Nurul Amin was committed to provincial autonomy of modified scale and Raja Tridiv Roy sought Awami League nomination and failing to secure it had contested the election as independent candidate. However, Awami League did not get any seat in any other provinces.
- In West Pakistan, PPP won majority seats in Punjab and Sind. Wali Khan's National Awami Party did well in Baluchistan and shared the glory with Qayyum Muslim League equally. In total, PPP won 83 seats out of 138 West Pakistani in the National Assembly, 113 out of 180 seats in the Punjab Provincial Assembly and 3 out of 40 seats in the North West Frontier Provincial Assembly.

## *Result of National Assembly*

Party	Seats
Awami League	160+7
Pakistan Peoples Party	83+5
Jamaat-e-Islami	4
Council Muslim League	7
Muslim League (Qayyum)	9
Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam	7
Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan	7
Convention Muslim League	2
National Awami Party (W)	6+1
Pakistan Democratic Party	1
Other parties	0
Independents	14
Total	300+13

## *Result of Provincial Assembly*

Party	Seats
Awami League	288
Pakistan Democratic Party	2
National Awami Party (Wali)	1
Jamaat-e-Islami	1
Others	1
Independent	7
Total	300