

1970 Elections

The general elections of **December 1970** were historic because they were the **first direct elections** in Pakistan's history based on **adult franchise**. This meant that every adult citizen had the right to vote. The elections were held under Yahya Khan's **Legal Framework Order (LFO)**. The results were unexpected: the **Awami League**, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won almost all the seats in East Pakistan, gaining **167 seats** in total. This gave them a clear majority in the **National Assembly**. In West Pakistan, **Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's PPP** emerged as the strongest party with **81 seats**, but it was far behind the Awami League. According to democratic rules, Mujibur Rahman had the right to form the government.

Constitutional Crisis

Despite the Awami League's majority, Mujibur Rahman was not allowed to form the government. The main reason was his **Six Points program**, which demanded maximum autonomy for East Pakistan. These points included control over taxation, trade, and currency, leaving the central government with only defense and foreign affairs. Leaders in West Pakistan, especially Bhutto, saw this as a step toward separation. Yahya Khan also feared that accepting the Six Points would divide Pakistan. This disagreement created a **constitutional crisis**: who would govern Pakistan, and under what framework?

Failure of Negotiations

In early 1971, Yahya Khan held several rounds of talks between **Mujibur Rahman and Bhutto** to resolve the deadlock. However, the talks failed because neither side compromised. Mujibur Rahman insisted on full implementation of his Six Points, while Bhutto declared that "two leaders" could not rule one country, showing his unwillingness to share power. To buy time, Yahya postponed the National Assembly session, which further angered East Pakistanis. In response, Mujibur Rahman launched a **non-cooperation movement**, effectively taking control of East Pakistan's administration.

Consequences of the Crisis

The failure of negotiations and the non-cooperation movement pushed the country towards confrontation. In **March 1971**, Yahya Khan ordered a **military operation in East Pakistan**, aiming to crush the Awami League's movement. This operation led to violence, mass killings, and widespread destruction. Instead of restoring order, it created more anger among Bengalis, who now demanded complete independence. The crisis turned into a **civil war** between the Pakistan Army and the Mukti Bahini (Bengali fighters).

Final Outcome

The crisis reached its peak in **December 1971**, when India entered the conflict, supporting the Mukti Bahini. After a short war, on **16 December 1971**, Pakistani forces surrendered in Dhaka. East Pakistan became an independent country named **Bangladesh**. This was the greatest tragedy in Pakistan's history. Yahya Khan resigned after the defeat, and power was handed over to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The 1970 elections, instead of uniting Pakistan through democracy, exposed the deep divisions between East and West Pakistan and ended with the **disintegration of the country**.