

Under pressure, Pakistan's Zia ups the ante against the opposition

by Ramtanu Maitra

Pakistan's President Zia ul-Haq, facing a wave of political violence two months before his scheduled visit to Washington, has prepared a new wave of repression to preserve the military dictatorship that has ruled since 1977. A series of "laws" has been enacted imposing the death penalty for any offense liable to cause "insecurity, fear or despondency among the public," and establishing the principle that a suspect is guilty until he proves himself innocent.

Highlighting the tension between the Pakistani population and the hated dictatorship is the battle over the request by Nusrat Bhutto, the Pakistan Peoples Party leader and widow of Premier Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, for permission to travel to Europe for urgent medical treatment. So far the authorities have stonewalled on the request, recently announcing that a team of Pakistani medical doctors would be chosen to examine her before any official decision is taken. Privately Mrs. Bhutto has communicated her belief that Zia wants to see her die. She is suffering from complications arising from her prolonged imprisonment under Zia's rule.

Meanwhile, the internal political situation has taken an extremely violent turn. In September two of President Zia's close associates were assassinated. Zahoor Hasan Bhopali, a lifetime associate of Zia and lynchpin backer of the dictatorship, was gunned down in broad daylight in his Karachi office. Jabril Siddique, another adviser and member of Zia's hand-picked Parliament, the Majlis-e-shoora, died a week later in what the Pakistani government described as a "road accident."

Throughout this period, Zia's associates—including U.S. ambassador to Pakistan Ronald Spiers, an unequivocal supporter of Zia's regime—have been allegedly receiving death threats. Both Interior Minister Mahmood Haroon, a representative of one of the "22 families" of Pakistan's oligarchy, and Majlis-e-shoora Chairman Khwaja Safdar, have been served death threats. Safdar's house in Sialkot was bombed, but Safdar escaped unharmed.

Zia, according to many in Pakistan, is using the death threats as a pretext, and has responded by upping the terror. Having long since banned all political activities in Pakistan, by the end of September President Zia imposed two more

regulations tightening the repression. The first called for provision of weapons licenses for all Zia associates, a move to make vigilantism against Zia opponents an official part of the military dictatorship. The second set of dictates provides for court-martial and the death penalty for political prisoners and others arrested for armed robbery, terrorist acts, and subversive activities—defined as anything which tends to "disrupt administrative work". These laws are retroactive to 1977, the year Gen. Zia overthrew Bhutto in a coup, and place the onus on the accused for proving his or her own innocence.

Copies of a letter sent to President Reagan by a group of young Pakistani military officers urging the American president to terminate aid to Pakistan's ruling junta has also been circulated widely within Pakistan. Apparently written in anticipation of Zia's planned December state visit to Washington, the letter, according to reports in a foreign news agency, described the Zia regime as one that has been "trampling on the human rights of our people for almost five years." The letter stated that General Zia had unleashed "an unprecedented campaign of annihilation of the best minds in Pakistan society," and alleged that since January 1981 alone more than 15,000 persons had been imprisoned as dissidents. All but 50 teachers at Karachi University, the letter stated, have either been dismissed or put into prison.

Indeed, Zia's rule is destroying Pakistan in more than one way. Drug trafficking into foreign countries as well as drug abuse within Pakistan have reached new, dangerous proportions. Recently a five-day international conference on drug abuse sponsored by the United Nations in Quetta, Pakistan, expressed its "deep concern" at the continued escalation in drug use and heroin addiction in Pakistan in particular, and recommended both short-term and long-term measures to reverse this. Critics of the Zia regime, pointing out that the proceedings of the conference were blacked out of the Pakistani media, note that the Zia regimes's claim that it lacks authority to control opium production in the tribal areas of the country is a fraud. As *EIR* has extensively documented, Pakistan's drug problem starts with Zia himself and his close associates, whose pockets are lined with the proceeds of the international narcotics trade.