

# TIME

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## Bangladesh: Death at Night

President Zia is assassinated

Ten years ago this spring, young Major Ziaur Rahman broadcast an electrifying message from a clandestine radio in the East Pakistan city of Chittagong, proclaiming a rebellion against West Pakistan that ultimately created the nation of Bangladesh. Late last week there was another voice on the radio from Chittagong, announcing that Major General Manjur, 40, had taken over the government and abrogated the country's 1972 friendship treaty with India. The hero of a decade ago, President Ziaur Rahman, only 45, lay dead with two aides and six bodyguards in a government rest house in Chittagong. All were reportedly shot by an assassination squad, led by Manjur, in the early morning hours Saturday.

Manjur's confident proclamation of a coup seemed premature. The official Bangladesh radio in the capital of Dacca assured the country's 90 million people that the government was safely in the hands of Vice President Abdus Sattar. The government declared a state of emergency and called upon the rebels to surrender. Moreover, stressed the state radio, all international agreements remained in force.

Bangladesh's long-troubled relations with India, the country that had helped it win independence, seemed to be at the heart of the assassination. The two nations are divided by bitter issues primarily concerning the lower Ganges River, which meanders through both countries as it flows out into a vast delta. Tensions have built up over rights to the Ganges water, various solutions to the water question and territorial claims to islands formed by silt at the mouth of a boundary river. The sovereignty question is particularly volatile: there are hopes of finding oil under nearby waters. While Zia had pressed India strenuously on the diplomatic front—even sending gunboats to one of the 'disputed islands last month—he was apparently not aggressive enough for a fiercely anti-Indian element with a strong base in Chittagong. The assassins were apparently linked to these militants.

The slain Zia had been one of South Asia's most promising leaders, a man who lived modestly while others chose corruption, who searched tirelessly for solutions to his country's awesome poverty. He was also a fatalist. Once, reflecting on his service for Pakistan in the 1965 war with India over Kashmir, he observed: "There is no scientific explanation for a man to die or live. In front of me many people died, but I got a bonus of life." He used that bonus well, but last week it ran out.

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