

PAKISTAN: A LITTLE Hope

BY WERNER ADAM

Islamabad: In quick succession President Yahya Khan has pushed through a series of positive measures to relieve frustrations over the rebellious eastern wing: a civilian governor has replaced General Tikka Khan, a new martial law administrator has been appointed, some restrictions on the press have been cautiously lifted, and a general "amnesty" declared. An official spokesman cited these as evidence of the president's continuing desire to restore democracy and facilitate transfer of power.

The new governor of the troubled province, 66-year-old Dr Abdul Motaleb Malik, was born at Kushtia, East Bengal. An optometrist by profession and married to an Austrian, he shares the distinction of being one of the stalwarts of the labour movement in British India with India's President Giri: After the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 he served the new Moslem state alternating as minister and ambassador in Europe, China, Southeast Asia and Australia. Under the present regime he has held the portfolio of health, labour, works and social welfare from August 1969 to February 1971 and served as acting head of state during Yahya's absence. In July, he was appointed special assistant for refugees to supervise and co-ordinate relief and rehabilitation operations in East Pakistan. When Malik took over his new post on September 3, he was also given the job of recommending ministerial appointments for the president's approval. Dr Malik will share power with General Abdullah Niazi who has been appointed martial law administrator. Niazi was commander of field operations during the military campaign in the eastern wing. It remains to be seen however whether he or Malik will have the last say in East Pakistan's affairs -- especially since West Pakistani troops are still facing grim resistance from the Bengali guerilla movement supported by India.

It is uncertain whether the East Pakistanis will co-operate with the civilian government -- particularly as the trial in their absence by a military tribunal of 72 Awami League members elected to parliament in the November elections is bound to create further resentment among Bengalis.

Informed sources predict that in the light of the latest decision, civilian governors will also be appointed in the four provinces of West Pakistan. The leader of the PPP (Pakistan People's Party), Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, has been pressing the president for a transfer of power, but the final decision may have to wait until the new constitution is prepared.

Any eventual transfer of power is likely to rest in the western provinces on the political balance reflected in last November's election results -- which gave the PPP a majority in Punjab and Sind. Qayyum Khan's Moslem League enjoys strong support in the Northwest Frontier province and Wali Khan's NAP (National Awami Party) emerged as the winner in Baluchistan. The choice of civilian governors would also have to mirror political loyalties to some extent.

Meanwhile, Pakistan appears to have recovered from its first shock over the treaty of friendship between India and the Soviet Union. Though not yet sure of its future implications, government circles in Islamabad are now believed to have discovered in it some positive elements for Pakistan. They argue that the pact is contradictory; India hoped it had won Russia's backing in supporting the guerilla force in East Pakistan, while actually its manoeuvrability had been restricted.

One foreign office official commented that despite their similarity of views on the need for a political solution to the East Bengal crisis, the Soviet Union clearly had no interest at all in a subcontinental war and was likely to urge India to tread carefully. But finally to dispel Pakistan's anxieties about the Indo-Soviet treaty Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Sultan Mohammed Khan intends to visit Moscow later this month. The sultan was invited to Moscow before the Indian-Soviet treaty was signed. The acceptance of this invitation indicates Islamabad will avoid entering into a policy of confrontation with Moscow as recommended by the press and ex-foreign minister Bhutto immediately after the pact was concluded. The military regime undoubtedly was taken by surprise but adopted a wait-and-see attitude. The foreign secretary has made it known that he will not ask the Russians for a similar pact with Pakistan when he visits Moscow; nor will the government sign a defence treaty with China.

Diplomatic circles in Islamabad believe the treaty will make India and Pakistan think twice before risking open war. But whether the treaty really is a safety factor is an open question as long as East Pakistan continues to blaze.

A. Hariharan writes from New Delhi: The green, red and gold Bangla Desh flag went up formally over New Delhi on August 30. Heading the new Bangla Desh mission is a former Pakistani diplomat here, K. M. Shehabuddin.

The event was followed by further desertions from the official Pakistan high commission in New Delhi, where the Bangla Desh mission says some 20 families have been held virtual prisoners since last March. Some of these have been brutally beaten up by security officers, it is alleged.

None of this would have caused a ripple in political circles in New Delhi but for the wide publicity given to President Yahya Khan's tirades against India and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. In an interview with *Le Figaro*, widely reported here, he said: "I shall not meet her. If I meet her I will ask her to shut up or leave us alone. She is neither a woman nor a statesman, though she wants to be both." Understandably, there was dismay here that a man who claimed he was the first and last soldier should have become so unchivalrous.

September is always a month of great anxiety in India, but especially so this year. It is remembered that it was in September, when the monsoon rains stop and the flood waters recede, that Pakistan made a bid for Kashmir in 1965. And in spite of the recent Indo-Soviet treaty, which is described here as a deterrent to Pakistani adventurism, India fears Yahya may make a fresh attempt to seize Kashmir in the hope that success would enable him to write off East Bengal and save face. Against this possibility, Indian defence forces have been put on a state of alert and the army in Kashmir considerably strengthened.

But anxiety over the possibility of war has so far not given way to panic. Mrs Gandhi has not cancelled her scheduled foreign tour in October and November and the sturdy Jat peasants in Punjab are still cultivating every inch of their land along the Indo-Pakistan frontier.