**South Asian politics in the 1970s: Part - II**

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In the first part of this article, we looked at some of the differences and similarities in the politics of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan from the early to mid-seventies. Here we look at the steps of Z A Bhutto, Indira Gandhi, and Mujib ur Rahman in 1975.

After the Fourth Amendment was introduced in Bangladesh by the Mujib government in January 1975, Z A Bhutto followed suit in February 1975, and the National Assembly passed the bill for terrorists’ trial by special courts. Then the main opposition, the National Awami Party (NAP) led by Abdul Wali Khan was banned and declared illegal.

Within a couple of days, the Third Amendment to the constitution of Pakistan was passed, curtailing the rights of detainees, and extending the powers of detaining authorities. The safeguards against preventive detention were reduced and the period for preventive detention was extended from one month to three months without production before a review board. Now in Pakistan any person could be detained indefinitely if he was acting or attempting to act in a manner prejudicial to the integrity, security, or defence of Pakistan. In 1975, almost the same things were happening in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

After the Fifth Amendment in the Bangladesh constitution, Mujib limited the powers of the legislative and judicial branches and established an executive presidency with a one-party system. That one political party was called Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (Baksal) which all members of parliament were obliged to join. Now Mujib was emerging as a villain rather than a hero. He had waged a struggle against General Ayub Khan’s presidential system and now himself had manipulated his own constitution to make it even worse than the 1962 constitution made by a military dictator.

In India, in June 1975, Indira Gandhi invoked Article 352 of the Indian constitution which gave her extraordinary powers. Now just like Bhutto and Mujib had done in Bangladesh and Pakistan, the state had the authority to take any action but the people had no recourse. Thousands of people from the opposition were arrested and put behind bars without a trial. Almost at the same time the Bhutto government also amended the Code of Criminal Procedure and prohibited the courts from granting bail before arrest to a person unless a case was registered against him.

In Pakistan, such bails before arrest were a safeguard for political workers to save themselves from victimization. A court could approve such bails even if no case had been registered but if a victim nonetheless anticipated that a case would be filed and he would be arrested before approaching the court.

Now, a million dollar question: what was the reaction of the army and the judiciary to all this in the three countries? Well, in Bangladesh, a 40-year-old General K M Shafiullah was the army chief; he ignored the resentment in the army and tried to keep aloof from politics but could not control the impending revolt.

In India, the army chief was 55-year-old General T N Raina who was reportedly asked by PM Indira Gandhi to provide army help during the emergency. General Raina managed to keep the army out of politics. In Pakistan, 60-year-old General Tikka Khan was a favourite of Bhutto. As army chief, he had offered unconditional support to Bhutto in the military operation in Balochistan. So, while in Bangladesh the army was increasingly getting restless and factionalized, in India and Pakistan the armies had more coherent structures – though their approaches to politics greatly differed.

As for the judiciary in Bangladesh, 60-year-old Abu Sayem was the chief justice; he remained away from politic, but three months after Mujib’s assassination sided with the army and became president. In India, 63-year-old Justice A N Ray was the chief justice whose appointment by Indira Gandhi was highly controversial as he was rewarded by the PM for his dissenting opinion regarding the Basic Constitutional Structure. His appointment had superseded three senior judges of the Supreme Court of India and was viewed as an attack on the independence of the judiciary; of course, he remained loyal to the PM Indira Gandhi.

In Pakistan, Justice Hamoodur Rahman was chief justice from 1969 to 1975. When the NAP case was heard in the Supreme Court of Pakistan, Justice Hamoodur Rahman – who had earned a respectable name in his judicial career and as head of the Hamoodur Rahman Commission – for some mysterious reasons overruled Wali Khan’s objections against two judges on the bench who were well-known for their proximity with Z A Bhutto. It is surprising that a judge of Rahman’s calibre – who hailed from East Pakistan and had closely observed the consequences of declaring political leaders traitors – was unable to see the ruse in Bhutto’s machinations.

In Bangladesh, an important factor for the army restiveness was the perceived differences in treatment with the three distinct groups: former Mukti Bahini soldiers who had been inducted into the army, the former rebel soldiers who had revolted against the state and joined the liberation war, and finally the soldiers who were stranded in Pakistan during the war and did not participate in the fight. The last group was looked down upon as they were considered by many as parasites who were enjoying the fruits of liberation without actually fighting for it.

In August 1975, a small group of mid-level officers attacked their all-powerful president and assassinated Mujib along with his three sons and their families. Only two daughters who were out of the country survived, one of them being Hasina Wajid who has now become the longest-serving prime minister of Bangladesh. A former Mujib associate and senior cabinet minister, Khondaker Mushtaque, headed the new government. His immediate initiation of critical changes in Mujib’s policies and rules of business in government, show that he must have been a complicit in the coup and its planning.

The revolt of mid-level officers and the inability of army chief General Shafiullah to do anything about it highlighted the deep fissures in the Bangladesh army. Apparently, the deputy chief of army staff, Maj-General Ziaur Rahman also didn’t know about the coup but as the later events proved, he also must have been part of the conspiracy, as the new president Mushtaque was able to remove army chief Shafiullah and appoint deputy chief Zia as the new head of the army. During his regime, four national leaders and Mujib loyalists were also killed. They were: former acting president, Nazrul Islam; two former PMs, Tajuddin and Mansur Ali; and former president of Awami League and cabinet minister, Qaruzzaman.

Was the entire army against Mujib, and sided with Mushtaq and Zia? No, the chief of general staff, Brigadier Khalid Mosharraf was not happy. Just one month after the coup, President Mushtaque promulgated an Indemnity Ordinance in parliament’s absence. It blocked any legal or any other proceedings against the killers and those who were involved in proclaiming martial law. This enraged Brigadier Khalid Mosharraf who mobilized pro-Mujib army units to overthrow the Mushtaque regime in the first week of November, 1975.

Army chief Zia was arrested, and Mosharraf promoted himself from brigadier to major-general and appointed himself army chief. Mosharraf kept Zia safe and appointed Justice Abu Sayem as the new president; both steps proved fatal errors of judgment. Just three days after the coup, on November 7, 1975, the anti-Mujib camp struck back and killed Mosharraf and his associates, released army chief Ziaur Rahman, who asked Justice Abu Sayem to continue as president. That’s how the story of pro-Mujib Mosharraf and anti-Mujib Mushtaque ended. And General Ziaur Rahman became the primary beneficiary of all the coups and bloodsheds.

Next week, we will discuss the differences and similarities in the rise of the two Zias in Bangladesh and Pakistan and what they learnt from each other, just like Bhutto and Mujib had done earlier. We will also have a look at the fall and rise of Indira Gandhi in India from 1977 to 1980.

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