

History

As an entity, Pakistan dates back only to 1947. However, modern day Pakistan formed an important part of the Indus valley civilization that flourished over 5,000 years ago and covered an area that stretched from the present day Delhi in the east and Gujarat in south to large chunks of Sindh province of Pakistan in the west and parts of today's Jammu and Kashmir in the north.

The civilization, best known by its city centers of Harappa, Mohen-jo-daro and Lothal, was an impressive civilization. It was especially well known for its town planning and science and technology, which made it the most advanced human civilization of the period, which had also seen Egyptian, Sumerian and Chinese civilizations. And unlike its contemporary civilizations, the Indian civilization was by far the largest civilization, spread over an area that extended from the borders of Iran in the west right up to eastern India on the east.

The civilization is believed to have possessed the best architectural and town planning skills. The towns had broad and straight streets, flanked by houses built of burnt brick on either side. The houses had an open courtyard, private wells and bathrooms. The drainage systems of the towns are amongst the most striking features of this civilization. Pottery pipes attached to the outer walls of the houses carried the wastewater and refuse from the houses to the large street drains, made of stone and carefully cemented and waterproofed with asphalt. Even the common bath and wash facilities like public tanks were lined properly in order to avoid water leaching.

The civilization boasted of several ports and had contacts with various parts of the world. This is borne out by the discovery of Indus valley civilization coins and pieces around the world, especially in West and Central Asia and southern Europe.

However, the civilization suddenly ceased to exist. Scientists are still debating the possible causes—which could be a sudden natural calamity like a devastating flood or an earthquake. After the civilization came the Indo-Aryans—the race that is the origin of almost the entire population of today's Europe and south Asia. It was during this period that some of the oldest surviving works of Indian literature and religious scripture were composed. Principally, the Rig Veda, recognized as the oldest book in the world. The Indo-Aryan civilization, too, kept up the contacts with the outside world. The civilization, like its predecessor was flourishing and hence often invited unwelcome attention from invading forces, attracted by the stories of India's wealth. Towards the end of 500 B.C.E., the northwestern part of India became susceptible to attacks from the enemies. Due to the Himalayas in the north and the sea all around south and deep jungles on the east, the Indian subcontinent was vulnerable to foreign attacks only from the northwestern part, fact that had led to several drastic changes in the history of this region. In 522 B.C.E., Persian Emperor Darius I became the first foreigner king to lead an attack on India and he captured Punjab and Sindh relatively easily. The relatively small region was however extremely critical for the Persians, because of its contribution of 10 tonnes of gold each year as tribute to the Persian Empire. A great Indian city of Takshashila became the capital of the Indian territory under Darius I's reign.

For over 200 years, the area remained under nominal Persian control, however, around 330 B.C.E., the Greek Emperor Alexander defeated the Persian King Darius III and took control of the Persian Empire. He, too, was attracted to India and in 326 B.C.E. he entered Punjab. Alexander managed to capture chunks of Punjab; however, his travel weary army soon tired of the wars and mutinied, forcing Alexander to return to Greece.

By this time, however, Takshashila formed part of a powerful Indian Empire, the Magadha

Empire, which had Patliputra in present day's Bihar as its capital. Chandragupta took over the reigns of Magadha in 321 B.C.E., founding a new Mauryan Dynasty. His army was one of the strongest contemporary armies and rapidly captured several areas that had been under the control of the Persians or Greeks for some decades. When Alexander's successor Seleukus tried to recapture the lost territories, he was defeated swiftly and completely in a battle that drove him back all the way to Syria. Once again, the Hindukush Mountains in the northwest became the external boundaries of India. Chandragupta also constructed a huge road, the Royal Road, which extended all the way from Takshashila to Patliputra, covering a distance of nearly 2,000 km (1,400 miles).

But India's northwestern region remained vulnerable to foreign attacks. In the second century B.C.E., Greeks from Bactria, who were in turn displaced by Scythians or Sakas from Central Asia around 80 B.C.E., captured the area. The next major attack came over six centuries later when Huns from Central Asia went on a rampage, capturing large chunks of northwestern subcontinent.

In the early eighth century, the Arabs invaded Sindh province and captured it. The province was under Arab rule for nearly three centuries. In the beginning of the 11th century, northern Sindh fell to Mahmud of Ghazni, the Turkish ruler, while southern Sindh was ruled by Hindu kings from Rajputana and Gujarat. Ghazni, who had no interest in capturing India, raided the country several times and destroyed cities, while carrying away a lot of wealth from the country. Muhammed Ghauri, who now occupied the throne at Ghazni, followed him in 1173.

The Arab conquest of Sindh also marked the first Islamic influence in India. The Arabs and the Turks who followed them were quick to convert their subjects to Islam and after several centuries of Islamic rule, the area had a Muslim majority. For almost five centuries various Islamic kings from various parts of Central and West Asia continued to raid India, lured by its wealth. And a disunited India, ruled by several kings of small kingdoms, could not resist the attacks, which not only left large cities and villages devastated but also saw Indian wealth go into foreign hands.

This trend, however, came to an end in the early 13th century, with the establishment of a Muslim Dynasty in Delhi. The founder was Qutub ud din Aibak, a former slave who rose to become a general in Muhammed Ghauri's army. A succession of Islamic kings followed for the next three centuries, till the arrival of the Mughals in the early 16th century. Babar, the first Mughal emperor, is supposed to have originated from the present day Afghanistan and established the Mughal Kingdom in 1526 C.E. For almost three centuries, Mughal emperors ruled almost all of India and also recaptured the parts in northwest that had been taken over by Turkish or other invaders. Unlike the other Islamic rulers before them, the Mughals really made India their home and contributed significantly to the country's architecture and literature.

It was during the Mughal rule that the first Europeans stepped on Indian soil and established their posts. British traders arrived in South Asia in 1601 and established themselves in the east at Calcutta. The Mughal Empire continued until the middle of the 19th century, by which time the British and other foreign powers had started conquering chunks of India. By 1830, almost all of India was under the British control. By the early 20th century, firm signs of an independence struggle had clearly emerged all over the country.

The British, realizing the difficulties of holding on to India, tried to divide the independence movement. In 1905, under the pretext that the state was too big to be governed properly, they divided the eastern state of Bengal, which was spearheading the independence movement. The division was clearly on the religious lines with eastern Bengal being Muslim dominated while the western part had largely a Hindu population. The British had hoped that by sowing seeds of division between the two of the biggest communities of India, they would be able to prolong their rule. They were helped to some extent by the fears of some extremists in both the Hindu as well as the Muslim camps. Concerns about a Hindu dominated Indian National Congress, the freedom movement's foremost organization, led some Muslim leaders to form the all-India Muslim League in 1906. However, many of the most notable Muslim leaders stayed with the Congress.

Documents dating back to the late 19th century show the British strategy had been in the making for sometime. Lord Dufferin, the secretary of state in London, advised the British viceroy of India between 1884 and 1888 that “the division of religious feelings is greatly to our advantage,” and that he expected “some good as a result of your committee of inquiry on Indian education and on teaching material.” A few years later, Lord Curzon (governor general of India 1895-99 and viceroy 1899-1904) was told by the secretary of state for India, George Francis Hamilton, that they “should so plan the educational text books that the differences between community and community are further strengthened.”

But it was with the creation of the Muslim League that the British saw their best chance to extend their rule in India, which was becoming a difficult prospect. The military and economic pressures of the World War I made the British departure imminent. But the British exploited divisions between the Hindus and Muslims to the hilt, sowing the seeds of the idea of an independent Muslim country to cater to the needs in the mid-1920s.

In the 1930s, the Muslim League, under the leadership of its highly ambitious leader Mohammed Ali Jinnah began talking of being the sole representative of the Indian Muslims, even though it had not won any popular vote to prove its credentials. In fact, the 1937 elections led to a humiliation of the Muslim League at the hands of the Congress all over India, including the Muslim majority parts.

However, almost a decade long propaganda of hatred and fear -- by extremists on both sides -- began to show its affects in the 1940s, during the Quit India Movement launched by the Congress between 1942 and 1945. The League told the Muslim elites in the Muslim majority states that they would be denied all rights in a Hindu dominated India and that only they -- the Muslim League -- could guarantee their rights as Muslims. And in the 1945 provincial elections, the league ended up with almost half the seats in Bengal and it gained in Punjab, winning as many as the Unionist Party—comprising people of all religious beliefs—and pushing the Congress to the third place.

It is also noteworthy that several important Islamic theologians were against partition. Maulana Madani undertook a whirlwind tour to campaign against the league. And representatives of the Muslim working class were also against partition. The Ansari Muslims (weavers by profession) who were very politically conscious and well organized in the northern India publicly demonstrated against the league’s partition resolution. These ought to have weakened the claim of Muslim League that it was the sole representative of the Muslims in India. But the British, by now actually eager to get out of India, accepted the league as the sole representative of the Muslims.

In June 1945 India became a charter member of the United Nations. In the same month the British government issued a white paper on the Indian situation. However, the proposals closely resembled those, which had been rejected by both the Congress and the league. Another deadlock developed and during the second half of 1945 a new wave of anti-British riots and outbursts swept over India. Three representatives of the British government made another attempt to negotiate an agreement with Indian leaders in the spring of 1946. Although the Muslim League temporarily withdrew its demands for the partition of India along religious lines, insuperable differences developed with respect to the character of an interim government. The negotiations were fruitless, and in June the British viceroy Archibald Wavell announced the formation of an emergency “caretaker” government. An interim executive council, headed by Congress’ Jawaharlal Nehru and representative of all major political groups except the Muslim League, replaced this government in September. In the next month the Muslim League agreed to participate in the new government. Nonetheless, communal strife between Muslims and Hindus increased in various parts of India.

By the end of 1946 the political situation in the subcontinent was on the brink of anarchy. The

British prime minister, Clement R. Atlee, announced in February 1947 that his government would relinquish power in India not later than June 30, 1948. According to the announcement, the move would be made whether or not the political factions of India agreed on a constitution before that time. Political tension mounted in India following the announcement, creating grave possibilities of a disastrous Hindu-Muslim civil war. After consultations with Indian leaders, Louis Mountbatten, who succeeded Wavell as viceroy in March 1947, recommended immediate partition of India to the British government as the only means of averting catastrophe. A bill incorporating Mountbatten's recommendations was introduced into the British Parliament on July 4; it obtained speedy and unanimous approval in both houses of Parliament. Under the provisions of this enactment, termed the Indian Independence Act, which became effective on Aug. 15, 1947, India and Pakistan were established as independent nations within the Commonwealth of Nations, with the right to withdraw from or remain within the Commonwealth.

The new states of India and Pakistan were created along religious lines. Areas inhabited predominantly by Hindus were allocated to India and those with a predominantly Muslim population were allocated to Pakistan. Because the overwhelming majority of the people of the Indian subcontinent are Hindus, partition resulted in the inclusion within the Union of India, as the country was then named, of most of the 562 princely states in existence prior to Aug. 15, 1947, as well as the majority of the British provinces and parts of three of the remaining provinces.

Consequently, a bifurcated Muslim nation separated by more than 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) of Indian territory emerged when Pakistan became an independent country on 14 Aug. 1947. West Pakistan comprised the contiguous Muslim-majority districts of present-day Pakistan; East Pakistan consisted of a single province, which, after gaining independence following a revolution in 1971, is now Bangladesh. But the two sides—the Congress and the Muslim League were unable to come to any agreement over the status of the highly contentious state of Jammu and Kashmir. The issue was left unresolved at the time of the partition, leaving it up to the Maharaja of J and K to take a decision on whether to merge with Pakistan or remain with India.

The Maharaja of Kashmir was reluctant to make a decision on accession to either Pakistan or India. Armed incursions into the state by tribesmen from the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), however, led him to seek military assistance from India. The Maharaja signed accession papers in October 1947 and allowed Indian troops into much of the state. The government of Pakistan refused to recognize the accession and campaigned to reverse the decision. To this day, the status of Kashmir remains in dispute. (See discussion under "Foreign Relations" in this review).

Pakistan's history as a nation is full of political instability, blamed largely on ambitious generals of a very powerful army who have never really let go of their iron grip on all the aspects of the Pakistani society. When the military has not been in power, it has never been far away from it either. The instability in Pakistan began almost with the independence. The death of its founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah in September 1948 was the first shock and it also robbed Pakistan of an almost mythical figure who had for the last two decades been the sole leader and dictator of the Muslim League. Jinnah's death left a power vacuum that was never really filled, at least by a popular vote.

Jinnah's death was followed in 1951 by the assassination of the Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan pushing the country deeper into the mire of instability. The year also saw two attempts coups by the Pakistan army, popularly referred to as the "Rawalpindi Conspiracy." The situation led to the imposition of Martial Law in Pakistan in 1953, the first time that the army had bared its teeth in the newly formed nation, which, unfortunately, was setting the tone of the things to come. Things seemed to improve with the restoration of a civil administration within a year and in 1956 Pakistan had its first constitution. However, barely a year later, the civilian government was thrown out and generals took control of the administration. On Oct. 7, 1958, President Iskander Mirza, under pressure from the army, suspended the 1956 constitution, imposed martial law and canceled the elections scheduled for January 1959. Twenty days later the military sent Mirza into exile in

Britain, and General Mohammad Ayub Khan assumed control of a military dictatorship. Thus began the first direct rule by a Pakistani general, a trend that repeated at various turns in the nation's history. For almost eight years, Ayub Khan kept his grip intact on both the civil society as well as the armed forces of Pakistan. He also led Pakistan into its second war with India in 1965, which began when India alleged that Pakistan was aiding and instigating armed groups to infiltrate Kashmir and attack Indian forces there. However, as in 1947-48, the Indians defeated the Pakistani army. This loss had serious consequences on the domestic politics of Pakistan. Ayub Khan's power declined sharply, leading to large-scale political and economic grievances all over the country. There were massive agitations and movements against Ayub Khan's rule and that forced his resignation in March 1969. He was succeeded by yet another general, Yahya Khan, who tried to bring a sense of normalcy in Pakistan's civil society, as well boost the morale of the military, which was still nursing its wounds of 1965.

However, Yahya Khan's tenure was not even off the ground when serious problems again engulfed Pakistan. This time, the problems were entirely internal and they were about the relations between East and West Pakistan. The relations had been uneasy ever since independence, especially due to the total domination that West Pakistan maintained over the national affairs, pushing East Pakistan, which was bigger in population, on to the sidelines.

The people in the East believed that they had been colonized once again and this time by West Pakistan. This belief stemmed from the fact the political, military and economic controls rested with West Pakistan, while the eastern part of the newly created country had literally no powers of self-governance.

The East Pakistanis were upset that not only did West Pakistan, especially the two provinces of Punjab and Sindh, dominate the political life, but also threatened the culturally different Bengalis of East Pakistan. One such highly unpopular decision was the imposition of Urdu as the national and official language of Pakistan, even though less than 10 percent of all Pakistan and below one percent of East Pakistan spoke the language. This led to a widespread belief in the East Pakistan that West Pakistan had taken up from where the British colonial rulers had left.

The only common factor between West and East was religion. Otherwise, it was an entirely different country, with a different language, culture and ethnic composition. These differences led in 1949 to the creation of Awami League by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, known widely as Mujib. The league was a party designed mainly to promote Bengali interests. Though most political parties of West Pakistan had their branches in the East, the Bengalis felt that these parties had failed to protect their interests at the national level and hence Awami League emerged as the unchallenged party of the East.

Mujib became president of the Awami League and emerged as leader of the Bengali autonomy movement. However, the autonomy demand was not tolerated by the West Pakistanis and in 1966, Mujib was arrested for his political activities. This led to a further rise in the league's popularity in the East.

The simmering discontent in the East exploded towards the end of 1970. The elections held in December 1970 saw the emergence of Awami League as the single largest party in all of Pakistan, despite the fact that Mujib had been in the prison and unable to campaign. The league swept the elections in East Pakistan, winning all the seats there, while it failed to make any impact in the West Pakistan, where Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party emerged with a majority. For the first time since the independence of Pakistan, a party based in the East had emerged as the largest party. The situation was viewed with alarm by the PPP, which had been pushed into the second place behind the Awami League.

This unprecedented sweep forced the West Pakistanis to open negotiations with Mujib on constitutional questions concerning the division of power between the central government and the provinces, as well as the formation of a national government headed by the Awami League.

However, clearly, the West, then ruled by Gen. Yahya Khan, was not prepared to make any real concessions to the autonomy demand of the East and the talks collapsed soon. And on March 1, 1971, the Pakistani president, Yahya Khan, indefinitely postponed the pending National Assembly session, precipitating massive civil disobedience in East Pakistan. Mujib was arrested again, his party was banned, and most of his aides fled to India, where they organized a provisional government in exile. Mujib also founded Mukti Bahini, an armed group to fight for the independence of the East. This marked the beginning of end of a united Pakistan.

The army crackdown led to millions of Bengalis fleeing into India, creating a humanitarian crisis. Despite several appeals by the Indian and international leadership for peaceful and negotiated settlement, the Pakistani army continued to carry out its operations against the independence campaigners, increasing the flow of refugees into India. Tensions mounted again and the two countries went to war in December 1971. The Indian army made swift gains against the Pakistani army and within 10 days had captured Dhaka, forcing the Pakistani army to surrender.

Mujibur Rehman was freed from the prison and East Pakistan declared itself independent and changed the name to Bangladesh. The events of December 1971 had disastrous effects on the internal situation of Pakistan. More than the loss of the eastern part, it was the defeat inflicted by India that rattled Pakistan. Yahya Khan was forced to step down in face of huge public outcry against him. The general was replaced his foreign minister Bhutto, who became president and the first civilian chief martial law administrator.

Bhutto moved decisively to restore national confidence and pursued an active foreign policy, taking a leading role in Islamic and "Third World" forums. Although Pakistan did not formally join the Non-Aligned Movement until 1979, the position of the Bhutto government coincided largely with that of the non-aligned nations. Domestically, Bhutto pursued a populist agenda and nationalized major industries and the banking system. In 1973, he promulgated a new constitution accepted by most political elements and relinquished the presidency to become prime minister.

Although Bhutto continued his populist and socialist rhetoric, he increasingly relied on Pakistan's urban industrialists and rural landlords. Over time the economy stagnated, largely as a result of the dislocation and uncertainty produced by Bhutto's frequently changing economic policies. When Bhutto proclaimed his own victory in the March 1977 national elections, the opposition Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) denounced the results as fraudulent and demanded new elections. Bhutto resisted and, after endemic political violence in Pakistan, arrested the PNA leadership.

With increasing anti-government unrest, the army grew restive. On July 5, 1977, the military removed Bhutto from power and arrested him; declared martial law; and suspended portions of the 1973 constitution. Chief of Army Staff General Muhammad Zia ul-Haq became chief martial law administrator and promised to hold new elections within three months.

Zia released Bhutto and asserted that he could contest new elections scheduled for October 1977. After it became clear that Bhutto's popularity had survived his government, however, Zia postponed the elections and began criminal investigations of the senior Pakistan People's Party leadership (Bhutto's party). Subsequently, Bhutto was convicted and sentenced to death for alleged conspiracy to murder a political opponent. Despite international appeals on his behalf, Bhutto was hanged on April 6, 1979.

Zia assumed the presidency and called for elections in November. He remained fearful of a PPP victory, and, in October 1979, banned political activity and postponed the national elections.

In 1980, most center and left parties, led by the PPP, formed the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD). The MRD demanded Zia's resignation; an end to martial law; new elections; and the restoration of the constitution as it existed before Zia's takeover. In early December 1984, President Zia proclaimed a national referendum for Dec. 19, on his Islamization program. He

implicitly linked approval of “Islamization” with a mandate for his continued presidency. Zia’s opponents, led by the MRD, boycotted the elections. When the government claimed a 63 percent turnout, with more than 90 percent approving the referendum, many observers questioned these figures.

On March 3, 1985, President Zia proclaimed constitutional changes designed to increase the power of the president vis-à-vis the prime minister (under the 1973 constitution the president had been mainly a figurehead). Subsequently, Zia nominated Muhammad Khan Junejo, a Muslim League member, as prime minister. The new National Assembly unanimously endorsed Junejo as prime minister, and, in October 1985, passed Zia’s proposed eighth amendment to the constitution, legitimizing the actions of the martial law government; exempting them from judicial review (including decisions of the military courts); and enhancing the powers of the president.

On Dec. 30, 1985, President Zia removed martial law and restored the fundamental rights safeguarded under the constitution. He also lifted the Bhutto government’s declaration of emergency powers. The first months of 1986 witnessed a rebirth of political activity throughout Pakistan. All parties, including those continuing to deny the legitimacy of the

Zia/Junejo government, were permitted to organize and hold rallies. In April 1986, PPP leader Benazir Bhutto, daughter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, returned to Pakistan from exile in Europe.

Following the lifting of martial law, the increasing political independence of Prime Minister Junejo and his differences with Zia over Afghan policy resulted in tensions between them. On May 29, 1988, President Zia dismissed the Junejo government and called for November elections. In June, Zia proclaimed the supremacy in Pakistan of Shari’a (Islamic law), by which all civil law had to conform to traditional Muslim edicts.

On Aug. 17, a plane carrying President Zia, American Ambassador Arnold Raphel, U.S. Brig. General Herbert Wassom, and 28 Pakistani military officers crashed on a return flight from a military equipment trial near Bahawalpur, killing all of its occupants. In accordance with the constitution, Chairman of the Senate Ghulam Ishaq Khan became acting president and announced that elections scheduled for November 1988 would take place.

After winning 93 of the 205 National Assembly seats contested, the PPP, under the leadership of Benazir Bhutto, formed a coalition government with several smaller parties, including the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM, formerly the All Pakistan Mohajir Students’ Organization). The Islamic Democratic Alliance (IJI), a multi-party coalition led by the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) and including religious right parties such as the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), won 55 National Assembly seats.

Different interpretations of constitutional authority; debates over the powers of the central government relative to those of the provinces; and the antagonistic relationship between the Bhutto administration and opposition governments in Punjab as well as Balochistan, together seriously impeded social and economic reform programs. Ethnic conflict, primarily in Sindh province, exacerbated these problems. A fragmentation in the governing coalition and the military’s reluctance to support an apparently ineffectual and corrupt government were accompanied by a significant deterioration in law and order.

In August 1990, President Khan, citing his powers under the eighth amendment to the constitution, dismissed the Bhutto government and dissolved the national and provincial assemblies. New elections, held in October 1990, confirmed the political ascendancy of the Islamic Democratic Alliance. In addition to a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly, the alliance acquired control of all four provincial legislative assemblies and enjoyed the support of the military and of President Khan. The National Assembly elected Mohammad Nawaz Sharif, the leader of the Pakistan Muslim League (the most prominent party in the Islamic Democratic Alliance), prime minister.

Sharif emerged as the most secure and powerful Pakistani prime minister since the mid-1970s. Under his rule, the Islamic Democratic Alliance (IJI) achieved several important political victories. The implementation of Sharif's economic reform program, involving privatization, de-regulation, and encouragement of private sector economic growth, greatly improved Pakistan's economic performance and business climate. The passage into law in May 1991 of a Shariat bill, providing for widespread Islamization, legitimized the IJI government among much of Pakistani society.

After PML party president Junejo's death in March 1993, Sharif loyalists unilaterally nominated him as the next party leader. Consequently, the PML divided into the PML/Nawaz Sharif Group (PML/N), loyal to the prime minister, and the PML/Junejo Group (PML/J), supportive of Hamid Nasir Chatta, the president of the group.

Over time, Sharif was unable to reconcile the different objectives of the IJI's constituent parties. The largest fundamentalist party, Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), abandoned the alliance because of its perception of PML control. The regime was weakened further by the military's suppression of the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), which had entered into a coalition with the IJI to contain PPP influence, and also by allegations of corruption directed at Prime Minister Sharif. In April 1993, President Khan, citing "mal-administration, corruption and nepotism" and the espousal of political violence, dismissed the Sharif government.

The following month, the Pakistan Supreme Court reinstated the National Assembly and the Sharif government. Continued tensions between Prime Minister Sharif and President Khan resulted in governmental gridlock. The chief of army staff brokered an arrangement under which both the president and the prime minister resigned their offices in July 1993.

An interim government, headed by Moeen Qureshi, a former World Bank vice president, took office with a mandate to hold national and provincial parliamentary elections in October. Despite its brief term, the Qureshi government adopted political, economic and social reforms that generated considerable domestic support and foreign admiration.

In the October 1993 elections, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) won a plurality of seats in the National Assembly, and Benazir Bhutto was asked to form a government. Since the PPP did not have a majority of seats in the National Assembly, the party's control of the government depended upon the continued support of numerous independent parties, in particular, the Pakistan Muslim League/Junejo Group (PML/J).

The unfavorable circumstances surrounding PPP rule; the imperative of preserving a coalition government; the formidable opposition of Sharif's PML/N movement; and the insecure provincial administrations together presented significant difficulties for Prime Minister Bhutto's government. The November 1993 election of Bhutto's close associate, Farooq Leghari, as president, somewhat augmented her power base. In November 1996, however, President Leghari dismissed the Bhutto government, charging it with corruption, mismanagement of the economy, and implication in extra-judicial killings in Karachi.

Elections in February 1997 resulted in an overwhelming victory for the PML/Nawaz, and President Leghari called upon Nawaz Sharif to form a government. In March 1997, Sharif proposed, and parliament passed, a constitutional amendment removing the president's power to dissolve parliament and making his power to appoint military service chiefs and provincial governors contingent on the "advice" of the prime minister.

Sharif cited tackling the economic crisis, corruption and institutional reform as his three primary objectives. In October 1997, Sharif's government secured a \$1.6 billion IMF assistance program. Approval of the program was expected to trigger support from other international financial institutions as well as give a boost to business confidence and the markets. An increase in sectarian violence and a lengthy confrontation over appointments of Supreme Court judges,

however, distracted the government from its stated objectives.

The conflict between Prime Minister Sharif and the Supreme Court, sparked by Sharif's appointment of new judges, led to a charge of slander and defiance of the Supreme Court against Sharif and some of his officials. This resulted in mass demonstrations by Sharif's supporters who ended up raiding the Supreme Court. The chief justice resigned and soon thereafter, the president also stepped down. Prime Minister Sharif nominated Mohammad Rafiq Tarar for the presidency. On Dec. 31, 1997, the Electoral College convened to elect a president choosing Tarar by a large margin.

Copyright CountryWatch.com

Used with permission