

Department of State

AIRGRAM

CONFIDENTIAL A-02

TO : DEPARTMENT OF STATE
INFO : DACCA, KABUL, KARACHI, LAHORE, NEW DELHI, PESHAWAR
FROM : AMEMBASSY RAWALPINDI
DATE : January 6, 1970
SUB : Pakistan Muslim League - Second Coming?
REF : Rawalpindi A-01, January 2, 1970,

Fazlul Quader Chowdhury was delegated the full powers and responsibilities of the President of the Pakistan (Convention) Muslim League (PML) by former President Ayub Khan in late December (ref airgram). The Political Counselor and reporting officer had an opportunity to interview the new PML leader January 2 in Rawalpindi. Malik Md. Qasim, General Secretary of the party and Abdul Ghafoor Khan of Hoti, Ayub's Commerce Minister, were present. Impressions of Fazlul Quader and salient points made during the meeting follow.

IMPRESSIONS OF FAZLUL QUADER CHOWDHURY

A bull of a man standing over six feet and weighing over 200 pounds Fazlul Quader dominated the meeting by his presence, energy, exuberance, and overwhelming confidence that the PML would rise again. Typical of most Bengali politicians, Fazlul Quader is long winder. He heavily interlarded his statements with historical references.

Fazlul Quader was Speaker of the National Assembly from 1963-65 when he was ousted from that position and expelled from the PML, ostensibly for supporting his brother Fazlul Kabir Chowdhury in a by-election against the government candidate. Fazlul Quader did not criticize Ayub or the PML during his out years and re-entered the party in June 1969, unblemished by the brush which tarred Ayub and his close associates.,

PML—STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Fazlul Quader spoke convincingly of the strength of the PML among the rural masses and predicted the PML would take 80% of the seats in Punjab and Bahawalpur. He

did not acknowledge that the splits in the PML party organization were of serious consequence. The East Pakistan "rebel" faction (see A-665) was in disagreement but remained in the party. Only Saeed Ahmed Kirmani, ex-President of the West Pakistan PML, had been expelled but he could rejoin if he wanted. Qaiyum Khan and his Quaid-i-Azam Muslim League were also welcome to join.

The PML would have elections within 45 days which would strengthen the party. Malik Qasim volunteered that the party elections were delayed by legal actions but that all would be straightened out in about a fortnight.

Fazlul Quader acknowledged that mistakes were made by President Ayub but maintained that Ayub did much good in economic development and was revered by the peasants in the countryside for his rural development programs. He stated categorically that Ayub was permanently retired and removed from the political scene.

COMMENT: Yahya's recent announcement about the retention of the Basic Democrats, without their electoral college function, could be a plus factor for the PML if what Fazlul Quader says is true.

PML ELECTION STRATEGY

According to Fazlul Quader the PML is a centrist, moderate party dedicated to the integrity, ideology and unity of Pakistan as an Islamic State. It is going to come down hard on all those "isms" alien to the culture and religion of Pakistan. Fazlul Quader specifically singled out for criticism those foreign elements flooding the country with literature and infiltrating political parties, news media, student groups, labor, etc. (He clearly indicated communism and socialism but capitalism too will share the "ism" umbrella as an election issue.) The PML would seek social justice for all, yet preserve man's fundamental rights. There would be a greater sharing of the wealth but according to the teaching of Islam. Fazlul Quader made it clear that the defence of Islam would be a major issue, for Pakistan is a "priest ridden country," more so in East Pakistan where each "Haji" is followed by thousands of people.

SHEIKH MUJIB

Fazlul Quader stated that he was Mujib's "guru" and paid for Mujib's education. Mujib was a "bundle of nerves" who "played to the galleries" with a negative program of carping about the past and lofty, unattainable promises for the future. Fazlul Quader alleged that Mujib had acknowledged to him that he would last only two months if he came to power. Apparently warming to his own rhetoric Fazlul Quader expansively claimed a PML "sweep" for Bengal.

MISCELLANY

1. Bhutto

Fazlul Quader characterized Bhutto as a man who began his career as an internationalist (Bhutto was Foreign Minister) became a nationalist and is now a provincialist, a Sindhi. Bhutto wanted the voting age lowered to 18 to get the vote of his student admirers. Fazlul Quader doubted that Bhutto could win in his own district. Malik Qasim interjected that he thought the PPP would win three or four seats, provided the other Sindhi political groups did not combine against it.

2. Asghar

Malik Qasim said that Air Marshall Asghar Khan retired from politics over disgust with his party colleagues and because he did not have a safe constituency. Fazlul Quader commented that Asghar was a good man and was welcome to join the PML fold.

3. Abdul Ghaffoor Khan of Hoti

The Khan of Hoti repeated the old hat story of the treasonous behavior of Ghaffar Khan, his son Wali, and the "Red shirts" on the Frontier. More importantly and with obvious sincerity he said that he felt his way of life, close to the American way of life, was being threatened and that he was prepared to sacrifice everything he had for the PML cause.

COMMENT: At first glance, Hoti appears to be a dubious asset to the party. He was known as "Chini Chor" (sugar thief) during the sugar shortages of a year ago because while Commerce Minister responsible for regulating the supply of sugar he was also one of the country's largest sugar mill owners. However Hoti and his wealthy friends and contacts can contribute to the party coffers.

COMMENT: The selection of Fazlul Quader Chowdhury to head the PML appears a wise one, because he is a Bengali, was not in the Ayub camp at the end and is a forceful leader and personality. However, the PML is not out of the woods as reported defections from the party continue and court orders have been approved to tie up party fund and to question the legality of the appointments of Fazlul Quader and Malik Qasim.