

From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

Zia lifts martial law in Pakistan

It is part of a grand plan which may or may not be merely a paper scheme.

Finally, General Zia ul-Haq, the President of Pakistan, did as he promised when he seized power in a 1977 coup. On Dec. 30, he lifted martial law in Pakistan, amending the 8½-years-old martial law order to transfer powers to the prime minister, Mr. Mohammed Khan Junejo.

It certainly can't be called a restoration of democracy, the demand of the opposition spearheaded by the outlawed Pakistan People's Party, founded by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the man General Zia overthrew. But it is part of General Zia's plan to fashion an alternative, what he calls "Islamic democracy" in Pakistan. One cannot fault the meticulous persistence with which General Zia has pursued his plan. It remains to be seen if what looks credible on paper as a political step-up will actually take root in the soil.

The lifting of martial law culminated a series of maneuvers begun a year ago when elections to constitute a new parliament were held simultaneously with a referendum which established General Zia as President until 1990. The controversial elections, boycotted by the 11-member opposition coalition, the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD), were held on a non-party basis to elect the 237 member national assembly.

Then, in October, the partyless assembly cast the first of two critical pieces of legislation to pave the way for lifting of martial law—the so-called Indemnity Bill, a constitutional amendment which pardoned the 1977 coup and validated most of the martial

law orders General Zia had issued since then.

To allow consensus passage of the bill, Zia accepted a compromise limiting the right he had conferred on himself as President to dissolve the assembly, and acceded to the election of the prime ministers and chief ministers of the provinces after 1988. Appointment of the provincial governors, it was further agreed, would be made in consultation with the prime minister and not at the President's sole discretion.

Zia had earlier dropped his plan to create a national security council of five army chiefs, six civilians, and the appointed chief ministers to act as a super authority in case of constitutional breakdown. He had also bowed to several other compromises, including withdrawing the demand that MPs approve without consideration the government Political Parties Act, which provides for the revival of political parties in the country.

Compromises notwithstanding, General Zia remains in a position of overwhelming control through at least 1990, and he has managed to further his goal of destroying the PPP, the largest opposition party which is a professedly secular party. The Political Parties Act ultimately passed in November permits the revival of political parties, but only through a process of registration to begin one year hence, in which many exacting criteria are to be met. One such criterion is the requirement that the parties' operation is in no way prejudicial to Is-

lamic ideology.

But while the general has managed not to drown, he hasn't exactly begun swimming yet. His dilemmas are several, as indicated in the apparent attempt to revive the Muslim League as the ruling political party of the land. The group has been moribund since 1958, when Ayub Khan established the first of Pakistan's martial-law regimes. That individuals associated with the Muslim League did well in partyless assembly elections boycotted by the active major parties a year ago does not speak for its viability or credibility as a political vehicle. Less so when one considers the deep-rooted if not well-led opposition ranging from the PPP to the Muslim fundamentalists of the Jamaat-i-Islami.

In the vacuum, the forces of fragmentation and fanaticism dig in. Although the Muslim fundamentalists—of the Jamaat-i-Islami—were rather decisively defeated in the assembly elections, their role as guardians of the faith, which General Zia purports to be enshrining in the state, and their potential to act as a conveyor belt for the surges of mullah-ism in the neighborhood, makes them a potentially explosive force.

The fundamentalists, have, for instance, joined cause with the secularists of the MRD to challenge Zia's insistence incorporated in the Indemnity Bill that no activity of the assembly is subject to judicial review—not even to the judgment of the Supreme Shariat Court.

The PPP has admittedly been set back, and is now reportedly threatened with a split. But the result will tend to be a devolution toward greater accommodation with localist, separatist tendencies which have already gained significant ground in the Sind and Baluch "liberation" movements.