

**Articles written to pay tribute to
Mohtarma Benazir
Bhutto**



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Benazir Bhutto addressing a rally in Rawalpindi, the last one she addressed before her assassination on Thursday. On right people look at the bodies of other victims after the attack.

Foreword

We cannot let my mother's sacrifice be in vain

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari

You can imprison a man, but not an idea. You can exile a man, but not an idea. You can kill a man, but not an idea. -- Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto!

My country mourns. And as my countrymen join me in personal grief over the loss of my mother, I join them in national grief over the loss of something even greater: the loss of Pakistan's greatest voice for democracy. Shaheed Benazir Bhutto's death, however, shall not have been in vain. We will go forward, as she would have wanted, and bring freedom and democracy to Pakistan.

For those in my country who would find it easier to walk away from democracy and seek revenge through violence, I urge you to remember my mother's words: democracy is the sweetest revenge. To plunge the country into more violence and chaos would only play into the hands of those who hope for democracy's failure. The terrorists have no use for democracy, and the current government fears it. We must unite and rise above both.

And to those outside of my country, who support our fight for democracy, I urge you to consider this: We cannot oppose one form of tyranny while turning a blind eye to another. Together, we must stand against the violence of the terrorists on the one hand, while standing equally firm against the regime's use of it as an excuse to impose their own repressive will upon the people of Pakistan.

The regime has made a mockery of our constitution. The world watched in disbelief as the regime declared emergency rule and sent troops into the streets in November – not because of a terrorist threat to the government, but a constitutional threat to their autocratic grip on power. The men they threw into jails were not terrorists but Supreme Court judges and respected lawyers. The newspapers they intimidated were not organs of terrorists but of free and independent citizens of Pakistan.

My mother stood bravely against both the tyranny of terrorism as well as the tyranny of dictatorship. She has been martyred for her courage and pursuit of freedom, but now that courage and pursuit has been bequeathed to the people of Pakistan. We shall carry on.

It will take the kind of courage my mother showed. It will take courage among her loyal followers to calm their anger and renounce violence or revenge. We must instead demand



fair and open elections, free of government intimidation, and then make our show of force on election day.

It will also take courage on the part of Pervez Musharraf and those who have supported his government, including those outside of Pakistan.

With my country's judges and lawyers still in jail, its free media intimidated and silenced, and its political leaders unsafe to walk the streets, we cannot pretend to have free and open elections. There can be no legitimacy to elections held under such ominous conditions. Those who espouse the virtues of democracy cannot stand by idly and maintain their credibility while this repression continues.

Our free and independent Supreme Court must be restored; the justices jailed by the regime must be released and returned to their proper seats, replacing the cronies with which they have packed the current court. Our other judges, lawyers and civic dissidents must be freed. The intimidation campaign waged against the free media must be halted. International election observers must be allowed to monitor our elections to ensure against government intimidation. And, finally, a credible international commission must be allowed to investigate the mysterious circumstances of my mother's assassination. Only after these steps are taken can we begin the honorable march to democracy and stability.

For those who think that by supporting dictatorship they are somehow securing stability in Pakistan, I can say only this: Where is that stability today? My country teeters on the precipice of anarchy not because of any actions by radicals or terrorists but because of the unchecked and power-mad actions of a military dictator.

Pakistanis will soon hold the most important election in our history. We have reached a tipping point. We will either unite behind democracy and the fight against radicalism and violence, or we will descend into the all-too-familiar cycles of despotism, terror and instability.

Those of us who will fight for democracy must make our stand now. Then, together, a united and democratic government can turn its attention to the extremists and terrorists who seek to undermine freedom in our country and throughout the world.

January 6, 2008

The duty my wife left us

Asif Ali Zardari



Last week the world was shocked, and my life was shattered, by the murder of my beloved wife, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. Shaheed Benazir was willing to lay down her life for what she believed in -- for the future of a democratic, moderate, progressive Pakistan. She stood up to dictators and fanatics, those who would distort and defy our constitution and those who would defame the Muslim holy book by violence and terrorism. My pain and the pain of our children is unimaginable.

But I feel even worse for a world that will have to move forward without this extraordinary bridge between cultures, religions and traditions. I married Shaheed Benazir in 1987 but spent less than five years living with her in the prime minister's house over her two terms in office, which were interrupted by military interventions. I spent more than 11 years in Pakistani jails, imprisoned without a conviction on charges that subsequent governments have now publicly acknowledged were politically motivated. Even before Shaheed Benazir was first elected prime minister, in 1988, Pakistan's intelligence agencies began working to discredit her, targeting me and several of her friends.

This campaign of character assassination was possibly the first institutional application of the politics of personal destruction. Shaheed Benazir was the target, and her husband and friends were the instruments. The purpose was to weaken the case for a democratic government. It is perhaps easier to block the path of democracy by discrediting democratic politicians.

During the years of my wife's governments, she was constrained by a hostile establishment; an interventionist military leadership; a treacherous intelligence network; a fragile coalition government and a presidential sword of Damocles, constantly threatening to dismiss Parliament. Despite all of this, she was able to introduce free media, make Pakistan one of the 10 most important emerging capital markets in the world, build over 46,000 schools and bring electricity to many villages in our large country. She changed the lives of women in Pakistan and drew attention to the cause of women's rights in the Islamic world. It was a record that she was rightly proud of.

Her murder does not end her vision and must not be allowed to empower her assassins. Those responsible -- within and outside of government -- must be held accountable. I call on the United Nations to commence a thorough investigation of the circumstances, facts and

cover up of my wife's murder, modeled on the investigation into the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq-al-Hariri. And I call on the friends of democracy in the West, in particular the United States and Britain, to endorse the call for such an independent investigation. An investigation conducted by the government of Pakistan will have no credibility, in my country or anywhere else. One does not put the fox in charge of the henhouse.

But it is also time to look forward. In profound sadness, the torch of leadership in the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has been passed to a new generation, to our son, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. I will work with him and support him and protect him to the extent possible in the trying times ahead. The Bhutto family has given more than anyone can imagine to the service of our nation, and in these difficult days it is critical that the party remain unified and focused. My wife, always prescient and wise, understood that. Knowing that the future was unpredictable, she recommended that the family keep the party together for the sake of Pakistan. This is what we aim to do.

The regime has postponed the elections scheduled for Tuesday not because of any logistical problems but because the "King's Party" know that they were going to be thoroughly rejected at the polls and that the PPP and other pro-democracy parties would win a majority. Democracy in Pakistan can be saved, and extremism and fanaticism contained, only if the elections, when they are held, are free, fair and credible.

To that end, the people of Pakistan must be guaranteed elections that are (1) conducted under a new, neutral caretaker government; (2) supervised by an independent and autonomous election commission formed in consultation with the major political parties; (3) monitored by trained international observers who have unfettered access to all polling stations as well as the right to conduct exit polling to verify results; (4) covered by electronic and print media with the freedoms they had before martial law was imposed on Nov. 3; and (5) arbitrated by an independent judiciary as provided for in the constitution. In addition, all political activists, lawyers and judges being detained must be released.

The enemies of democracy and tolerance who took my wife from me and from the world can and must be exposed and marginalized. Dictatorship and fanaticism have always been rejected by the people of Pakistan. If free and fair elections are held, those forces will be defeated again on Feb. 18. And on that day, the vision and indefatigable spirit of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto will burn brightly, and in the words of John Kennedy, "the glow from that fire can truly light the world."

Asif Ali Zardari, a former senator, is co-chairman of the Pakistan People's Party with his son, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari

The Washington Post
January 5, 2008

Democracy must be Benazir Bhutto's lasting memorial

Gordon Brown

The world was shocked and saddened on Thursday as the news emerged that Benazir Bhutto, along with dozens of her supporters, had lost her life. Given Britain's deep ties with Pakistan, that sense of loss and outrage was keenly felt here. All across the country, Muslims and non-Muslims alike offered their thoughts and prayers for the families of those who died, and to the people of Pakistan who saw their hopes for a brighter future dealt another blow.

Benazir Bhutto was dedicated to her country, which she served twice as Prime Minister, and a woman of immense courage and bravery. From bitter personal experience, she knew well that to return to Pakistan was to risk her life, yet she chose to take that risk in order to fight for democracy in Pakistan.



The criminals and cowards who plotted her death knew that for millions of people in Pakistan and all around the world, she was a symbol of the modern Islamic democracy Pakistan aspires to be. The terrorists also know that the vibrant democracy she championed is the single biggest obstacle for them as they attempt to spread their message of hate and destruction. Democratic societies are strong because they are based on the common values that bind people together. By guaranteeing freedom and human rights for their citizens, they deny extremists the oxygen of disenfranchisement and alienation that they rely on to poison people's minds. By being empowered by a popular mandate, freely expressed, democratic governments have the strength to stand up to extremists with the clear backing of their citizens, and expose them for the tiny, desperate bands they are. So free, open, democratic societies represent everything the terrorists despise.

That popular mandate is, of course, conferred through elections, which must be free and fair if the government that emerges is to have legitimacy. Pakistan's leaders are considering the best way to keep the democratic process on track. It is vital that people remain calm during that time, and express their grief and anger in a peaceful way. And it is equally important that the country's political leaders are not deflected from their pursuit of democracy, and that the forthcoming elections can be free, fair and secure. This is an opportunity for Pakistan's politicians to come together and to work as one to defeat terrorism through a genuinely free, fair and inclusive democratic process.

As we reflect on Benazir Bhutto's achievement as the first elected female leader of a Muslim nation, we must also recognise that a society that allows women's voices to be heard is more likely to be a society of tolerance and compassion where violence has no place. It should also be a part of her legacy that women are empowered to play their full part in Pakistan's democracy: Pakistan's society will be the stronger for it.

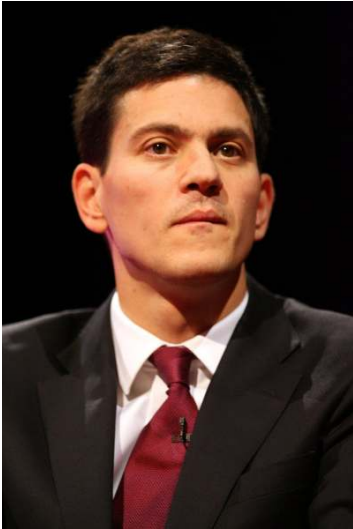
Benazir Bhutto may have been killed by terrorists, but the terrorists must not be allowed to kill democracy in Pakistan. Pakistan is a resilient country, its people committed to a democratic, tolerant vision of society. This atrocity will strengthen our resolve that terrorists will not win in Pakistan, in the UK, or anywhere else in the world.

A strong, representative democracy in Pakistan will defeat terrorism and extremism, show the path to a more stable, prosperous future, and stand as a lasting memorial to the life's work of Benazir Bhutto. We owe it to her memory to strive together to achieve that goal.

*Gordon Brown is the Prime Minister of the UK
Britain USA
December 31, 2007*

Benazir Bhutto

David Miliband



The assassination of Benazir Bhutto is a shocking blow. First, to her family, to whom the Prime Minister has extended sincerest condolences. Second, to her supporters in the Pakistan People's Party and beyond, who saw in her the chance of progress in Pakistan. Third, to the fragile, troubled, personalized Pakistani political system which depends for the strength it does possess on the fortitude of its leaders. Fourth, to many friends and supporters of Mrs. Bhutto in Britain, where she had spent much time, and to the diaspora Pakistani community in the UK, which has so many ties of family, heritage and business back to Pakistan and will fear for the worst. Fifth, to friends of Pakistan in the international community, including the UK, who saw in what Mrs. Bhutto represented an important contribution to Pakistan's future. And sixth, to decent people everywhere who will feel revulsion at the political violence that has claimed Mrs. Bhutto's life and that of some twenty others today.

The one person who might not have been shocked is Mrs. Bhutto. Her family has known the violence that has marked Pakistani politics since independence. And she spoke openly about the threats against her return to her home. I met her on one occasion recently and had spoken to her several times on the phone. (I had been part of a small retinue for the then Leader of the Opposition Tony Blair who went to meet her at the Dorchester Hotel in 1996. She sat at the end of a room on a couch and offered a commanding *tour d'horizon* of the post cold war world, animated by the idea that the collapse of communism, obviously a good thing, might have taken the brakes off market societies, with dangerous consequences). She was very concerned about the security of herself and her campaign supporters, but said she felt impelled to return to Pakistan by the state of the country. After the bombing of her campaign rally on her return in October, she said that the campaign would be taking extra precautions.

A couple of weeks ago, her focus was almost exclusively on the organization of the election campaign, and the details of election practice and observation that would be a key to the result. There was in retrospect and even perhaps at the time a very calm about the way she expressed thanks for the interest of the international community, and its commitment to Pakistan's system of government as opposed to just one individual. Ms Bhutto promised 'moderation and modernization' for Pakistan.

The debate has no doubt started about what and whether she would have delivered, informed by the competing claims about her periods in office in the 1990s. But her assassination lays bare the responsibilities of the politicians, community and faith leaders, businesspeople and military chiefs who will now be a key to Pakistan's future.

They need to build a political system that can sustain itself, a social deal that tackles inequalities of opportunity (less than 2 per cent of national income is currently spent on education), and a structure of governance that tackles the long hangover of the days before independence (and before that) in the tribal areas. As for countries like Britain, with our multiple networks of politics and culture and business, we need to continue to engage to back strong systems not just strong people.

In the meantime, we mourn with those close to Mrs Bhutto on their loss. All friends of Pakistan will rue this day.

*The writer is British Foreign Secretary
Foreign Commonwealth Office
December 28, 2007*

The future Pakistan deserves

Muhammad Nawaz Sharif

There is no law and certainly no order in my country. What happened this past week has shaken every Pakistani. Benazir Bhutto was no ordinary person. She served as prime minister twice and had returned to Pakistan in an effort to restore our country to the path of democracy. With her assassination I have lost a friend and a partner in democracy.

It is too early to blame anybody for her death. One thing, however, is beyond any doubt: The country is paying a very heavy price for the many unpardonable actions of one man -- Pervez Musharraf. Musharraf alone is responsible for the chaos in Pakistan. Over the past eight years he has assiduously worked at demolishing institutions, subverting the constitution, dismantling the judiciary and gagging the media. Pakistan today is a military state in which a former prime minister can be gunned down in broad daylight. One of my own political rallies was fired upon the day Benazir Bhutto was killed.



These are the darkest days in Pakistan's history. And such are the wages of dictatorship. There is widespread disillusionment. At all the election rallies I have addressed, people have asked a simple question: Criminals are punished for breaking laws, so why those who subvert the constitution should not be punished? Those who killed Benazir Bhutto are the forces of darkness and authoritarianism.

They are the ones who prefer rifles to reason.

Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and my own Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) have traditionally been political rivals. We fought each other through elections. We won some. We lost some. That is what democracy is all about. Whoever has the majority rules. Bhutto and I both realized while in exile that rivalry among democrats has made the task of manipulation easier for undemocratic forces. We therefore decided not to allow such nefarious games by the establishment. I fondly remember meeting with Benazir in February 2005. She was kind enough to visit me in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where I lived after Musharraf forced me into exile. We realized that we were fighting for the same thing: democracy. She, too, believed in the rule of law and rule of the people. A key point of the Charter of Democracy that we signed in May 2006 was that everyone should respect the mandate of the people and not allow the establishment to play dirty politics and subvert the will of the people. After the Jeddah meeting we regularly consulted each other on issues of national and international importance. On many occasions we tried to synchronize our strategies. We had agreements and disagreements, but we both wanted to pull Pakistan back from the brink of disaster.

And while the PPP may have been our traditional rival, it is a national asset whose leadership has inspired many Pakistanis. Political parties form part of the basis on which the entire edifice of democracy rests. If our country is to move forward, we need an independent judiciary, a sovereign Parliament and strong political parties that are accountable to the people. Without political parties, there will be hopelessness, and authoritarianism will thrive. Dictators fear the power of the people.

That is why they pit parties against each other and then try to destroy those parties -- to further their own agenda. This is what has happened in Pakistan in recent years. So, what is the way out of the depths to which Pakistan has been plunged? First, Musharraf should go immediately. He is the primary and principal source of discord. Second, a broad-based national unity government should be immediately installed to heal the wounds of this bruised nation. Third, the constitution should be restored to what it was in 1973. The judiciary should be restored to its condition before Nov. 3 -- countering the boneheaded steps Musharraf took under the garb of "emergency" rule.

All curbs on the media should be removed. Finally, fair and impartial elections should be held in a friendly and peaceful environment under such a national government so that the people are able to choose their representatives for a Parliament and government that can be trusted to rebuild the country rather than serve the agenda of a dictator.

These are the only steps that will give the country a semblance of stability. If Musharraf rules as he has for the past eight years, then we are doing nothing but waiting for another doomsday. The world must realize that Musharraf's policies have neither limited nor curbed terrorism. In fact, terrorism is stronger than ever, with far more sinister aspects, and as long as Musharraf remains, there remains the threat of more terror. The people of Pakistan should not be antagonized any further for the sake of one man. It is time for the international community to join hands in support of democracy and the rule of law in Pakistan. The answer to my country's problems is a democratic process that promotes justice, peace, harmony and tolerance and hence can play an effective role in promoting moderation. With dictatorship, there is no future.

*The writer is head of the Pakistan Muslim League
and was twice elected prime minister of Pakistan
The Washington Post
January 1, 2008*

Not having lived in vain

Tariq Islam

AFTER she had kissed her sister's face and bid her farewell, my cousin Sanam Bhutto turned to me and said: "Benazir had spent a lifetime writing obituaries for loved ones. It is time now to write her obituary. I know my sister would have wanted you to write it."

Well, where does one begin? The pain is yet too sharp, the wounds too raw and the tragedy too overwhelming. Words and tears can not flow together.

At the end of our summer vacation in London in July, we had spent a family evening together. Whilst leaving, I turned to her and said, "BB, please don't come back ... they will kill you." She held my hand and smiled, there was sadness in her eyes. She said nothing. Her eyes said it all. She knew death awaited her upon return. She knew that somewhere, in some dark corner, a sniper was lying in wait.

But she was not going to run from death. She was the daughter of the East, daughter of destiny. She was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's daughter. I was with her on that truck on Oct 18 when the bomb blast ripped apart the soul of a nation. For any other person, it would have been an opportune time to heed the warning and retreat. But no, not her. She was what she had always been. She was Benazir. As children we grew up together. But today when I look around she is not there. In leaving us for another world, she has left us only with flashes which linger in the memory. Like us she was a teenager once and how she loved those tear-jerking, sloppy songs. How she loved listening to Bobby Gentry's 'Honey', Terry Jack's 'Seasons in the sun' and 'California dreamin' by the Mamas & the Papas.

I have seen the roller-coaster ride that has taken her from the halcyon, blissful days of Karachi Grammar School to Radcliffe and Oxford and then the sudden, steep fall into the valley of cruel reality. Her Oxford days were marked by the carefree, windswept rides in the yellow sports MG, childish outbursts and outrageous flights of tantrum. Nothing had prepared her for the hardships and tragedies that were to follow. But travails and tragedy did come and they came in a flood.

She dealt with adversities with the disdain and abandon of her salad days. The toughness of the steel was not mellowed by the pampered indulgence of youth. She returned after graduating from university, hoping to savour the fruits of fulfilment. But a military coup overthrew her father's government and turned her life upside down. Her father was implicated in a false and fabricated murder charge. She donned his political mantle whilst running from one legal counsel to another, from one court to another in the pursuit of justice – all in vain.

How on that dark, dreaded April night, herself in prison, she must have counted the seconds as they led her father to the gallows. How her little heart must have sunk. How, like the

trembling heart of a captive bird, she shrank in her space. Yet there was a legacy to preserve, there were miles to go, promises to keep. Blackness heaped on darkness, there was no relief. The traumatic days and months in the unforgiving heat of Sukkur jail where they tormented and tortured her and damaged her left eardrum, the menacing pose of the colonels, father's shadow gone and no one to cling to; who was there to save her now? Something within her said hold on and so she did. She was allowed to fly out for an emergency operation but only under an international outcry.

Her life has been a metaphor, bigger than her known portrait. She saw the highs and the lows of life, she met with tragedy and with triumph and Kipling-like she treated both those impostors just the same. In her brief span, she ascended pedestals and stepped into graves to bury two youths, who were your brothers.

She lived to vindicate the memory of her father and became the Islamic world's first woman prime minister. She could have chosen the route of revenge and retribution. But she was determined not to be a prisoner to permanent prejudice. In the interest of her country and a future without hate, she quarantined the past. It was time to move on; to cross new frontiers, to meet new challenges and to dream new dreams.

For a brief shining moment, the world was hers and a brilliant star blazed over her horizon – then the moment passed. And night closed in again. Her brief spell in government was cluttered with byzantine-like intrigues, which can be best captured by paraphrasing a passage from T.E. Lawrence's Seven Pillars of Wisdom: "The morning freshness of the world-to-be intoxicated us. We were wrought up with ideas inexpressible and vaporous, but to be fought for. We lived many lives in those whirling campaigns, never sparing ourselves: yet when we achieved and the new world dawned, the old men came out again and took our victory to re-make in the likeness of the former world they knew."

She secured the freedom of so many when she first came to power but upon losing it, she saw her own husband locked behind bars. Tales were spun, myths created and conspiracies hatched in the dark, dirty corners of sickened minds. Like metal, myths are frequently recycled – the daughter of the East had to go. But they had not mastered the art of vanquishing her. The words of Queen Elizabeth I could well have been hers when she declared, "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and the king of England too."

She surmounted impossible obstacles to vanquish her foes and win power for a second time in 1993. She moved at a frenetic pace. There was a sense of exhilaration and she felt she was going places. The world was her oyster. With spirit renewed, with hope unhindered and a strong and clear vision, she set sail yet again on a voyage that was finally to lead her ashore. Or so she hoped. But travesty and tragedy were written in the stars. Her own appointed president stabbed her in the back. Nowhere do dreams melt so quickly as in the cauldron of politics. Undaunted and undeterred she battled on. She fought the governments that followed; she fought her cases and returned home to fight the terrorists.

A single assassin's bullet on that fateful December day put out a candle but fanned fires across the country. A single assassin put out every light in every home and filled our hearts with sorrow. In one bloody moment, a vision has been shattered and all our dreams wrecked on the sharp rocks of gruesome reality. There is this debilitating fog of moral relativism in the air, a miasma of guilty loathing to the point where an element belonging to the other end of the moral spectrum persuades itself to believe that the Bhuttos must vanish.

The killer has had his way and now we must learn to cope without her. When we finally look at her life, we will see a kaleidoscope of jumbled pieces. She met with failure and she met success. She had moments of joy and laughter but all too fleetingly. She encountered more than her fair share of moral squalor and political kerb crawlers. With her martyr's blood, she has touched the sublime but left us in spiritual emptiness. Very few will ever know where the person began and the metaphor ended. There is a Chinese proverb: "Wronged souls don't vanish." And vanish she won't. Whatever she was, she has passed into sainthood.

When the final curtain falls, we will look back at her life in the immortal words of Keats,

*"But I have lived and not lived in vain;
My mind may lose its force;
My blood its fire;
And my frame perish even in conquering pain;
But there is that within me;
Which shall tire, torture and time
And breathe when I expire".
So farewell to you Benazir, our beloved shade.
Sleep well.*

DAWN
January 1, 2008

Benazir Bhutto: A great and brave friend

Victoria Schofield



When I said goodbye to Benazir Bhutto two months ago just after she had survived a bomb attack she said she would “catch me later”.

I was returning to England after accompanying her on her return journey to Karachi and those were the last words she said to my face.

To me, they epitomised our friendship which had started 33 years ago, when we were students at Oxford.

Despite the different worlds in which we lived - she a politician in Pakistan, me a writer and historian living in England - I always knew I would be seeing her again, whether as prime minister, opposition leader or friend and mother.

Our friendship had passed through many phases. After our student days at Oxford, when we had enjoyed debates at the Union - where she became president in 1976 and I followed a year later - I witnessed the beginning of her political career.

Not long after returning to Pakistan, her father was dismissed in a military coup and put on trial for conspiracy to murder. While he was in jail, almost by default she picked up his political mantle.

“All the other political leaders have been arrested,” she told me when I joined her in Pakistan, that summer of 1978.

When her father was executed the following April, what she hoped would be only a temporary position, standing in for him as leader of the Pakistan People’s Party, became a permanent one.

It was to be a long struggle. General Zia al-Haq, the military leader who had overthrown and executed her father, was entrenched as president of Pakistan. After the Soviet Union invaded neighboring Afghanistan in 1979, he enjoyed the backing of the West. His death in a plane crash in 1988 opened the way for her to stand in national elections.

When she became prime minister, it seemed that she had been able to step into her father’s shoes to continue his work.

As a liberal Western woman and believer in the political process - something she had imbibed during her education at Harvard and Oxford - she genuinely believed that she could make a difference.

She often told me that it was the love and dedication of the people that kept her going. But within 16 months, her first premiership was over, after the military ousted her amid allegations of corruption.

Her second term as prime minister lasted longer but ended in the same way. As a mother of three children with her husband in jail, she preferred to retain her liberty rather than face possible imprisonment and so moved to Dubai.

She also continued to campaign for the restoration of democracy in Pakistan, fighting, as she used to say, against dictatorship because under its wing the forces of extremism could flourish.

Her joy at returning to Pakistan in October was immediately marred by the attack on her bus as she made her way in a triumphal procession through Karachi.

It was a reminder, as she knew already, that by returning to Pakistan her life was in danger. Even then she showed that extraordinary courage which I had come to appreciate as the hallmark of her character.

“We cannot let them force us to quit,” she said to me. During the various phases of her political career, I had also seen how much she enjoyed her role as a mother - more perhaps than the general public was aware.

Even during her periods of exile, when she came to London to meet politicians and party workers, she loved organizing outings and picnics for her children. As a friend, she was kind and generous.

One of the things she enjoyed most was catching up with our old friends from Oxford, finding out who had married and had children. After more than a decade in exile, one might almost have thought that she would stay in Dubai where she had made a home for herself.

But throughout her time in exile, she never lost sight of what was going on in Pakistan or the pledge she had made to the people to return to attempt to make their lives better, repeating the election manifesto of her father to provide them with food, clothing and housing.

In October, with elections due and her children now teenagers, she felt the time had come to return. Despite the dangers which she knew she faced, it was her sense of duty and commitment, which so tragically made her not just the daughter of Pakistan, as she was so famously known, but also of destiny.

Telegraph
December 28, 2007

A ruler of hearts

Dr. Javaid Laghari

She was my friend, my sister, my mentor and my leader. She was Bibi, Benazir Bhutto, Madam and Mohtarma all in one. I was fortunate enough to be closely associated with her for over 12 years now, leading a university named after her father, of which she was the Chancellor. I have had the privilege of traveling extensively with her around the world. This has provided me with the unique opportunity to reflect back on her and share her unique leadership style for her millions of admirers to follow.



In my association with her, I have met hundreds of statesmen, noble laureates, heads of states, ministers, university presidents, rectors and scholars, but I can say with certainty that Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was a giant of a leader among all others leaders of the world that dwarfed her. She was a living legend. There are tremendous differences between a politician and a leader. Among others, a politician asks for sacrifices, a leader gives one. She gave the ultimate sacrifice for her nation.

So what are the attributes of a Leader? One does not need power to be a leader. A leader needs followers, and she had plenty of them, even when out of power. One only needs to look at the likes of our past prime ministers, presidents and generals, when they are out of power. How much of a following do they have now? The day will come soon, which will not be too far away, for our current general to realize that like others, he too will be vanquished into the dust bins of history. Power does not make leaders. History and followers do!

Determination and drive is the prerequisite to leadership. She had plenty of this: To bring democracy to Pakistan, and to implement an agenda of reform and moderation. Determined to succeed and deliver, she wanted to put Pakistan onto the right track. She was enduring and was not deterred from her fight against extremism and terrorism. Despite the bombing attack at Karachi, she was determined to lead and had the drive to put things right.

Extremely hardworking, she always worked late into the night. She was a workaholic and a work machine. Those working with her would exhaust, but she would not! I recall my last meeting with her. Landing into Karachi from Islamabad at 2:00pm after working through the morning hours with meetings and interviews, she called from the airport wanting to see me at 4:00 pm. I was there fifteen minutes earlier. After a press conference and separate marathon meetings with ticket holders, minorities, women candidates, and with party executives, she hit the road again at 2:00am to travel to the shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar at Sehwan and was back by 8:00am. And she still put in a full working day ahead of her. No one could have her stamina and the energy.

Courageous and brave, she had a spirit of heroism and chivalry. She was far bolder than any male leader in Pakistan or anywhere in the world. Even the October 18 attack on her life, in which over 190 had died, had not frightened her. She told Afghan President just hours before her tragic assassination on December 27, 2007, "Life and death is in the hands of Allah, and that is why I have the courage to stare in the eyes of death without any fear."

A charismatic leader, she had a magnetic personality. Her star power and striking beauty made her more charismatic than Princess Diana and John F. Kennedy combined. Her sophistication and diplomacy par excellence led her to an international exposure and experience far exceeding any of the other leaders in Pakistan. She had a large network of friends and admirers around the world. The world community respected her, and she was accorded the protocol of a princess. I recall a meeting of the World Political Forum in Italy in 2003, in which when she walked into the conference hall, almost forty world leaders stood up and applauded her entrance. Her magic and the chemistry gave her an aura of confidence whenever walked into airports, hotel lobbies or restaurants. The world would freeze around her as everyone would turn to stare at her in admiration. She would stop a conversation or an activity just by walking into a room. As she lectured at universities around the world, an audience of 300 to 400 would be drawn to her, bedazzled and absorbing every word she spoke. She was east and she was west in one. It will take decades of research to study what made her a superwoman.

She was intelligent and wise, well educated and well read. Her favorite shopping at airports before departure would be non-fiction bestsellers, autobiographies, books on history and philosophy, and on leadership and development. She would devour every newspaper at the newsstand in a matter of minutes. Her photogenic memory would remember everything and everyone by names, including what had transgressed at their last meeting even months or years ago, and that too without notes. She was a genius. She had an analytical mind, and was a decision maker. While others on committees would fumble for days, and perhaps weeks, strategizing party policies, she would quickly analyze the situation within a matter of seconds and come up with a creative solution and new directives.

Sometimes we would disagree, but when we would go back to reflect on the disagreement, time would tell that we were all wrong and she was right. She would bring experts to embarrassment, be they economists or cardiologists. She could mentally calculate numbers faster than most individuals could. She also had many other interests in life: feng shui, astrology, alternate medicine, health, nutrition, you name it. She was a talking computer and a walking encyclopedia built in one, and had the ability to multi-task, handling three to four items simultaneously.

She had the gift of eloquence in her speech. Preparing all her speeches herself, she was an orator like her father, and was one of the most sought after speaker in the international arena. Turning down a very large number of speaking assignments around the world, she would selectively accept only those which would fit conveniently into her hectic travel schedule. She could be in Phoenix one afternoon, San Francisco the other, New York the third, and London the fourth. But then at a different level, she could also relate to children,

relatives and friends at the same time. She could just communicate effortlessly with people of all walks of life.

Very well organized and disciplined, she handled her life well. Very punctual herself, her time was managed efficiently. She could bring any time management guru to shame. She was fond of reading and writing. One of the last books, which I had gifted to her was, 'Sun Tzu's The Art of War,' which was one of her favorites. She was extremely computer literate, spending endless hours every day in front of her PC, and recently on her blackberry. I recall when she had purchased her first laptop years ago in Bilawal House, how she had asked me to come over and explain the basics. Today, she could teach me much more.

She had spent countless hours on the election manifesto, in which I served as a key member of the team. Each document the committee brought was ripped apart with green ink, reminding me of how we used to grade undergraduate students reports. The final manifesto document, which is a full credit to her creative abilities, spelt out the 5 E's of the PPP: employment, education, energy, environment and equality. Empathetic, compassionate, generous, and kind, she was always very caring and thoughtful about others around her. She personally supported hundreds of desperate individuals and families around the country, people she had not even known or heard of except through an email received. This is a face not many people know about. Once she received an email from a critical patient with six unmarried daughters, requesting a major hospital express. I could see tears in her eyes as she read it, opened her purse, and passed over a sum of money to me, asking me to ensure it arrived in his hands at the earliest. Other times I have seen tears roll in her eyes when talking of the assassination of her father, her two brothers, and of the plight of the poor. She was indeed the Daughter of East.

Extremely hospitable and caring, she would remember all her friends, relatives and admirers. She had the habit of always sending over gifts to anyone she may have known. I recall once in Germany, when our attendant driver, who drove us around all day, finally dropped us to the airport, she asked him to come inside to keep her buy a gift for someone she knew. When he pointed out a ceramic gift item he liked, she had it gift wrapped and handed it over to him much to his astonishment and surprise. She left a mark on anybody she had ever met.

A strong believer of reconciliation, she would forgive and forget. I know many have accused her wrongly adopting this policy in the past of forgiving her father's killers, and in the present of reconciling with the existing set up, but she would sacrifice all for the sake of democracy, so Pakistanis could walk together again as a loving nation. She believed in healing hearts and forging unity. But this was Benazir, ever forgiving anyone despite the slur they may throw at her or write against her. She was not revengeful; she had a heart bigger than the Lion of Oz. One can now see this reflection in Bilawal when he in his first public address to the media after his mother's assassination, stated "democracy is the best revenge."

Apart from being a firm believer in liberty and freedom, she had great dreams for the country, for the poor, for the elderly, for the old, for the women, for the children and for the

minorities. She visualized a moderate, pluralistic, democratic and prosperous Pakistan. Believing in equality, gender rights and freedom of speech and expression, she was rightfully the symbol of federation. Pakistan has not given birth to the likes of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Benazir Bhutto in our five thousand years of known history.

Above all, she was a human being, a loving, caring individual, a mother, a wife, a daughter, a sister, who cared for her children and family. When at home, she would exclusively dedicate time in the evening with her children, discussing their interests in life, as well as relating her own stories of her experiences, a continued training for the future generations of politicians. She would also spend weekends with her family as well take care of her ailing mother. She was spiritual and pious, offered prayers, did regular walks late at night, practiced yoga, go shopping, and had a craving for chocolates and ice-creams as well.

When she lived, she followed in the footsteps of her father's legacy. However, her assassination has been a wake up call for all of us. We have just discovered that she has a legacy of her own. Her forthcoming book, "Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy and the West" is a manifestation of her beliefs and her vision on the new world order, which she had completed just one week before her departure for the eternal. Her vision for Pakistan is spelt out in the PPP Election Manifesto 2008 which she authored. Her struggle for democracy is expressed in her revised autobiography, "*Benazir Bhutto: Daughter of the East*". Her dream is narrated in her poetic composition, "The Story of Benazir: From Marvi of Malir and Shah Latif" which she composed in exile on her fiftieth birthday. Her legacy has been left behind for the nation to follow.

Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was a jewel in the crown and the hope of the nation. She was a royalty who ruled hearts. The tragedy has broken our spirits. This country will never be the same without her, at least for this generation. Bibi is gone but her legacy will continue.

*Dr. Javaid Laghari is Vice President SZABIST and Ex Senator PPP
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Bhutto's legacy

Husain Haqqani



Benazir Bhutto's tragic assassination highlights the fears about Pakistan that she voiced over the last several months. Years of dictatorship and sponsorship of Islamist extremism have made this nuclear armed Muslim nation of 160 million people a safe haven for terrorists that threaten the world. Bhutto had the courage and vision to challenge both the terrorism and the authoritarian culture that nurtured it. Her assassination has already exacerbated Pakistan's instability and uncertainty.

Riots have been reported from several parts of the country as grief has fanned anger against a government that is deeply unpopular. As Pakistanis mourn the death of a popular democratic leader, the United States must review its policy of trusting the military-dominated regime led by Pervez Musharraf to secure, stabilize and democratize Pakistan.

The U.S. should use its influence, acquired with more than \$10 billion in economic and military aid, to persuade Pakistan's military to loosen its grip on power and negotiate with politicians with popular support, most prominently Bhutto's successors in her Pakistan People's Party. Instead of calibrating terrorism, as Mr. Musharraf appears to have done, Pakistan must work towards eliminating terrorism, as Bhutto demanded.

The immediate consequence of the assassination will likely be postponement of the legislative elections scheduled for Jan. 8. Bhutto's party led in opinion polls, followed by the opposition faction of the conservative Pakistan Muslim League (PML), led by Nawaz Sharif. Immediately after Bhutto's assassination, Mr. Sharif announced that he is now joining the boycott of the polls called by several smaller political parties. If Mr. Musharraf goes ahead with elections, it is unlikely that it would have much credibility.

In her death, as in her life, Benazir Bhutto has drawn attention to the need for building a moderate Muslim democracy in Pakistan that cares for its people and allows them to elect its leaders. The war against terrorism, she repeatedly argued, cannot be won without mobilizing the people of Pakistan against Islamist extremists, and bringing Pakistan's security services under civilian control.

Unfortunately, at the moment Bhutto's homeland (and mine) remains a dictatorship controlled through secret police machinations. Mr. Musharraf's regime has squandered its energies fighting civilian democrats instead of confronting the menace of terrorism that has now claimed the life of one of the nation's most popular political figures. His administration will have to answer many tough questions in the next few days about its failure to provide

adequate security to Bhutto, particularly after an earlier assassination attempt against her on Oct. 18.

The suicide bombing on that day, marking her homecoming after eight years in exile, claimed the lives of 160 people, mainly Bhutto supporters. But the government refused to accept Bhutto's requests for an investigation assisted by the FBI or Scotland Yard, both of which have greater competence in analyzing forensic evidence than Pakistan's notoriously corrupt and incompetent law enforcement.

The circumstances of the first assassination attempt remain mired in mystery and a complete investigation has yet to take place. Television images soon after Bhutto's assassination showed fire engines hosing down the crime scene, in what can only be considered a calculated washing away of forensic evidence. Bhutto had publicly expressed fears that pro-extremist elements within Pakistan's security services were complicit in plans to eliminate her. She personally asked me to communicate her concerns to U.S. officials, which I did. But instead of addressing those fears, Mr. Musharraf cynically rejected Bhutto's request for international security consultants to be hired at her own expense. This cynicism on the part of the Pakistani authorities is now causing most of Bhutto's supporters to blame the Musharraf regime for her tragic death. In her two terms as prime minister -- both cut short by military-backed dismissals on charges that were subsequently never proven -- Bhutto outlined the vision of a modern and pluralistic Muslim state. Her courage was legendary. She stepped into the shoes of her populist father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, without much training or inclination for politics, after he was executed by an earlier military ruler, Gen. Zia ul-Haq.

She was demonized by the civil-military oligarchy that has virtually run Pakistan since 1958, the year of Pakistan's first military coup. But she retained a hard core of popular support, and her social democratic Pakistan People's Party is widely regarded as Pakistan's largest political party. In 1988, at the age of 35, Bhutto became the youngest prime minister in Pakistan's troubled history, and the first woman to lead a Muslim nation in the modern age. For her supporters, she stood for women's empowerment, human rights and mass education. Her detractors accused her of many things, from corruption to being too close to the U.S. During her second tenure as prime minister, Pakistan became one of the 10 emerging capital markets of the world. The World Health Organization praised government efforts in the field of health.

Rampant narcotics problems were tackled and several drug barons arrested. Bhutto increased government spending on education and 46,000 new schools were built. Thousands of teachers were recruited with the understanding that a secular education, covering multiple study areas (particularly technical and scientific education), would improve the lives of Pakistanis and create job opportunities critical to self-empowerment. But Pakistan's political turbulence, and her constant battle with the country's security establishment, never allowed her to take credit for these achievements. For years, her image was tarnished by critics who alleged that she did not deliver on her promise.

During the early days after Mr. Musharraf's decision to support the U.S.-led war against terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11, conventional wisdom in Washington wrote her off. But Pakistan's constant drift into extremism, and Mr. Musharraf's inability to win Pakistani hearts and minds, changed that. Earlier this year, the United States and the United Kingdom supported efforts for a transition to democracy in Pakistan based on a negotiated settlement between Bhutto and Mr. Musharraf. She was to be allowed to return to Pakistan and the many corruption charges filed against her and her husband, Asif Zardari, were to be dropped.

Mr. Musharraf promised free and fair elections, and promised to end a bar imposed by him against Bhutto running for a third term as prime minister. But on Nov. 3, his imposition of a state of emergency, suspension of Pakistan's constitution, and arbitrary reshuffling of the country's judiciary brought that arrangement to an end. He went back on his promises to Bhutto, and as elections approached, recrimination between the two was at its height. Benazir Bhutto had the combination of political brilliance, charisma, popular support and international recognition that made her a credible democratic alternative to Mr. Musharraf. Her elimination from the scene is not only a personal loss to millions of Pakistanis who loved and admired her. It exposes her nation's vulnerability, and the urgent need to deal with it.

Mr. Haqqani, a professor at Boston University and co-chair of the Hudson Institute's Project on Islam and Democracy, is the author of "Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military" (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005). He has served as adviser to several Pakistani prime ministers, including Benazir Bhutto. Currently he is serving as ambassador for Pakistan in USA.

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My life with Benazir

Christina Lamb

We had just entered Santa's castle in the pretty Portuguese village of Obidos on Thursday when my phone beeped with the first text message. "Benazir has been critically wounded in bomb attack - in hospital undergoing treatment."

I think I knew immediately. Obidos styles itself Portugal's Vila Natal or Christmas Town and it was packed with families oohing and aahing at Nativity scenes scattered with artificial snow and downing cups of local cherry brandy. As I pushed through the crowds to get out and hear my phone, which by then was ringing repeatedly, the elves and Santas all around suddenly seemed sinister.



White Christmas was blaring out of speakers by the old church as I opened a text message. "Agencies reporting Benazir dead." Everything around me seemed to turn into a blur.

With me were my eight-year-old son and my parents, my elderly father valiantly navigating the cobblestones with his stick. I did not want to destroy their day out. I remembered Benazir's pride at her eldest child, Bilawal, starting at Oxford two months ago. "They grow up so quickly," she'd said to me at the time. "Enjoy your son while you can."

A week after that we'd been together on her bus in Karachi when it was bombed. She narrowly escaped, but I knew they'd get her in the end. Politics in Pakistan means being out among the people, pressing the flesh. She was never going to hide behind the armour plating her party workers so carefully arranged for her, but would always stand on top of the bus or out of the sunroof of armoured cars. Having seen her father and two brothers killed, she more than anyone knew the risks. I asked her over and over again if it was worth it. "I put my faith in God and I trust in the people of Pakistan," she always replied. She was the bravest person I have ever met and, for all her flaws, she was still the best hope for her country.

Almost exactly 20 years ago, in December 1987, I woke up in bed in Karachi. The air was damp and sticky and I was breathing in the headachy smell of jasmine. Delicate henna flowers and blossoms twisted across my palms and my feet, and fireworks exploded into red and white stars in the sky. It was day three of the wedding celebrations of Benazir Bhutto and my life had just changed for ever.

Throughout my teenage years I had yearned for adventure. At Nonsuch school for girls in Surrey I was endlessly in detention. Kept after school writing lines, I would gaze out of the

window conjuring up far-off worlds. It was Benazir who gave me the chance to reach them. Her world was utterly different from mine. I'd grown up on a council estate in Morden, the last stop on the Northern line. She had been born amid wealth – the Bhuttos owned great estates – and she had glamour. As a young woman, she knew about power and pain: her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was prime minister of Pakistan but was deposed by the army and executed. She was a star at Oxford – the first Asian woman elected head of the union, flitting around in her yellow sports car – while I was just a spectator a decade later as editor of Cherwell, the university newspaper. Nonetheless, we met and we clicked.

As a graduate intern at the Financial Times in the summer of 1987, I was assigned to a lunch where a man from the Pakistan People's party (PPP) – her party – asked me if I would like to interview her. Of course I said yes. She had just announced her engagement and was sitting serenely in her Kensington flat, surrounded by lava lamps and bouquets. Although she often appeared cold and imperious, she could also be warm and girly, and we struck an instant bond. The resulting interview was my first big article in a national paper and it would decide my destiny. At the time, General Zia ul-Haq, her father's executioner, had been president of Pakistan for a decade. Zia's regime had thrived by facilitating America's efforts to push the Russians out of neighbouring Afghanistan, but Benazir was pressing him to hold free multi-party elections.

With all the confidence of my 21 years, I wrote: "There is little doubt that, were fair elections held tomorrow, she would probably win by a substantial margin. Unfortunately for Ms Bhutto politics in Pakistan are rarely determined by popularity; but rather by a daunting triumvirate of generals, businessmen and mullahs with their US sponsors keeping a watchful eye." I predicted – wrongly – that "it could be a long time before Ms Bhutto takes her father's place at the head of the country". And I added judgmentally: "If she ever does attain power it is uncertain, given the vagueness of her policy prescriptions, whether this elegant soft-spoken lady will be able to deliver."

Despite my less than friendly verdict, that autumn a large, gold-inscribed invitation to Benazir's wedding landed on my mat in a rented room in Walsall. I had moved on from the FT to a traineeship at Central TV. Our area encompassed the M1 and M6 motorways, where young people were often killed in drink-driving accidents. There was nothing harder than knocking on the doors of their families and asking for a photo.

One drizzly December day I drove round and round Spaghetti Junction trying to find the turn-off for the Birmingham Bullring, where I was assigned to interview two firemen who were trying to beat the world record for time spent wearing gas masks. It was so cold that the cameras kept seizing up. By the fifth take even the firemen looked bored.

A few days later, however, I arrived at 70 Clifton Road, the Bhuttos' Karachi home. Like a huge Christmas tree, the house was festooned with lights. Inside, preparations and festivities had been under way all week. Weddings in Pakistan are a matter of face. Combine that with Benazir's fanatical perfectionism, and you have a recipe for high tension. To the dismay of

her aunties, she was refusing to accept the traditional trousseau from the bridegroom's family.

Instead of the 21 to 51 sets of clothes usually presented to the bride, she had set the limit at only two. Instead of gold bangles all the way up each arm, she said she would wear glass, explaining: "I am a leader - I must set an example to my people." Nor, she said, did she have time for the traditional week's purdah. Instead she kept nipping out to the office.

All the same, the aunties told me how pleased they were that Bibi- as they called her - was settling down. Was she in love? Announcing her engagement, she had said less than enthusiastically: "Conscious of my religious obligations and duty to my family, I am pleased to proceed with the marriage proposal accepted by my mother." Everyone told me that an arranged marriage was better because you went in with no preconceptions and learnt to love each other.

The morning before the main celebrations Benazir underwent the painful process of having all her body hair removed. No screams were heard. She had, after all, endured years of detention in Pakistan, including 10 months in solitary confinement. The main event took place in a multicoloured marquee in the garden, where bowers of jasmine and roses led to a tinsel-bedecked stage. Here, Benazir sat next to her husband-to-be, Asif Ali Zardari, on a mother-of-pearl bench and said yes three times to become a married woman. Sugar was ground over their heads so their lives would be sweet.

Taking a break along Clifton beach, I paid a man with a scrawny parakeet a few rupees for it to pick me tarot cards. "You will be back within a year," he predicted. I was. After all the late-night discussions of how to overturn dictatorship in Pakistan, there was no way I could go back to the death knocks in Birmingham. I went to see the FT and got a vague agreement that they would pay for whatever they published by me. I bought a bucket-shop flight to Lahore and packed everything I imagined I would need to be a foreign correspondent, including a tape of Mahler's Fifth, a jumbo bag of wine gums, a lucky pink rabbit, a copy of Rudyard Kipling's Kim and a bottle of Chanel No 5 that my boyfriend's mum had got at trade price. I could hardly carry the suitcase.

The foreign editors in London were all more interested in Russian-occupied Afghanistan than in Pakistan, so I headed for the frontier town of Peshawar and - like most journalists there - spent much of my time going back and forth across the border. "Going inside", we called it. When you were out you spent all your time attempting to get in; and once in, living in caves on stale bread and trying to avoid landmines and bombs, you desperately wanted to be out.

I celebrated my 22nd birthday in a kebab shop in Peshawar's Old Story-tellers' Bazaar with flat chapli kebabs followed by yellow cake with a candle on top. The night ended with a moonlit swim in the pool of the Pearl Continental, where proper correspondents stayed. There were other things to celebrate that night: May 15 1988 marked the start of the withdrawal of the Soviet army, which had occupied Afghanistan since Boxing Day 1979.

The supply of American Stinger missiles, which could down Soviet planes, had turned the war around. For the mujaheddin, who had humiliated the largest army on earth, these were glory days, before jihad became a dirty word. For Pakistan, it was the start of a tumultuous series of events that would raise Benazir to power but ultimately take her life.

Zia announced party-based elections in which Benazir would be able to take part. Later he announced at a press conference that parties would not be allowed. I stuck up my hand. As a tall, blonde English girl in sea of Pakistani men – none of whom seemed concerned by his turnaround – I was handed the microphone. “Why have you changed your mind about holding party-based elections, as you said when you announced them?” I asked. “I did not say that,” Zia said. He was lying. “Yes, you did.” A gasp ran through the Pakistani journalists, and people tugged at me to sit down. But Zia smiled, thanked me for respecting his country’s culture by wearing the traditional *salwar kameez* and invited me to make an appointment for an interview.

We met at Army House in Rawalpindi, where he served me tea and again smiled disarmingly. His lips were thin and his teeth big: I wondered if he had smiled as tightly when he ordered the hanging of Benazir’s father along the road in Rawalpindi jail. He talked for more than an hour about everything from Afghanistan to the state dinner he had attended in Paris when President Mitterrand had told him to take off his long black tunic, thinking it was a coat. “I had to tell him I had nothing on underneath.”

By the time I left I had some good lines, particularly his belief that the US no longer felt it needed him now the Russians were leaving Afghanistan. In my efforts to concentrate on what he was saying, however, I had pressed the wrong button on my tape recorder. When I switched it on later, the tape was blank. I made an embarrassed call to his military secretary. As it was a dictatorship, they too had recorded the interview. Shortly afterwards a man in uniform arrived bearing a copy of their transcript and a box of sweet-smelling mangoes.

My gaffe had a dramatic coda. Three weeks later, Zia was killed when his plane crashed with all the top military on board. That night I was on News at Ten just after the bongos, being interviewed by Sandy Gall and looking slightly startled. Live satellite broadcasts were virtually unknown in those days.

To everyone’s surprise, the new army chief, General Aslam Beg, announced that the elections would go ahead. Zia had scheduled them for November because he had been informed that Benazir was expecting a baby then and would be unable to campaign. But for once she had out-witted him. Knowing his spies would obtain her medical records, she had managed to have them swapped and was actually due in September.

Her detractors were not so easily thwarted. Military intelligence (ISI) put its weight behind her opponents in the Muslim League and main religious parties. They airdropped leaflets showing an old photograph of her mother in a cocktail dress dancing with President Gerald Ford. They referred to mother and daughter as “gangsters in bangles”.

Benazir's PPP emerged as the largest party but 16 seats short of a majority. While the army dallied, her lieutenants made desperate overtures, often of a financial nature, to win the support of small parties and independents. Days turned into a week, then two weeks, and editorials around the world thundered that Benazir must be allowed to form a government. On the 15th day, in an indication of who really pulls the strings in Pakistan, she had a meeting with General Hamid Gul, director of ISI; tea with the US ambassador; and dinner with the army chief. The next day, official security replaced the the PPP activists guarding the gate of the house where she was staying. At 35, she was going to be the first female prime minister in the Muslim world. That night many of the people who had been at the wedding gathered with her to celebrate again - it was hard to believe it had been less than a year - but Benazir looked pensive. For power did not come without compromise. To the consternation of some of her closest advisers, she had agreed that the military would still control Pakistan's nuclear programme and Afghan policy.

These were far from the only challenges. After years of dictatorship, everyone expected jobs and patronage from those now in power. Her followers regarded her as Queen Bountiful. Everywhere she went she was mobbed by supporters waving petitions demanding jobs as recompense for their sacrifices during martial law. Under 11½ years of dictatorship an awful lot of people had suffered for the PPP. With the treasury coffers empty, she could satisfy few of them. As I reported at the time: "Bhutto already has the biggest cabinet in Pakistan's history and an entire battalion of advisers, known locally as the 'Under 19 team' or 'Incompetence Incorporated'.

"This is not patronage politics, however. In the new government's terminology it is people's politics. When ministers ignore their government work to spend all day arranging jobs for their voters and licences for their patrons, this is not corruption or nepotism it is people's government. Using the same ploy, they have renamed many of the country's schools as people's schools, and thus claim to have created thousands of new schools."

Bhutto often complained that she was "in office but not in power". Real power remained with the army, which at any moment could bring the whole thing to an end as it had with her father. It had never really occurred to me before to question democracy as a system. But I was impressed by the Pakistani military officers I met, many of them Sandhurst-trained. It was hard not to sympathise with those who argued they were a better option than some of the leading politicians - feudal scions, used to peasants kissing the hem of their coats, who switched sides to stay in power.

I was angry with her myself about something else. How could she as a female prime minister do nothing about laws that meant a woman's evidence was worth half that of a man and that she could not open a bank account without her husband's permission?

Worst of all was the notorious Hudood Ordinance, under which if a woman was raped she needed to produce four male witnesses to the penetration. If she failed she would be imprisoned for sex outside marriage. I had visited jails full of girls who had been raped. Yet,

instead of worrying about this, Benazir spent her time on trivial matters such as working out place settings for banquets.

I

In Benazir's world you were "either with us or against us". My invitations to dinners at the prime minister's house dried up. I began getting anonymous phone calls asking if I was being paid by the opposition.

It wasn't long before the army started plotting. One afternoon, one of Benazir's ministers stopped by at my apartment looking flustered. He told me a group of army officers had been arrested to foil a coup plot. At the monthly meeting of nine corps commanders, four had openly spoken against her. After other sources confirmed what the minister had said, I filed my story. A few evenings later, two men in grey *salwar kameez* and dark glasses – the hallmark of ISI – rang my doorbell. I was driven to the Rawalpindi military cantonment where I was questioned about my "links with British and Soviet intelligence". I could not believe they were serious. They presented me with a file headed "Activities of Christina Lamb". It contained many of the things I had done and some I hadn't. There were photocopies of personal letters, and there was also some information that could have been passed on only by a good friend.

I was questioned all night and warned that it would be in my interests to leave the country. Early next morning, I was driven back to Islamabad. My flat had been ransacked. Two cars and a red motorbike appeared on the street corner and followed me everywhere.

I was determined not to be driven out, but my enemies had the last word. The interior ministry refused to renew my visa and I was asked to leave the country. The local press described me as either an Indian spy or the "Pamella Bordes of Pakistan". To my outrage, one article even claimed I had rented room 306 of the Holiday Inn to entertain.

As I drove to Islamabad airport, I notice fresh graffiti on the wall. "We apologise for this democratic interruption," it read. "Normal martial law will be resumed shortly." A few months later, on August 6, 1990, Benazir woke to the news that troops had surrounded ministries, television and radio stations. The president, flanked by the service chiefs, announced that her government had been dismissed for "corruption, mismanagement and violation of the constitution".

For more than a decade, my work took me elsewhere in the world – to Latin America and Africa – but I went back and forth to Pakistan and was there for Benazir's triumphant reelection in 1993 and her removal once more three years later amid accusations of nepotism and the undermining of the justice system. That was the first time I saw her in tears.

I married Paulo, a Portuguese journalist, and in July 1999 – three months after a Pakistani court had found the exiled Benazir guilty of corruption – our son, Lourenço, was born. I thought about giving up the peripatetic life of a foreign correspondent to write books and be more of a mother. But on September 11, 2001, I stared over and over again at the film of the second aircraft hitting the second tower of the World Trade Center.

“Mummy, Mummy, plane crashing!” shouted two-year-old Lourenço. I felt a familiar shivering in my guts. I knew I had to go back. As in the old days, the lobby of the Serena hotel in Quetta, the Pakistani city just across the border from Kanda-har, was full of ISI agents in salwar kameez and aviator glasses. Pakistan was again under a military dictator, General Pervez Musharraf, who had seized power in 1999. Benazir was out of the picture, living in exile in Dubai with her husband and two daughters.

Even if Musharraf was genuine in his professed support for the American war on the Taliban, it seemed naive to think that ISI would meekly obey. A key paradox to Pakistan is that, while it is nominally an ally in the war on terror, its powerful military intelligence has another agenda. ISI made the Taliban what they were by channelling weapons to them in Afghanistan’s years of chaos during the 1990s, and supporting them was an ideology, not just a policy. When I began investigating reports from contacts that ISI was still supplying arms to the Taliban, the men in aviator glasses struck. I was arrested at 2.30am in my hotel room, as was Justin Sutcliffe, the photographer working with me.

We spent the next two days being interrogated in an abandoned bungalow. Fortunately Justin had managed to smuggle in a mobile phone. While I made a loud fuss to our captors, he phoned from the toilet for help. Jack Straw, then the foreign secretary, intervened. On the third day we were deported as a threat to national security. Three months later, after the abduction and beheading of Daniel Pearl, the American investigative reporter, we wondered what might have happened had we not had that phone. There were signs of ISI methodology in the Pearl case.

Pakistani military intelligence couldn’t stop us getting into Afghanistan via Iran to cover the flight of the Taliban. I managed to get home to England again for Christmas, arriving on the morning of December 25. It was a shock to go from a land of dust and hunger to an enormous lunch of turkey with all the trimmings at my parents’ house and a mountain of presents under the tree for Lourenço. I couldn’t help snapping at him for leaving food on his plate, though I knew he was far too young to understand.

It was clear that the war for Afghanistan was not over – and that the real story was in Pakistan. Again and again I found myself being drawn back there. The West could send as many troops as it liked into Afghanistan but if it could not staunch the supply of Taliban fighters from madras-ahs in Pakistan, it would never resolve the problem. And this was where Benazir came back into the story.

As Pakistan became less and less governable, America began to put pressure on Musharraf to reach a political accommodation with her in the belief that together they could save the country from becoming a nuclear-armed Islamist state.

It was never a realistic scenario. Musharraf told me in November 1999, just after he seized power, that he blamed her more than anyone for the situation Pakistan was in. “You’re a friend of Benazir’s,” he said. “Well you should know this. More than anyone she had the

brains and the opportunity to change Pakistan and she didn't do it, instead spending her time making money. As long as I am here she will never be allowed back into power." Having overthrown her twice, and with their project for the resurgence of the Taliban looking successful, were the military fundamentalists going to let her back a third time?

Benazir and I had made up over the years. She sent us a large crystal bowl for a wedding present and we often met for lunch near her flat in Kensington during her years in exile. She said she enjoyed having time to play with her children in Hyde Park but it was clear she was depressed at seeing her political ambitions wash away, complaining she could not even get meetings with officials in London and Washington. When she moved from London to Dubai, it seemed as if much of her time was spent doing yoga and shopping. She had a weakness for chocolate and ice cream and had put on weight. Her shelves were full of self-help books.

I was in Karachi two months ago when, after long negotiations, she said goodbye to her two anxious daughters in Dubai and flew home after eight years in exile. Despite the risks she knew she was taking, I hadn't seen her look so happy for years. The old fire was in her eyes. She cried as she got off the plane.

I was the only journalist among about 15 family, political colleagues and friends on the open top of her campaign bus that night when two bombs went off. We were incredibly lucky to escape. When a woman tried to steer me towards an ambulance I realised I was covered with the blood of some of the 140 victims.

Benazir survived that attack but it was a brutal awakening to just how much her country had changed since she had packed her bags and fled to London in 1998. The next evening I sat with her in her small book-lined study in Karachi. She was dressed in sombre grey silk with a black armband and told me she had had just under four hours' sleep and had woken up with blood in her ears from the effect of the blast. "I haven't felt weepy yet but it suddenly hit me at about 5.30am that maybe I wouldn't have made it," she said. "I kept thinking of the noise, the light and the place littered with dead bodies. Everything seemed lit up." On the wall of the study was a child's spelling certificate, a reminder that Benazir may have been a politician but was also the devoted mother of Bilawal, 19, Bakhtawar, 17, and Asifa, 14. I saw her brush her fingers across their photographs when we got back to the house after the Karachi bombing and I asked what she had said to them.

I knew how hard it had been to hear from my husband that he and our son had seen television pictures of the explosion and that Lourenço had asked matter-of-factly: "Do you think Mummy survived?" "The first thing I thought of after the bomb went off was the children," she said. She admitted it had been hard speaking to them that morning.

"They kept saying, 'Mummy are you okay? Mummy are you okay?' They had been desperately keen to come with me, and I said, 'That's why I didn't want you to come.'

“The worst thing is hurting them, making them fearful,” she added. “I feel children need their parents. Losing my father was the worst thing that ever happened to me and I was 25 – they are still much smaller. I worry about the effect on them.”

However, she insisted they understood that she had to go back. “My mother comes from Iran and many of her relatives and friends never went back home, so I used to think I didn’t want to be one of those people who’d lost their country.”

I will never forget seeing Benazir on her bus, like Boadicea riding her chariot, standing at the open front, refusing the entreaties of her security to stay behind the armour-plated shield. Her cheeks were flushed with excitement and a speckled dove with an injured leg perched on her shoulder. “This is why I came back,” she said. “Look at the crowds, the women, the children who have come from all over. These are the real people of Pakistan, not the extremists.”

In the end she paid the ultimate price. When I got home from Portugal on Friday the first thing I opened from a pile of post was a Christmas card from Benazir sent from Islamabad. It said, “Praying for peace in the world and happiness for your family in 2008.”

It really made me cry what they were by channelling weapons to them in Afghanistan’s years of chaos during the 1990s, and supporting them was an ideology, not just a policy. When I began investigating reports from contacts that ISI was still supplying arms to the Taliban, the men in aviator glasses struck. I was arrested at 2.30am in my hotel room, as was Justin Sutcliffe, the photographer working with me.

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*TIMESONLINE
December 30, 2007*

Arkansas friend calls Bhutto a tireless 'spirit'

Michelle Hillen

During his last conversation with former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto last Friday, Benton resident Larry Wallace said he spoke with his old friend about the danger she faced as she campaigned for parliamentary elections.

On Christmas Eve, she sent him a note wishing him a happy holiday. On Thursday morning, he heard the news that Bhutto had been killed when his wife turned on the television. "It's just a tragic situation for the people of Pakistan," he said.

Despite a previous assassination attempt in October and a constant fear that she would be murdered by someone close to her, Wallace said, Bhutto could not be dissuaded from her zeal for bringing democracy to Pakistan.

"She was burning with a passion for freedom," he said. "She really wanted to [bring democracy to Pakistan], even though it was risky, even though it was a huge burden on her and her family and her kids. You couldn't have stopped her."

Wallace, a lawyer who said he has been friends with Bhutto for 10 years since being introduced by mutual friends, flew into Pakistan with her Oct. 18, her first trip home after eight years in exile. Hundreds of thousands of supporters came out in the streets to greet her, he said.

"Instantly, I realized that my friend was much bigger than a human being - she was a spirit over there," Wallace said.

Later that day two explosions went off near a truck carrying Bhutto, killing 126 people and wounding 248 others. Wallace said he holed up with Bhutto in her house for nine days.

"She was extremely calm and collected that whole night. We talked until 6 or 7 in the morning," he said. "She was undeterred the entire discussion, and had she lived through this assassination, within 30 minutes she would have been right back on her mission."

Bhutto, who visited Arkansas for the first time in 1991 to speak at Harding University in Searcy, returned several times while touring the U.S. to promote democracy in Pakistan. In addition to the visits to Harding and the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Bhutto also spoke at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville in October 2002, asking for U.S. intervention in elections in Pakistan.

Bill Vickery, a Little Rock political consultant who met Bhutto through Wallace, said he tried to help her garner support in the U.S. for her efforts. Her death, Vickery said, is a “complete and total disaster for both Pakistan and the United States.”

“The one key figure in the war on terror could have been Benazir Bhutto,” he said. “She would have possessed the public approval and the confidence of the U.S. government to go after al-Qaida and the Taliban, and she professed that she would do that. Ultimately, that may have cost her her life.” Wallace said though Bhutto would want the elections to go on in Pakistan, he doesn’t know who will be able to fill the void she has left there.

“You have al-Qaida operating right there, funded and trained right there,” Wallace said. “Here was a leader that wanted to come in and change that and stand by us and the people of America for justice and democracy. We have lost that. There is no one else there that could do that.”

*Arkansas Online
December 28, 2007*

Daughter of destiny

Christopher Hitchens

The sternest critic of Benazir Bhutto would not have been able to deny that she possessed an extraordinary degree of physical courage. When her father was lying in prison under sentence of death from Pakistan's military dictatorship in 1979, and other members of her family were trying to escape the country, she boldly flew back in. Her subsequent confrontation with the brutal Gen. Zia-ul-Haq cost her five years of her life, spent in prison. She seemed merely to disdain the experience, as she did the vicious little man who had inflicted it upon her.

Benazir saw one of her brothers, Shahnawaz, die in mysterious circumstances in the south of France in 1985, and the other, Mir Murtaza, shot down outside the family home in Karachi by uniformed police in 1996. It was at that famous address—70 Clifton Road—that I went to meet her in November 1988, on the last night of the election campaign, and I found out firsthand how brave she was.

Taking the wheel of a jeep and scorning all bodyguards, she set off with me on a hair-raising tour of the Karachi slums. Every now and then, she would get out, climb on the roof of the jeep with a bullhorn, and harangue the mob that pressed in close enough to turn the vehicle over. On the following day, her Pakistan Peoples Party won in a landslide, making her, at the age of 35, the first woman to be elected the leader of a Muslim country.

Her tenure ended—as did her subsequent “comeback” tenure—in a sorry welter of corruption charges and political intrigue, and in a gilded exile in Dubai. But clearly she understood that exile would be its own form of political death. (She speaks well on this point in an excellent recent profile by Amy Wilentz in *More* magazine.) Like two other leading Asian politicians, Benigno Aquino of the Philippines and Kim Dae-jung of South Korea, she seems to have decided that it was essential to run the risk of returning home. And now she has gone, as she must have known she might, the way of Aquino.

Who knows who did this deed? It is grotesque, of course, that the murder should have occurred in Rawalpindi, the garrison town of the Pakistani military elite and the site of Flashman's Hotel. It is as if she had been slain on a visit to West Point or Quantico. But it's hard to construct any *cui bono* analysis on which Gen. Pervez Musharraf is the beneficiary of her death. The likeliest culprit is the Al-Qaida/ Taliban axis, perhaps with some assistance from its many covert and not-so-covert sympathizers in the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence. These were the people at whom she had been pointing the finger since the huge bomb that devastated her welcome-home motorcade on Oct. 18.

She would have been in a good position to know about this connection, because when she was prime minister, she pursued a very active pro-Taliban policy, designed to extend and

entrench Pakistani control over Afghanistan and to give Pakistan strategic depth in its long confrontation with India over Kashmir. The fact of the matter is that Benazir's undoubted courage had a certain fanaticism to it. She had the largest Electra complex of any female politician in modern history, entirely consecrated to the memory of her executed father, the charming and unscrupulous Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a former prime minister, who had once boasted that the people of Pakistan would eat grass before they would give up the struggle to acquire a nuclear weapon. A nominal socialist, Zulfikar Bhutto was an autocratic opportunist, and this family tradition was carried on by the PPP, a supposedly populist party that never had a genuine internal election and was in fact—like quite a lot else in Pakistan—Bhutto family property.

Daughter of Destiny is the title she gave to her autobiography. She always displayed the same unironic lack of embarrassment. How prettily she lied to me, I remember, and with such a level gaze from those topaz eyes, about how exclusively peaceful and civilian Pakistan's nuclear program was. How righteously indignant she always sounded when asked unwelcome questions about the vast corruption alleged against her and her husband, Asif Ali Zardari. (The Swiss courts recently found against her in this matter; an excellent background piece was written by John Burns in the New York Times in 1998.) And now the two main legacies of Bhutto rule—the nukes and the empowered Islamists—have moved measurably closer together.

This is what makes her murder such a disaster. There is at least some reason to think that she had truly changed her mind, at least on the Taliban and al-Qaida, and was willing to help lead a battle against them. She had, according to some reports, severed the connection with her rather questionable husband. She was attempting to make the connection between lack of democracy in Pakistan and the rise of mullah-manipulated fanaticism. Of those preparing to contest the highly dubious upcoming elections, she was the only candidate with anything approaching a mass appeal to set against the siren calls of the fundamentalists. And, right to the end, she carried on without the fetish of "security" and with lofty disregard for her own safety.

This courage could sometimes have been worthy of a finer cause, and many of the problems she claimed to solve were partly of her own making. Nonetheless, she perhaps did have a hint of destiny about her.

Slate Magazine
December 27, 2007

The impact of the Bhuttos

Farahnaz Ispahani



The brutal and tragic assassination of Pakistan's beloved princess of democracy, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, has unleashed a wave of emotion throughout the country. Generals, bureaucrats, financial analysts and other hard-nosed types are trained not to be emotional. That is why none of them succeed in understanding populist politics. Only those who understand what my husband Professor Husain Haqqani calls "the sentimental dimension of politics" know why the Bhutto family commands such devotion among the impoverished masses.

The elites have gone hoarse demonising the Bhuttos and Asif Zardari for several decades. That, and the repeated listing of the national managers' "achievements by technocratic criteria, have not been able to dent the love and adulation that the Bhutto family inspires. Amidst the mourning for our beloved Benazir Bhutto, the succession to her mantle has rightly passed to her son, Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, and her husband, Asif Ali Zardari. Bilawal represents the Bhutto bloodline; Asif Zardari symbolizes the great sacrifices of a couple that could have left politics and lived a good life, as asked of them by successive intelligence generals. But people whose rise in life as the result only of their job choices do not comprehend the power of belief in a cause.

Benazir Shaheed and Asif Zardari shared the belief in the people's right to choose. For that commitment to democracy, Benazir Shaheed risked her life and Asif Zardari languished in prison instead of taking the easy way out of quitting their struggle. The Bhutto-Zardari family will have throngs of adulatory supporters long after their tormentors are dead and gone. How many people, motivated by nothing but love, risk their lives to hear a speech by the inheritors of Ayub Khan, or Ziaul Haq who governed for many more years but never ruled anyone's heart?

For most people, fear is instinctive. The Bhutto family is perhaps amongst that rare breed that never allows fear to venture in their lives. Much will be written in the days to come about the Bhutto legacy. But even their worst critics would have to recognize that the Bhuttos' populist fearlessness is what Pakistan's entrenched establishment has feared most. This fearlessness was shared by the father, the brothers and Benazir Bhutto. Only a fearless Benazir Bhutto dared to question the entrenched authority of General Musharraf and the violent obscurantism of the terrorists.

The various segments of Pakistan's establishment – military, civil, religious, economic and social – have all hated the Bhuttos for more than three decades. The events in the country

following Benazir Bhutto's return from exile on October 18 needs to be seen in that context. The military establishment, represented by General Pervez Musharraf, engaged with Benazir Bhutto for what was meant to be a transition to democracy. While they were engaging with her they were also trying to damage her by describing the negotiations as a "deal". They expected to weaken her support with constant refrains of "power-sharing deal" and "American backing" before allowing her to return to Pakistan. The attitude of several members of the intelligentsia, which fell for the psychological warfare tactics aimed at compromising Shaheed Benazir's democratic credentials, created the illusion of dissent within PPP ranks. This rekindled the establishment's hopes of finishing off politically the populist Bhutto creed in Pakistan's politics and enforcing the guided democracy model that all military rulers since Ayub Khan have preferred.

But Benazir Bhutto knew better. She knew that her strength lay in the people of Pakistan and if she managed to reach out to them and connect with them she would be able to win back her support. To do that she needed some freedom of movement in the country and that she ensured through negotiations. Despite the harsh comments of her detractors and critics, she created space not only for herself but for all democratic political forces.

Her massive welcome reception and the mobilization from across the country proved once again that despite years of propaganda to taint the Bhutto name she was still a formidable force. Pakistan's politics were incomplete without her presence and that of her party. The suicide bombing at the Karachi rally on her arrival sent a clear message to Shaheed Benazir that she was welcome to do politics but only within the bounds defined by the establishment. They asked her not to go out and meet people.

Within days of that attack she was on the streets, meeting workers all over Pakistan. This was the way Bhuttos connect with the people and she would not walk away from that. The tragedy of December 27 took her life but Benazir Bhutto kept alight the torch lit by her father. "Power belongs to the People" and should only be exercised by their representatives. The generals, intelligence officials, bankers, business executives and others who think they, rather than the unwashed masses, must run the country might be able to hang on to power with the force of arms and with large quantum of external aid. They will never be loved, in life or in death, as much as any of the Bhuttos.

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*The News
January 1, 2008*

Why I cried, at last

Shaheen Sehbai

It is male chauvinism or bloated egos, but men don't cry, at least in public. But when my friend Masood Haider of Dawn, who had just arrived from New York, called me from Lahore after the news of Benazir's sudden death had broken, both of us just held the cell phones without saying a word and cried, sobbing aloud, tears flowing. I was in the office and told him to calm down and I got back to work, as the job had to be done first. Tears could wait.



What we both were recalling were the numerous sessions we had together with Benazir Bhutto, whenever she was visiting New York or Washington during the last many years of her exile. These were exclusive sessions and what we talked about was everything probably no one else would ever dare to raise with her, friend or critic.

She knew about all the long critical articles and stories that I had written during her first and the second tenures in government and would argue with force that the data and equipment that I quoted was leaked, distorted and misrepresented by the establishment, reaching my hands through agents whom probably I did not know but trusted as good news sources.

But she also knew that whenever she was out of power, it was the same media, the same writers and journalists who stood by the persecuted and fought their case. In 1991 when Asif Ali Zardari was in Jam Sadiq Ali's dreaded jail, shortly after Benazir had been removed as Prime Minister, she recalled that journalists from Islamabad were the first to go and meet him, in jail, despite Jam's fierce resistance. I was part of those six journalists, others including Nusrat Javeed, late Azhar Sohail and Shakeel Sheikh, and had been invited by Jam Sadiq to tour Sindh at his expense but write what we saw. That we did and almost every article shredded the late tyrant's claims of peace and tranquillity in Sindh. That jail visit was where we all began a long lasting friendship with Asif Zardari. She remembered and discussed those days with praise and gratitude.

Benazir thus was not an arrogant person as many portray her to be. She was inexperienced and a little naive in her early years of power but with trials and tribulations of horrendous magnitude she matured into a polished politician, a diplomat par excellence and a pragmatic leader. Her years of exile taught her more about politics and how to handle people than her years in power. She developed a direct rapport with anyone and everyone and used the internet to the maximum. Her E-mail politics, as her critics used to joke, did wonders for her. She was in direct touch with all and she got feedback instantly, helping her make quick and right decisions. That style of politics kept her ahead of her opponents and kept the cadres engaged, giving them a feeling of intimacy and a feeling of access to the top leadership.

My first hand experience of that E-mail politics was when she was planning to visit Jeddah to condole with Mian Nawaz Sharif as his father the late Abbaji had expired in exile. Asif Ali Zardari had also made it to Dubai and they were planning to meet Nawaz for the first time outside their country. Since I was on her E-mail grid and frequently exchanged notes, I asked her what she was expecting to achieve at the Jeddah meeting with Mian Nawaz Sharif as it should be a major political event and not just a condolence meeting. In reply she asked what I thought should come out of Jeddah.

I gave her my view as an objective observer. The meeting must produce some document which gives hope to the people that the two major political parties of Pakistan are now ready to sit together and discuss their past, present and future relations, I suggested. On her insistence I sent her a one-page brief of what they should discuss and announce publicly. I called it the Charter of Democracy. It should, I suggested, candidly admit the past mistakes committed by both the sides and lay down the course of political action making solemn pledges and commitments that never again would the two parties undermine each other to favour any third non-political institution.

Benazir was so excited she responded instantly saying I have just got this paper and I am flying after a few hours and I will take this paper to Mian Sahib. What we saw then was an announcement about the Charter as both Mian Nawaz Sharif and Benazir made it into a cornerstone for their future politics, a watershed of sorts. They set up a committee which gave real shape to the basic idea which remained the reference point of both the leaders, despite their variances in approach, for dealing with the military regime.

That was Benazir Bhutto, the mature politician who would listen to others and share with them her confidence and trust, the grown up Benazir, so to say. One remarkable aspect of her life in exile was that never ever, even in the wild wild world of the paparazzi, the media men and camera guys chasing world celebrities, any personal scandal about her was discovered, though she travelled almost continuously between world capitals. She was always conscious of her image back home, wearing the proper head dress when appearing before the cameras and always showing respect for other religions and sects.

She was not always happy with Masood and myself as we would sometimes say things she would not like. In July this year when she was hobnobbing with General Pervez Musharraf some friends met in Washington and reached a consensus that her secret backdoor channels with the military would damage her politically. Somehow I took that on myself to inform her in detail that this was a mistake.

Editor Najam Sethi was also part of that discussion and he immediately dissociated with the consensus view. The diplomat Benazir just did not respond to the communication and we did not bother. When her meetings with Musharraf started yielding results, positive for her but criticized by almost the entire civil society, a feeling started developing that probably she had a point in showing pragmatism as she did not have enough guns and commandos to fight her way to power and win against an entire army.

But probably she miscalculated either the commitment of the other side in her secret talks or the resistance within the institution to her teaming up with General Musharraf. She achieved a lot but she misread the open and hidden opposition, wherever it was. They were out to get her and General Musharraf either did not bother, did not know or did not care. She paid the price for her pragmatism.

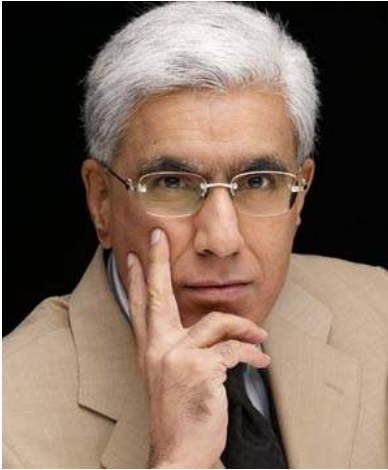
We lost a great leader, a popular politician and also a person with whom an intelligent, candid and frank discussion could be held, without fear of any repercussions. No one is left in the political spectrum to match her level of sophistication, international exposure, popular support and still open to receive and act on good advice.

We lost a friend and when I returned home at 3 am after a hard day's work, this shocking reality sunk in that the friend was being air lifted in a casket and her grave was ready to receive her. Benazir in a grave, the thought suddenly jolted me, brought waves of tears and I shed them all in silence, and alone.

The News
December 29, 2007

My friend, Benazir

Karan Thapar



Sitting in my digs at Cambridge after dinner during the Easter vacation of 1976, Benazir, who had driven over from Oxford that morning with her friend Tricia, suddenly suggested we dash out for ice cream. So we bundled into her MGB sports car which was parked outside. But instead of driving towards the centre of town, she headed for the A40. "Where are you going?" I asked perplexed. "London! It's the nearest Baskin Robbins I know."

Benazir loved ice cream. She could eat vast quantities of it. In later years, her favourite became Ben & Jerry's. Whenever I finished a particularly acrimonious interview, she would insist that we eat ice cream together. "It will cool you down!" she would laugh.

There were several interviews that annoyed her, a few that upset her and at least one that riled her. But she never held that against me. She accepted that a journalist had a job to do just as she insisted that a politician couldn't answer every question. She always ensured that our professional relationship – as interviewer and Prime Minister or Opposition leader – remained separate from our friendship.

As a young politician, in the years after her father's cruel hanging, she often consciously modeled herself on Indira Gandhi. I remember her fascination for the traditional Indian namaste. "It's dignified, friendly but not familiar," she once said. I suspect the adab that she made her personal greeting was in her eyes an equivalent.

In 1984, when Maqbool Butt was about to be hanged, Benazir wrote to Indira Gandhi pleading that he be saved. "Why are you doing that?" I asked. I couldn't understand her need to write the letter. I thought it was a mistake. "I have to, Karan," she explained. "I've lived through my father's hanging and I know the trauma it created for the family. I can't watch someone else go through the same misery without doing what I can to prevent it." Indira Gandhi never replied but Benazir didn't hold that against her.

As a Bhutto daughter, Benazir was always conscious of her family's similarity with the Gandhis. After Sanjay Gandhi's plane crash and Indira's assassination in the early 80s were followed by her brother Shahnawaz's mysterious death, she once commented that there was a curse on both families. At the time, Rajiv's killing and her own were still far in the future. Today there can be no doubt about that curse.

In 1988, when Rajiv visited Islamabad, during the early weeks of her first prime ministership, she invited him and Sonia to a private family dinner on their first night. Her husband Asif, her mother Nusrat and her sister Sanam were the only other people present. In those days, a common joke in both countries was that Rajiv and Benazir should marry each other and sort out their two countries' problems. Benazir told me they laughed over it at dinner. "Rajeev", as she always pronounced his name, adopting a misplaced Punjabi accent for a Westernised Sindhi, "is so handsome," she said when I next met her. And then she added, "But he's equally tough."

During the BJP years, Benazir forged a link with the Advani family with equal facility and friendship. A few months after her first meeting with L.K. Advani, we were together in Washington for the Prayer Breakfast of 2002. During a break in one of the sessions, she insisted that I accompany her shopping. "But we're walking, okay? I need the exercise and so do you!" As we sauntered down Connecticut Avenue, she stopped outside an old-fashioned bookshop. Minutes later she bought a Robert Kaplan paperback as a gift for Advani. I carried it back to Delhi. It was the first of several similar gifts she sent to him through me.

I know that as Prime Minister, her two terms in office disillusioned many. Her fans were disappointed whilst her critics felt justified. But between 1989 and 2007 the change that characterised her attitude to India and Kashmir in particular steadily progressed and didn't falter. From the young prime minister who would shout on television "Azadi, Azadi, Azadi!", she became the first, the most consistent and perhaps the strongest proponent of a joint India-Pakistan solution to Kashmir. As early as 2001, she began to speak about soft borders, free trade and even, perhaps unrealistically, a joint parliament for the two halves of Kashmir. Musharraf's concept of self-governance and joint management draws heavily upon her original thinking.

When I last interviewed her in September, days before her return to Pakistan, she went further than ever before. Not only did she forcefully repeat her commitment to clamp down on all private militias and shut terrorist camps but, in addition, she promised to consider the extradition of Dawood Ibrahim and even the possibility of giving India access to men like Hafiz Mohammed Sayeed and Masood Azhar.

In private conversation, she would readily admit that the strident prime minister of 1988-89 was a mistake. In fact, she came close to saying as much on television as well. Had she lived to become Prime Minister, I feel certain she would have fulfilled this commitment. This is why she was so upset, actually angry, at the National Security Advisor's scepticism of her. Her death is, therefore, an irreparable loss for India as well.

The two months since her return to Pakistan have proved beyond doubt her incredible bravery. But it wasn't just the peak of the Zia dictatorship, an untried and inexperienced 33-year-old flew home to challenge the might of the General and his loyal army. "Are you worried?" I asked on her last night in London. "When something has to be done, fear is the last thought in my mind." To some that might sound pompous, but I took it as a reflection of her steely confidence.

This October, when I asked her if she could repeat the miracle a second time, she shot back with the question, "Why do you ask?" I told her that now she was 54, she had been Prime Minister twice and disappointed many and Pakistan was a very different country.

She heard me in silence and then softly smiled. Her eyes seemed to take on a knowing but playful look. When she spoke, her words sounded measured and well-considered. "It will be an even bigger return home."

In fact, it was an explosive return. But I doubt Benazir would have wanted to die of old age. Instead, she died a hero, a martyr and an inspiration for many.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the father she adored, would have been proud of his Pinky. But she leaves behind three young children and an ailing mother who will miss her sorely. And there is a hole at the heart of Pakistan's return to democracy that may never get filled. Was she her country's last chance of a peaceful, moderate, enlightened, Muslim future?

The day after her death, I received Benazir's New Year card. It reads, 'Praying for peace in the world and happiness for your family in 2008.' Unfortunately, they were denied to her.

Hindustan Times
December 29, 2007

World has lost a leader

Neena Gopal



How does one say goodbye? To a politician whom the world saw as imperious, cold and manipulative. To a woman I grew to view as intrinsically warm, but torn nevertheless between a strong sense of destiny and an equally deep sense of duty to her young family and her troubled country.

Benazir Bhutto's eight years of self exile in Dubai were perhaps the only time in her tragedy-ridden life when she found a cocoon, a safe haven in the desert oasis that cloaked her and her family from the rough and tumble of Pakistan's brutal, unforgiving, Machiavellian battlefield. A time, when she shepherded her beloved son and daughters to the threshold of adulthood. A time when she found a rare peace within, radiating a surprising warmth to all those she gathered to her, even as the world without remained awash with conflict, war and instability.

Indisputably, Bhutto's shock assassination, a casualty of that very instability, removes one of the world's most incandescent political leaders from the international arena. This was someone armed with the mantra of democracy, holding out the promise of indisputably changing the course of her country. Away from the forces that were pulling Pakistan towards anarchy and radicalism, offering perhaps even an alternative, the palliative of a representative democracy alien to an increasingly militant environment.

The stark reality is just as Bhutto said it would be. In the last eight years of rule by diktat, a pretense of civilian rule allowed the spread of Talibanisation. Elected leaders who stood for principles, rule of law under threat, simply swept away by the radical, the fanatic. Men who cloaked their beliefs and whose penetration of the establishment compromised security for the man on the street and those who claim to speak for them. It's only apt then that hours after her remains were interred in the Bhutto family mausoleum deep in the Sindhi heartland at Garhi Khuda Baksh - a day after an assassin felled her at a high octane rally in Liaquat Bagh in the garrison town of Rawalpindi - the controversy surrounding her death has risen like a spectre.

The conflicting stories would have been torn apart in seconds by Bhutto, adept at deconstructing spin. A day after the October 18 failed assassination attempt Bhutto sat with me in her Karachi home Bilawal House and named the two men she believed were behind the attempt to eliminate her. The rise of another Bhutto to upset the carefully built "mullah-military-madrassa" edifice would not be allowed. But coaxed by Washington and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice who used her as a human pawn in America's bloody chessboard, this woman had gathered up the courage to face the very men who

systematically remove anyone who posed a threat to their idea of the ideological moorings of the state of Pakistan.

Foolhardy? Perhaps. Especially when she readily admitted that Washington's blessings were a kiss of death. But as the water cannons hosed down Shar-e-Faisal where she narrowly escaped death the night before, removing all the evidence so that it will never be known whether it was a suicide bomber or a bomb planted in an abandoned car left on the divider that killed some 150 of her supporters and she upped the ante by calling for an independent judicial inquiry, she knew it was a plea that would fall on deaf ears.

No eye witness accounts were sought, no judicial inquiry, no public debate allowed in an unprecedented media clampdown. Ten weeks later, 12 days away from the polls and with growing evidence that this was a Bhutto on an electoral roll, the assassins struck.

Clearly, the trained marksmen who converged around her vehicle had studied her campaign, knew when the populist leader was at her most vulnerable - when she would be drawn by the magnet of crowds to emerge from her bullet proof vehicle to connect with her people.

The video footage released by officialdom shows a man with a gun to her left. Eyewitnesses inside the car who cradled their mortally wounded, dying leader as they tried to get to hospital say the explosion that wrecked the vehicle came after she slumped back soundlessly through the hatch. Her trusted legal and political aides insist she had three bullet wounds to her neck, head and chest.

That changing the cause of death from bullets to shrapnel to a lever that cracked her skull is to remove the idea of complicity of the military. The lack of a post mortem, a dubious medical report, the haste with which a twice elected prime minister was buried without requisite state honours, the speed with which the spot where she died was hosed down and naming Baitullah Mehsud as the terminator can only raise questions of a cover up.

As for elections, her Pakistan People's Party would probably sweep polls buoyed by a sympathy factor, having quite the opposite effect intended by the masterminds. With ally Nawaz Sharif refusing to cash in and participate, the election is already a farce. In death as in life, this remarkable woman's beliefs will continue to determine whether her country heads towards the abyss or the phrase she made her own - "transition to democracy". A woman to whom one can never say goodbye.

*Neena Gopal is an analyst on Asia
Gulf News
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My BB, my boss

Shafqat Mahmood

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was an iconic figure long before I met her for the first time in November 1989. Those of us who despised the Zia dictatorship had cried at the memory of this young woman's tearful last meetings with her father and the trauma she had endured on his judicial murder.



We also admired the fortitude and courage with which she had stood up to the dictator and bravely faced imprisonment and solitary confinement. And, when she came back to the country, we had lived through the joy of her triumphant return and the victory of her party in 1988.

I remember tears in my eyes when she took oath as Prime Minister because it seemed that evil had lost and good had won and a new chapter was about to begin and that never again would dictators rule this land and that this young and fragile looking women would take our nation forward and replace despair with hope and bring light where darkness had ruled. I remember that as soon as the ceremony was over, the TV played a recording of Faiz's '*bahar aae to mit gaye hein azab saray*' and amid more tears, emotions of joy welled up in my heart and after a long time I felt proud to be a part of nation that had produced a leader like Benazir Bhutto.

Imagine then my nervousness when I was ushered in, a mere grade 19 civil servant, to meet her in the Prime Minister's office in the State Bank building in November of 1989. Sardar Maqsood Khan Leghari had made this happen and I sat quietly while he spoke. Mohtarma was sitting looking at some files while listening to him and I felt here was my chance to impress her and perhaps get a chance to work for her, so with shaking knees, I started to give her my take on the situation in the country. I don't think until then she had noticed me at all but when I started to speak, she probably thought that I was making some sense because she put on her glasses and started to listen carefully. She immediately ordered that I be posted in her secretariat and thus began an association that was to last seven years.

For someone untutored in the ways of high politics, it was both exciting and a surreal experience. Just a few days after I had take charge, I wrote her a note on the politics of Punjab and she called me to the Sindh House, which was then the Prime Minister's residence, to discuss it. As I started to brief her, she turned on a small radio to a station playing 'pahari' music of the Potohar region. This surprised me and she saw me giving it a strange look. She smiled and started pointing her finger towards the roof and the walls. It took me a few seconds to realise that she was telling me the room was bugged. For a mid level civil servant sitting with the Prime Minister of the country this was a sobering welcome to the tortured world of power in Pakistan.

It soon became obvious to me that she was not only trying to solve some of the serious problems facing the country but she was fighting an internal battle against the establishment and its intelligence agencies who were trying to destabilize her. Those of us in her personal staff were immediately sensitized to this danger and started to be very careful about what we said or wrote. This internal battle was brought home to me when the Sindh government launched the *pucca qilla* operation in Hyderabad in 1990.

This was a police action designed to unearth a large quantity of arms hidden in this redoubt in the city. As the police reached near the main arsenal, the army intervened and stopped the operation. A day later, I flew with her to Hyderabad and the local administration was very clear that this intervention was only designed to thwart their finding a large quantity of arms and ammunition hidden there. I remember asking her whether anyone in the army had sought her permission or that of the Sindh government. The answer was in the negative. The Army commander General Aslam Beg had done this, to stop the terrorists from being exposed.

It was clear to us then that sooner or later, General Beg would engineer her ouster and that is exactly what happened. Through friends in the media who were being briefed by the agencies, I learnt in early June that the PPP government would be dismissed by the President in late July or early August. I told the Prime Minister but she did not believe it. She thought that they would try for another vote of no confidence and not dismissal. Since I was sure that the die had been cast, I asked her permission to resign from service and join her party.

Surprisingly she was very reluctant to do this. She told me that I should not ruin my career and that politics was a difficult and a tough game. I was adamant because I thought that I had crossed the line dividing a civil servant from politics, and there was no point in hanging on. She finally agreed and appointed me her political secretary on July 1, 1990. As predicted, her government was dismissed by President Ishaq Khan on August 5, which came as a bit of a surprise for her. Until that morning, she had believed this would not happen even though newspapers were predicting it. That evening I wrote my first political statement on her behalf sitting on the dining table of the Prime Minister house.

The three years we spent in the opposition were a rollicking ride. There is so much to say and so many memories. I had taken over the running of the PPP secretariat but doubled as her speech writer, confidant, liaison with the diplomatic community and was intimately involved in all kinds of games that are a necessary part of power politics in Pakistan. It was during this period that I discovered the intimate human side of her. She was fiercely protective of her children and loved them to bits. She was a devoted wife and suffered the anguish of Mr. Zardari's imprisonment. She was a good and a caring friend who looked after some who were in distress. She was also a wonderful story teller and had a great sense of humour.

Her courage was of course legendary and I saw two instances of it. Once in 1992 we were sitting on the lawns of Bilawal House in Karachi in the evening when firing started outside.

Instead of running inside, she started to go up the watch tower to see what was going on. It was with great difficulty that her friends and security people persuaded her not to. Later, during the long march of that year, she broke through the security cordons to reach Liaquat Bagh even though Islamabad had been turned into an armed camp. It was also during this time that I earned my spurs in politics by going to jail.

After she won the election in 1993, Benazir Bhutto became Prime Minister again. She was very kind to people who had stood by her in difficult times and gave me a ticket for the Senate seat in Islamabad. Surprisingly for me, while I was now a PPP representative in the Senate and a member of the central executive committee of the party, I had little role in the running of the government. It was during this time that our differences started to grow, as I was very upset at the way the government was being run and with the people who had surrounded the Prime Minister and her spouse. This led to many problems for the government and tarnished the name of this great politician and wonderful human being. I quit the party in November 1996 when her government was dismissed and I am not very proud of the fact that I joined the caretaker government put together by President Farooq Leghari. It was a stupid mistake and was more in pique rather than on principle.

Two small events I would like to mention in closing. When the late Murtaza Bhutto was tragically killed, I was in the United States and immediately came back and went to see her in the PM house. As it happened, she and I were alone and she broke down and wept uncontrollably. Those who say that she had any hand in her brother's death are insane. The second is the time I went to see her after quitting the party in November 1996 and joining Mr. Leghari's cabinet.

I felt that it was only fair that I must tell her why I have done so. We met for over an hour and as it turned out this was my last real meeting with her. For someone who should have been angry at my quitting the party, she was gracious and only said that I was being misled. This is a person who people think was vindictive. May she rest in peace.

The News
January 2, 2008

Memories, pain and grief

Javed Jabbar



Having been fairly skeptical and critical of Benazir Bhutto since my resignation from the PPP in 1995, during her second tenure as prime minister (1993-1996), I was shocked at my own self for two of my reactions on Dec 27.

In the afternoon, in response to a friend's question as to whom I would vote for on Jan 8, 2008, I spontaneously replied to the effect that if I did vote, it would be for the PPP. In view of my earlier condemnation of the decision by major parties to take part in the polls being held under a dispensation violative of the fundamental principles of justice and fairness, I was surprised at my own answer.

Despite all my reservations, developed over the past decade and more, about certain aspects of PPP's top leadership, I have now come to realize that if the electoral process is to be used to combat the demons of darkness in Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto was the most potent rallying point to combine the forces of modernism and secularism.

To recognize her primacy in the struggle against obscurantism was not to detract from the sincerity or the strength of other political personalities and parties that share the same broad approach. By being forthright on this issue, by refusing to equivocate with provisos and qualifiers, she was mobilizing a new politically credible resistance to primitivism.

My second reaction on Dec 27 came when I heard of her death on my way home. Fortunately, I was not on the steering wheel. The driver too was taken aback by my reaction. Leave alone he, I too was unprepared for the pain and grief that suddenly surged in me.

Between the tears and gasps of shock, there came up enormous affection and empathy for her, sentiments I had obviously pummeled deep inside my psyche over the past ten years, as one's cerebral views took over almost entirely from partly emotional responses.

Our first meeting was in 1986. As a member of the independent parliamentary opposition group I joined other members in welcoming her to a meeting in Rawalpindi. Our last meeting turned into a three-hour, one-on-one lunch in, of all places, Damascus in 2000 where she had come to pay homage to a good old friend of the Bhutto family, the late President Hafez al Assad. I was representing Chief Executive General Pervez Musharraf at the state funeral.

We maintained a cordial, formal and sometimes warm relationship. In the past seven years, on random occasions, through common friends, we exchanged brief messages of goodwill. But now I regret I did not make an attempt to seek a meeting since our last chance encounter.

In the 15 years during which we did meet, particularly in the 1988-1990 phase in which I served in her first cabinet as minister of state for information and broadcasting and later, for science and technology, I often became conscious of her vulnerability and her fragility, qualities that one does not normally associate with a person of exceptional verve, composure and determination. Behind her public persona of a bold defiance of dictators, of her bland, imperturbable expression that would deflect and reject queries from interviewers about corruption charges, there existed a sensitive private person thrust into public life through cruel twists and turns without a single day's direct experience of parliamentary membership or of executive responsibility.

To be the daughter of a famous leader long accustomed to public office is one thing. To become prime minister in her own right, in a sense overnight, at a critical period without any prior personal exposure to public office caused severe stress and strain on her, is another. On rare occasions, these became visible. This made her all the more endearing.

My working relationship with Benazir Bhutto was sometimes tense and troubled, marked by strong disagreements on some policy issues. Yet there was also amiability, affinity and humour. Whatever the mood or situation, it was always memorable. In spite of our divergent perceptions on certain issues, she sometimes entrusted me with extremely important tasks, a confidence on her part which I greatly respected.

She was a leader of global calibre, and not just a daughter of the east. She inherited a powerful political legacy and sustained it in many ways while also enhancing it in some respects and diminishing it in others. In the new era of globalization in the last two decades of the 20th century, in the face of dramatic geopolitical changes that swept the world, in the context of the traumatic turmoil that has marked Pakistan's history in the first seven years of the 21st century, she remained, at home and in self-exile, a unique and formidable leader.

Assassinated by a cabal of cowards and conspirators who should be urgently traced and punished, her tragic loss opens up new challenges for society and the state of Pakistan. Every citizen who felt the grief and the pain at her demise now has a duty to render an active role to curb mayhem and disorder, to unite all progressive forces and to achieve the ideals she fought for.

More than ever before, there is a need to secure and strengthen the Federation of Pakistan for which she sacrificed her life.

*The writer is a former Senator and Federal Minister
December 29, 2007*

A tribute to Benazir Bhutto

Nafisa Shah



For decades, Benazir Bhutto mesmerised the people of Pakistan. Her beauty, charisma, exuberance, and intellect gave her a string of qualities that rallied people around her. But more than all this, what gave her a mass appeal, were the circumstances under which she took on the mantle of Pakistan Peoples Party, her father's Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's most important legacy. A young woman in her mid-twenties took on the challenge to lead Bhutto's party after he had been hanged in a farcical trial by a military dictator. General Zia's coup brought a repressive regime, when many People's Party workers were incarcerated, hanged, lashed, and several thousands went underground for years. The young and fiery Benazir Bhutto, leaving her own suffering aside, became a source of strength for her party, which she would lead from the front henceforth.

The Bhutto persona has been the backdrop to all of my life. I experienced Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's rise and fall as a child, and then Benazir Bhutto's powerful presence, through my father, who has been on the PPP landscape ever since its inception and has remained a central political figure in the party. My own relationship with Benazir Bhutto was formal, with few communications, but I always awaited her occasional assignments for the party that she would send out from time to time. Of course, Benazir also gave me the first major push into Pakistan's murky politics by nominating me for the position of Nazim of my home district.

Benazir adeptly transformed tragedy, oppression and threat into opportunity. She withstood arrests and exiles with admirable courage. Her contributions towards strengthening and evolving Pakistan People's Party are impressive. As a party head, she sang praise for those workers who suffered during the Zia regime, and those who gave their life. She managed to string together dissenting groups and individuals, and manage the conflicts within the party, and yet be cohesive force. There were important continuities of the organisation from Bhutto's time. The concept of the 'PPP worker' continued to be its defining feature. Under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the PPP worker, called *jiyala*, was defined as a vocal, highly emotional, full of fervour, aggressive, straight speaking party activist, who would tell it straight to the higher leaders of their weaknesses. The PPP worker did everything from raising slogans, to participating in meetings to mobilising people on the ground, to resolving the day-to-day issues. And most importantly the worker was fearless, immune to government pressures, threats, arrests, and FIRs. This highly stylistic PPP worker has survived all trials and travails. It would be more difficult to discuss Benazir's contributions as a Prime Minister, primarily because even when she was at the helm of power, her rule was subject to back door intrigues by the dark forces, and was allowed little space to execute her policies with a free hand. Here

too, she was sinned against, not for once being allowed to stay in power for the five years that people voted her for.

If I were to choose one enduring legacy in all of these aspects - it would be of her role in defining the shape and agenda of popular politics in Pakistan. From Movement for Restoration of Democracy to Alliance for Restoration of Democracy, Benazir Bhutto's politics could simply be summed up as a struggle for restoration of a democratic order in a country that is increasingly perceived as a failed and fragmented state hostage to a cartel of greedy and roguish commando generals reeking of US dollars, arms, nuclear and drug trafficking, conspiracies of terror, sleazy deals- and bloodshed.

As she landed from her Dubai flight, we all noted that even physically she had become larger than life itself. She seemed to be cast from marble, and she seemed invincible, standing out as a surreal image, as someone descending from the skies. She was the quintessential heroine, a mythical character, and the stuff of a Greek legend.

In her election rallies, the tone and tenor of Benazir's speeches riveted the crowds, and her voice echoed far and wide. She continued to voice the needs of the dispossessed and the poor. Her language was simple and crisp, but she spoke a fairy tale script, a classic battle of good against evil. "I have come to save Pakistan," she repeated often. These made the entire nation believe that she would conquer and rescue their country from the forces of evil. Of course she knew very well that the road was rife with dangers, that there were conspiracies to end her life. But even at her most vulnerable, she seemed the most invincible. Her last images show her fighting posture, her confidence and her will.

Eventually her idealism and her belief that good will prevail over evil killed her. And of course, her love for her people killed her. She said in one of her interviews, that on Oct 18th, her procession was bombed because "They don't want me to meet my people - but I will meet my people."

On that fated evening, she came out of her Toyota sunroof, to meet the people she loved and who loved her. She raised her hand and said, 'Jiye Bhutto' "Bhutto lives," as her final answer to her snipers, as they ended her life... And so, Benazir's family narrative of dramatic and heartrending sacrifices endures in her own death.

In her twenties, Benazir buried her father at Garhi Khuda Bux, Bhutto ancestral graveyard. She then began to build the mausoleum, where she buried her younger brother Shahnawaz, and later Murtaza Bhutto both killed by the similar conspirators who took the life of the elder Bhutto. When she returned to her ancestral home two months back, her first visit was to Garhi Khuda Baksh, where she sat and recited verses from the Quran in front of her father's tomb for a long time. She surveyed the work on the mausoleum, and paid homage to her elders. Who could tell then, that what she was examining in detail, would be the place where she would permanently rest in a few weeks time. Garhi Khuda Baksh would, from now on be not only the country's most important political shrine, but one which treasures its history of political struggle and sacrifice.

We, the people, instinctively know the insidious and shadowy killers of Benazir Bhutto. We can sense them. We know it's not Taliban or their mutants. They are far more sinister. We have seen them attack us before, by attacking those we have raised to pitch battles against them. But we don't know yet how to name them.

But Benazir Bhutto's shadowy killers must know that physical death does not stop history from taking its course. And Benazir has already set the terms of history in this region. In this Benazir was always a step ahead of her killer's plans. Her prophetic words that echoed in all her later speeches were: "How many Bhuttos will you kill, a Bhutto will come out from every house" - and "Yesterday Bhutto lived; today also, Bhutto lives, already showed that Benazir had already moved beyond life, and become an icon.

In her death, she is even more powerful a symbol of strength and resistance than Benazir who lived among us. And the People's Party is more entrenched than ever. As I overheard a PPP worker, "PPP is now more than a political party, it is a fiqh."

If people loved Benazir Bhutto on the eve of her death, they worship her now. All over in the country, her photographs have been put up as garlanded shrines. If people cheered and followed her before her death, they have now become her devotees. The enemies of the populist politics have created a cult called Benazir, which will continue to fight the shadowy dark forces in this miserable land. Siyasi murshid siyasi pir, Benazir, Benazir.

The writer served as nazim of Khairpur district from 2001 to 2005, and has now been nominated by the PPP on a reserved seat for women in the National Assembly. She is currently also a doctoral student at Oxford University

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To Benazir, in the heavens

Ghazala Minallah

Following a statement by Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto regarding the judiciary in early December, I had written an open letter to her and also sent it on her email address. My letter came in several newspapers and is on the Internet. Mohtarma, much to my amazement, replied the next day. Her response had some information which made me not to reveal it. Now that she is gone, it can be made public but I have to do it with another open letter, which may reach her in the Heavens, if so.



My Dearest Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto,

Somewhere in the Heavens

It has taken me three days to muster up the courage to write to you. When I wrote to you on December 2, it was because of the belief I had in you and the unrealistic expectations I had from you. When you returned on October 18 I truly and honestly felt that you would join and lead us in the struggle we began on March 9 for an independent judiciary. I believed that since you and your family had suffered in the past due to another dictator and a corrupt judiciary, you would be the first to raise your voice.

Your statement that individuals were not important made me feel betrayed. I considered you to be a kindred spirit and I reacted emotionally because I lacked your ability to look at things in their broader perspective.

Bibi, I turned to you then and I turn to you now. I did not make public the reply you sent to me on December 3 for obvious reasons. You did me the honour of replying promptly despite your busy schedule. The few lines you wrote were so powerful and had such depth, that other than a few close friends, I did not reveal the contents. But now I feel that I owe it to your memory to reveal what you wrote to me.

I was touched by the fact that instead of being angry at me, you took the trouble to try and explain to me the reason for your unpopular statement. You wrote: "Dear sister Ghazala, I had to force my tears back while going through your letter. It pains and saddens my soul to see that such perceptions are still held about me, in spite of what I and my family have gone through and the personal sacrifices. I still remain committed to the freedom and vitality of democracy, as the great Quaid-e-Awam had dreamt of. Yes, it is true that you have to deal sometimes with the Devil if you can't face it, but everything is a means to an end. I have great respect and admiration for the judiciary both bench and bar". My lips were sealed after

that because obviously this was sensitive information. I feel that now it is important to share this with my fellow Pakistani's for whom your ultimate sacrifice has immortalized you. Your reply reveals your maturity and compassion. You could have ignored my letter, or sent me a scathing reply, or snubbed me for jumping to conclusions. But you chose not to.

Bibi, how will the wounds caused by your departure ever heal? It breaks my heart when I recall the last days of your beloved father. When I reminded you of your last meeting with him, when the tyrants did not let you hug him, it was actually a desperate attempt on my part to jolt you into reality. But how naive I was to imagine that you could have forgotten those dark days. If that terrible injustice still makes my blood boil, I should have realized what it must have been for you. There was a time when our lives were intimately intertwined. Due to a tyrant you lost a loving father and the nation lost a brilliant leader. Due to the same tyrant we were forced into exile and my father took to his grave the fact that an innocent man had been hanged and he and the other two dissenting judges could do nothing to stop that terrible injustice.

My dearest Bibi, you and your family have suffered for the sake of this country more than your fair share. I was told by someone close to you that you had spoken of a sniper and that you knew 'they' were out to get you one way or the other. Yet you still carried on, saying as always, that you were ready to sacrifice your life for the sake of this country. It was this very bravery which led to your untimely death on that fateful day, when you stood up to wave to a supporter and offered yourself as an easy target to the awaiting sniper.

My heart goes out to your beloved children and your husband. My heart goes out to Sanam who has just buried her third sibling, all victims of the same enemy. My heart goes out to your beloved mother, who I am glad is not well enough to know what is going on. Perhaps it is a blessing for how much more a mother can endure? Bibi, I pray that you find eternal peace wherever you are. This world was not meant for you. Life has not been fair to the Bhutto family, although the name of this family will go down in history in golden words, as icons for the struggle for democracy. As a nation we are extremely unfortunate, since we are not able to protect our heroes. How many more Bhuttos is it going to take to rid our ravaged country of the cancer of dictatorship? How many more innocent lives will it take to satisfy their lust for power? I ended my last letter by saying that you owed it to the nation and your children to fight for the restoration of the judiciary and the future of this country. Bibi, how I wish I had not been hasty in doubting your intentions. As you can see, even in death I turn to you.

Why don't I write to those responsible for this cowardly act? Why don't I write to those who are determined to destroy this country? I don't because, my dearest Bibi, one pours one's heart out to those you have faith in. It saddens me that this time I will not see your email address in my inbox. As a nation we have lost one of the most valuable assets we had, and I have lost a compassionate sister who could help me see reason. My dearest Bibi, the least we as a nation can do is to carry on what you and your beloved father before you had started. I vow today that now the entire nation owes this responsibility to Bilawal, Bakhtawar and Asifa. We owe it to Fatima and Zulfikar junior. We owe it to your beloved sister Sanam and

we owe it to your tormented beloved mother. We as a nation have to shoulder the responsibilities we so unrealistically expect from others. The entire nation is now the mother, the sister and the father you and your family have lost in this struggle. We will not rest till your killers are identified and brought to justice. I end by bowing my head before you and begging for forgiveness for anything I may have said that upset you. Even though your reply will always be a great solace to me, I still mourn the fact that now there is no one I can turn to.

With all my love, respect, and prayers

Eternally your sister

The News
January 2, 2008

How Benazir let her hair down

Daphne Barak

“Daphne, you don’t want me to go back home?” asked Benazir Bhutto. She knew the answer - we’d been having the same debate for months. Benazir was a close friend of mine and, even before an assassination attempt on her life in October this year, I was against her returning to Pakistan.

“You know how I feel,” I said. “It’s a trap! You fell into it, but you can still get out...” “I can’t,” Benazir replied, sounding stressed. “You see Daphne, they are expecting me in Pakistan. They know Washington is supporting me. My photos are already all over the streets. Asif [her husband] and I are taking into account what you are saying. But how can I back out? It’s too late. And if I don’t go now, I might as well just quit politics forever.”



She was confident in the support of the Bush Administration. But I wasn’t so sure. I had a bad feeling about it and when I last saw her I became emotional. I knew I wouldn’t see her again. She came over and hugged me. I cried. She didn’t. She just held me tighter. The Benazir I knew and loved was the most extraordinary woman. Everyone knows she was brilliant and extremely ambitious but what very few people know - and I am privileged to be one of those - was that she was also what I would call a girlie-girl who loved to talk about skincare and hairstyles. Benazir, who used to sign off her emails to me with the name Bibi, was one of those rare women who had the ability to move a conversation from heavy politics to lightweight gossip in the space of a minute.

Benazir was like a big sister to me. I am still trying to come to terms with the loss of someone so close to me. We met for the first time while she was serving a second term as Pakistani prime minister when she gave me an exclusive interview in June 1995 to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the United Nations. We got on well and met again in 2000 at the home of our mutual friend Esther Coopersmith, who is known in Washington as the hostess with the mostest. Benazir was no longer in power but Esther had arranged an amazing lunch for her, and everything from plates, napkins and even food was in either green or white, the colours of the Pakistani flag.

From then on Benazir and I developed an increasingly close friendship. When we met - usually in New York, sometimes in London - we talked about politics, of course. I knew she was determined to bring democracy back to Pakistan and I would sometimes arrange parties for her and make sure she met the right politicians in a private and relaxed setting.

But, as so often happens with powerful women I interview, like Hillary Clinton and Segolene Royal, I also had the great fortune to get to know her as a woman, wife, mother and friend,

the sides she revealed only to people she could trust, and these are the areas I want to concentrate on.

As a woman she was very different from the tough politician she presented to the world. She wasn't, as some have said, a brutal man in feminine clothing. She was just like so many women. She was always keen to lose weight and wanted to look younger and healthier. We discussed girlie subjects alone and when men were present.

Benazir had a very good appetite and particularly loved Italian and French food. When we went to restaurants together - only those that were off the beaten track so we would not be snapped by the paparazzi - she would always order three courses. She particularly loved desserts and cakes and chocolates. She also gained weight from stress.

No one would recognise her when we went on our dinner dates. She would dress very casually, usually in a blouse and slacks, and her hair would be uncovered. Sometimes she wanted to diet. I introduced her to my own private general practitioner Mark Hyman, who lives in New York, and he worked out diet regimes for her.

Dr Hyman would prescribe a powder that had to be made up into some kind of milkshake. You drank that and ate only vegetables for three days at a time. I found it disgusting, but Benazir persevered and would ring or email me from Dubai or wherever she was, thrilled when she'd lost a few pounds. "Daphne," she would say. "It's wonderful I have lost some weight. Please send me more of those detox powders." She always took vitamins every day, too. She cared about what she looked like. She was very Americanised and wore her headscarf only when it was politically correct to do so.

I helped her with her hair, too. My hairdresser, Diego, who works for the Regency Hotel in New York, would style her hair when she came to some of my parties. When she was in exile, I introduced her to influential people and she wanted to look her best. She had the most wonderful, lush, thick, dark hair and she loved, literally, to let it down. But, of course, only in private.

Benazir was interested in the latest face and body creams and asked me for advice. I change brands all the time but my latest recommendation was Pria, created by a friend of mine. Benazir told me she loved it. We often exchanged gifts - anything from the latest political books to very sensual candles. Of course we talked a lot about men, as all women do when they get together. She enjoyed hearing in detail about other people's love affairs but most of all she was totally fascinated by Princess Diana.

She knew I was friendly with Hasnat Khan, the Pakistani doctor whom Diana fell totally in love with before she died. Benazir enjoyed speculating endlessly about the couple's relationship. "I am curious to know why their love didn't have a happy ending," she would say. "I wonder if Diana was serious in her intentions to go and live in Pakistan. It would be hard for her."

I also remember her discussing Diana's relationship with Dodi Fayed shortly before the Princess died. "I am sure it is just a summer fling," she said. "I firmly believe it is her attempt to lure Hasnat back to her. It won't last."

As far as her own love life went, she was completely and utterly in love with her husband Asif. In him she knew she had found a man who was confident and secure enough in himself to allow a woman to be really powerful and not to feel threatened. Asif is also very liberal and they behaved like teenagers together. In public they were very restrained, but in private or with close friends they were very demonstrative and would hold hands and kiss. You could feel the passion between them.

She could be very giggly when she was with Asif and I can tell you he was the power behind her throne because although she was very strong-willed, she always wanted to please him. He is really the one who has been calling the shots. He is a brilliant man and she always did everything political that he advised her to do. He will certainly run for office instead of her to maintain the legacy.

Of course Benazir and Asif did not spend very much time together throughout their 20-year marriage and had to face major challenges that not many other couples would have survived. In a way it made their relationship such a romantic one.

Asif was rich when he met the heiress of the political dynasty and became politically involved when he fell in love with her. But in 1997 he was jailed on corruption charges and she didn't see him at all for the seven years he was in prison. She used to joke to me: "My life is strange. It seems that either I am prime minister or my husband is in jail. There can't be many like me."

During the last three years or so they saw each other only about 25 days a year. Asif lived in New York where he was undergoing heart treatment while Benazir was in exile in Dubai but they would speak and email each other all the time. Both Benazir and their children - Bilawal, Bakhtwar and Aseefa - would travel to New York to see Asif. She would say: "They must spend time together. It is very important that they know their father." It was hard for them all. Asif was trying to become a father and husband again, but he found coping with noise and even a lot of space very difficult after his years in confinement. Even going to a theatre was a problem and I remember him leaving one venue shortly after we had arrived because he couldn't cope with the crowds.

Asif was living in an apartment hotel and initially wanted Benazir to stay somewhere else, mainly because he didn't want to be recognised and also because it wasn't romantic enough for her, but she gradually persuaded him that they should be together. They had two dogs - one very small and one that looked like a horse - who both chewed all the furniture. Benazir didn't complain. She didn't even seem to mind that the flat was sparsely and simply furnished.

No one besides family and extremely close friends were invited to visit and anyway she had other more important things on her mind. She would say: "My mind is on politics. My home in New York is temporary. I am not interested in making it comfortable."

She was very patient with her husband and he brought out the feminine side of her and liked her to shine. After his time in jail it was as if they found each other all over again. I remember having a meal with them and some other friends. I had just come back from interviewing Segolene Royal, the Socialist candidate for the French presidency against Nicolas Sarkozy last May.

Benazir wanted to know what Segolene wore and how was her relationship with her partner. I told Benazir that Segolene resembled her. Asif responded forcefully and immediately. "Nobody is as beautiful as my wife," he said. Benazir blushed deeply. She loved him saying that. She was also a wonderful mother. I called her a cross between an earth mother and a Jewish mother because she was loving but also pushed her children to do better than their best. She was very hands-on with the children and they would tease and hug each other a lot. But she wasn't at all strict. She didn't want to put any more pressure on them than they already had because of her political ambitions. I feel she was always trying to compensate. But even though she was easy-going, the children were very well-mannered.

I met them all many times. When one of her daughters, I think it was Bakhtwar, decided she wanted to become a punk singer, Benazir asked me if I could introduce her to Puff Daddy, who I know, to give her advice about a career in music. She wasn't snobbish about it. Nor did she seem in the least concerned about the implications it might have on her own political future.

Benazir was also particularly proud that her son Bilawal got into Oxford and made sure that both she and Asif took him up and helped him settle in, just as any parent would. Benazir was a wonderful friend to me - the best friend you could ever have. I was staying at the Dorchester Hotel and was injured just as she arrived to spend a few days with me before her historic return to Pakistan.

Asif told her I couldn't get out of bed but she wouldn't take no for an answer and came up with creative solutions like going to Harry's Bar wearing a jump suit to cover my injuries. Despite what she was going through herself she would regularly email me to ask how I was and if I didn't tell her exactly, she would remember to ask me again, and be very specific. Sometimes her emails made me laugh.

For ages it was impossible to use a Blackberry in Dubai, but that changed recently and so over the past six months she emailed me from it all the time. In an email about her plans for her farewell dinner in October, she wrote: "Wld u like to join me for dinner? I am having dinner at nine and cld collect you at 8.15. I am having dinner with a friend and I told him I wld like to bring you. Bibi."

Later that day as we finalised our plans, she sent me another email: "Dinner at Harry's bar. Can u come in a jump suit? Do u want to check? If its not too late when we finish we will drop by for coffee. Let me know if Harry's bar allows u to come in a jump suit."

After eight years in exile, Benazir finally returned to Pakistan on October 18 this year. There was an attempt on her life that very day at a homecoming rally in Karachi - a suicide bomber killed 140 people but Benazir escaped unhurt. I spoke to her on the phone and realised that she was suffering from trauma after the blast.

On November 3, Pakistan's President Musharraf declared a state of emergency and suspended elections. Suddenly, after being snubbed for nine years, Benazir was being feted by Washington. She thought this was fantastic news and that President Bush's support would help her win the election in Pakistan. But Asif asked me to check with my own contacts in Washington and Islamabad. I did and the information I got was that as soon as Musharraf ended the state of emergency, the Bush Administration would abandon its support for Benazir. She would be left extremely vulnerable. I thought it was a death trap.

On November 8, Benazir was placed under house arrest after threatening to join a protest rally against Musharraf. I rang several times before I managed to get my call answered. I didn't speak to her but she later called me back. She couldn't talk freely as she knew her conversation would be overheard. She sounded frantic. I asked her if she needed anything, meaning a book, face cream, perfume or me to contact anybody. She replied: "Yes. I need a bulldozer." I couldn't understand what she meant and thought she was talking in code.

Later Asif called me and said her house was surrounded by so many guards, Benazir needed a bulldozer to get out. In one of our last phone calls, Benazir told me: "Washington is behind me. I can't lose this opportunity. I have been waiting for it for nine years. We need to get Pakistan democratic again. I am needed here. It is now or never."

I said: "There will be a better opportunity for you and I wouldn't bet on Washington's support. You have already been prime minister. Try something else." Again she didn't listen. Once Benazir made up her mind about something, there was no way to change it. How I wish I could have made her think again. Bibi, I'll miss you so.

TV journalist Daphne Barak has befriended many of the world leaders she has interviewed - from Nelson Mandela to Shimon Peres - but none became such a close friend as Benazir Bhutto

*Daily Mail
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Her march into history

Adnan Gill

OPEN a newspaper or tune in a news channel and odds of Pakistan being in the headlines are at least 50-50. But Dec 27, 2007, would sadly be immortalised in the annals of history.

It is the day when the leader of Pakistan's largest political party, Benazir Bhutto, was assassinated. Despite the fact that Ms Bhutto was not a sitting prime minister, her assassination would be remembered as an event that shook the world, just like the assassination of US President John F. Kennedy did decades ago.

Who is to be blamed for her brutal assassination would be debated for a long time, but there is little doubt that her untimely death will shake the foundations of Pakistan. The gravity and the magnitude of the tragedy could be judged from the fact that virtually every single news media outlet was exclusively focused on her assassination. The news of her death triggered the sell offs on the Wall Street, dipping the stocks deep into negative territory. In impromptu press conferences world leaders like the US President Bush and UN General Secretary Ban Ki-Moon did not lose a moment in condemning her assassination.

It would be hard to imagine how the Musharraf government could have had any role in Ms Bhutto's assassination; because even a person with marginal intelligence could foresee how even a hint of the government's complicity in the crime would spell the end of Musharraf's rule. And still, at minimum, Ms. Bhutto's assassination will write the final chapter of Musharraf's rule.

Benazir Bhutto was the daughter of Pakistan's first-elected Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Media savvy Ms Bhutto was considered to be a contemporary political genius rivaling the likes of President Bill Clinton. Outside the political arena, Ms Bhutto was widely believed to be a devout mother and a sincere wife. Regardless of one's political differences, millions upon millions of Pakistanis revered the daughter of Pakistan for the distinction of becoming the first ever female prime minister of a male dominated Muslim country. One can criticise her for the way she ran her governments in her two terms, but one cannot deny her invaluable services in strengthening the roots of democracy in Pakistan. She proved her resolve by courageously standing her ground in the face of not one but two military dictators. There is hardly any doubt that had she lived long enough, she would have swept the Pakistani elections, but her untimely exit at the verge of political victory over a military dictator will earn her political immortality. History will see to it that Benazir Bhutto's name will be written alongside the names of political giants like Sir Winston Churchill and John F. Kennedy. I may add here on a personal note that I have been a hard-hitting critic of Benazir Bhutto's party and her political career. But I believe in defeating or marginalising a politician through votes or arguments, and not through violence or the cowardly act of suicide bombing. The only time I spoke directly to her was on CNN's Larry King Live show in the

mid-90s. She was kind and courteous to address my concerns in detail. She left me impressed by the depth and clarity of her knowledge.

Rest well, rest well daughter of the east. May your ultimate sacrifice bring sanity and peace in the lives of tired and grieving Pakistanis.

DAWN
December 29, 2007

Pakistan loses a fighter for democracy

Nicholas Coates

What a tragedy for the people of Pakistan. They have lost in Benazir Bhutto someone who had to fight all her life to get where she did.

She had suffered personal grief with the deaths of her father, brothers and sister; she spent most of her five-year jail time in solitary confinement. While all that may have altered her perception on life, it never weakened her resolve. Nor her desire to see democracy return to her country.

Her political views doubtless strengthened as a result of the execution of her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1979 following a controversial trial for apparently authorising the murder of a political opponent. The execution was largely seen as politically motivated under the directives of General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was Pakistan's first popularly elected prime minister. His death occurred while Benazir Bhutto was two years into serving a five-year jail sentence. Bhutto succeeded twice in being elected to the post of prime minister, from 1988 to 1990 and again from 1993 to 1996, becoming the first female.

On both occasions she was dismissed from office by the president for alleged corruption and misuse of power. That these charges were never proven to the satisfaction of the courts merely serves to demonstrate the vacillations of jurisprudence and governance in Pakistan. With various charges being laid at her door, she decided to leave Pakistan and reside abroad, in voluntary self-exile, in the hope that by staying out of jail and fighting through her legal representatives, where she could have better access outside the country, it would enable her to fight her cause more effectively.

It is true to say that Bhutto aroused strong emotions in Pakistanis. The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) founded by her father, and subsequently spearheaded by Bhutto achieved enormous public support among the populace. Indeed, in the forthcoming elections, it was expected that not only would her party trounce Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML) but also the PML (Q), which supports President Pervez Musharraf. Had this latter been achieved, it would very much have undermined the credibility of Musharraf, who seized power from Nawaz Sharif in a coup, and subsequently, and reluctantly, decided to hold an election for presidency, which not only was questionable in being held, but also in the balloting.

It is for these reasons that Bhutto - and even Sharif - thought their positions among the populace had improved dramatically in an election for prime minister.

However, Bhutto's secret approaches to the military regime were seen as a betrayal by many of her supporters, as well as her opponents. Subsequently, Bhutto deemed it more prudent to disassociate herself from the negotiations and the Musharraf regime, especially as Musharraf constantly vacillated on his position on how he should proceed. It is possible that this was her undoing in the eyes of the military, the result of which was to afford Bhutto inadequate protection at her rallies, and increase the chances of her injury or death.

Following the unsuccessful attempt to kill her in October, it is surprising to know that very little was done by the army or police to ensure proper protection and security to Bhutto and her entourage. Even at the last and successful attempt of assassination, it is alleged Bhutto lay injured on the ground for 10-15 minutes, awaiting some sort of action by officials, which, if true is a shocking state of affairs and merely serves to highlight the inadequacies of the security services - and this under what is in all but name, a military dictatorship.

Now the question arises as to her legacy. Certainly her children are too young to enter politics at this time - even if the desire existed with the present uncertainty in the country. Although it is said her son Bilawal Bhutto was being groomed to eventually enter the political arena, but that may now be doubtful with his mother, aunt, uncles and grandfather having been killed.

Regrettably, political dynasties often are destined to have tragic ends: witness the Gandhis and the Kennedys.

Bhutto will be sadly missed by many people around the world, especially those who had hopes for the restoration of true democracy in Pakistan. Bhutto leaves behind the conundrum of what now happens in Pakistan, and not least whether the scheduled elections will now take place.

It's all in God's hands

Razeshta Sethna

She negotiated to stay in the running right until the end. Then, she lost her battle to those elements she vowed to cleanse.

It's hard to believe that Benazir Bhutto has been assassinated. She was only 54, a twice-elected and twice-expelled prime minister, the only woman to have led a Muslim country as head of state, and a mother of three. Pakistan might have lost the only woman leader with guts and unparalleled energy, a brave, secular democratic, who despite her barely shielded flaws vowed openly, without fear to combat militancy. Her fiery and candid press conferences post-October 18 persistently addressed the continuing plague of terrorism that has gripped Pakistan in its nightmarish tentacles.

Islamic militants put her on their hit list because she had close connections with Washington; she had previously paid attention to madressahs when she was in power and this time around had returned with a stark message to cleanse Pakistan of militancy. She pledged that her party, if given the opportunity would find a way out to ensure that the politics of hatred and intolerance was eradicated.

Posing to be the darling of the west and speaking about how she would tackle militancy in her country, but if given yet another chance, one would have hoped Ms Bhutto could have delivered a fraction of what she promised. Listening to her latest speeches during her campaign trail, I discovered an articulate, striking politician who didn't mince her words and who obviously angered many possibly party to her death. She had time and again emailed western politicians, including an American senator about how she feared certain elements within the establishment, were out to get her. Those fears could simply be exaggerated; but there must be a morsel of truth somewhere.

Who killed Bhutto? Interestingly, the question that comes to mind is not only who did it, but why and what they would have to gain in her absence, especially with the forthcoming elections around the corner. For militants with Al-Qaeda linkages, murdering a westernised, secular woman leader who they saw as a traitor to their faith, culture and society would be incentive enough in itself. The elections would be left in jeopardy with President Musharraf's position even shakier than before.

Commenting on Bhutto's assassination, Jason Burke, a senior journalist with The Observer and author of "Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam" suggests that this kind of high-profile assassination, which has never really been al-Qaeda's style until now, would be exactly the sort of spectacular attack they have been seeking for some period without getting and knowing it would receive media attention.

American experts have also pinned the blame thus far on al-Qaeda linked elements with close ties to Taliban leaders within Pakistan's embattled northern belt.

Endorsing the above, the Pakistani interior ministry has announced the hand of Baitullah Mehsud, an influential Taliban leader fighting against the state in South Waziristan. His spokesman denies the involvement. If these linkages are authentic, then one would say that an entire cluster of cells could have had a role in Bhutto's assassination including internal jihadi groups flourishing under the auspices of certain elements within Pakistani intelligence coupled with connections to al-Qaeda's.

Ms Bhutto was undoubtedly a fearless woman with conviction, or else, this daughter of the east wouldn't have returned to a very turbulent Pakistan after eight years in self-exile. The threats to her life didn't scare her, she said. "It's all in God's hands," Benazir told reporters when returning on October 18. The Pakistan she left in the late nineties was not the same country she returned to after years wooing the west to support her politics of return, alongside raising her children, between doing the lecture circuit in America and Europe. She claimed on numerous occasions that she was aware of the political risks she would take in the near future.

Benazir wrote in her memoir, of what life as a young woman at Harvard felt like. "I was amongst a sea of women who felt as unimpeded by their gender as I did." At Oxford, she adopted a westernized way of life, spending winters at the Swiss ski resort of Gstaad. Her passions at the time included reading royal biographies and woozy romances, and shopping at Harrods in London – a habit she maintained throughout the rest of her life. It was right after her Oxford years that Benazir was thrust into the heart of Pakistani politics after her father was imprisoned and later hanged by General Zia-ul- Haq.

She writes of her last meeting with her father, through a metal lattice at the Rawalpindi central prison. "But I did not cry. Daddy told me not to," she recalled. There is pathos in her life's story: it almost reminds of this woman of contradictory and complex behaviour. Years spent under house arrest and even in jail left no time for her to fall in love with a life partner and so an arranged marriage. She was destined, albeit reluctant to adopt the Bhutto political mantle, her politics included her father's popular slogans, *roti, kapra and makan* (bread, clothing and shelter) and then recently, her promise of employment and education to the masses. Pinky, as Benazir was named, always enjoyed the finer things in life, attributing this penchant to her sense of entitlement as the daughter and heir of a feudal land-owning family.

Was she a saviour this time around for the lost people of Pakistan or a wily politician who thought she might be invincible, despite warnings that her security could not be guaranteed. Why did she flirt with danger and death? Was she simply courageous and stubborn? In an interview in the nineties to the BBC, Ms Bhutto, once said that watching her father, ZAB die, in many ways prepared her for the turbulent and in the end violent political career that destiny had planned. Murdered three decades later, and only a few yards from where her own father was imprisoned at Rawalpindi's central prison in 1976, her end adds to the doomed Bhutto legend. Which allows comparison to the Kennedy's for their contribution to Pakistani politics and the price they continue to pay for it.

No one will ever know who killed Benazir. The range of suspects vast, yet the most obvious ones remain militants with links to al-Qaeda. On October 18, Ms Bhutto's homecoming rally was highly charged with supporters but the end result that night: a horrific suicide attack with blood, gore and mayhem killing more than 130 Pakistan People's Party loyalists. It will take a long time to forget the heart-wrenching footage showing injured and dead children that violent October night. I sat through the early hours of the morning talking to reporters who barely saved their lives returning with blood stains on their clothing, as I stifled emotions to bring forth an unbiased broadcast to our viewers.

No stranger to violence it seemed, BB sounded even more determined to fight terrorism and not give in to the extremists by staying away from the thousands of supporters who thronged at rallies to hear her speak (her last speech was emotive, highly stirring and reminiscent of her fathers' manner of gripping the crowds), to catch a glimpse of her smiling, waving and acknowledging their presence often through the sunroof of her bullet-proof vehicle. One could say Benazir was the people's politician: she loved to touch hearts, to make her supporters feel they were not alone in their struggle for a better life. That was Ms Bhutto's triumph. She kept the PPP alive all these years with her charisma, her resolve and leadership that eventually earned her the status of an international icon. One must admit despite her government's dismissal on corruption charges in the past and the accusations that were not buried through the decades of her self-exile, BB strove to win the hearts of her western friends and ensured her own people knew she was committed in her resolve: to bring democracy back.

Her popularity was worthy of accolade and it threatened many who witnessed it escalate despite her previous years spent out of the country. She was western educated, and a glamorous woman with brains in a male-dominated society. One wonders if she had changed for the better; whether her politics had changed this time around. Even if she had decided to negotiate with the ruling government for the tentative sake of restoring democracy to have a third go, one might have given her the benefit of the doubt. With her detractors claiming she had done nothing in her past tenures but wreck the economy and make more enemies within the military, one questions why then did Ms Bhutto not live the life of Riley abroad, than risk her life at home. She said somewhere around the time of her return that her country was not created for militants but for those who aspired towards peace and tolerance.

In the wiser Benazir, Pakistan has lost a woman politician who drew people into her fold with her courage to stand up to those forces that persist in wrecking the stability and sanity of this country, openly challenging the writ of the state through unprecedented acts of violence. For future generations, I wonder whether Pakistan will work to reveal a semblance of stability, normality or even modernity and progression.

Death of an icon

Imtiaz Alam

She had promised, she knew it and so she did. Ms Benazir Bhutto, the great Daughter of East, was not to be deterred by any amount of threat to her life, as this was to be her last battle against terrorism and authoritarianism of both the clergy and garrison. Perhaps, no leader in civilian history had such a precise knowledge of his/her imminent death in the course of struggle as she had and by defying the inevitable she willingly embraced the martyrdom that is now the valiant tradition of the Bhutto dynasty – The Dynasty of Martyrs. Never had this nation mourned the demise of its any leader with such intensity and affection as it did in the last four days across all divides in every nook and corner of the country. Hers is an epical-tragedy: she came, she prevailed and she became immortal in a most tragic and eventful life. Instead of ending, the Bhutto epic makes a new beginning with Bilawal having been baptized to Bhuttoism by virtue of matriarchy.

“Mohtrama don’t travel by road, avoid procession and adopt electronic means for communication” I almost beseeched her repeatedly. “Of course there are great risks, but I can’t keep away from my people, come what may; they are my real strength”, Benazir Bhutto continued to reply in her unique defiant mould that she has been in since October 18 when she was again mesmerized by the overwhelming response of the people in Karachi. It seems as if some metaphysical forces had taken over her soul that was destined for martyrdom. Of course, she hadn’t gone crazy. She could not be a commander of the people without mobilizing them for the last battle she was pursuing for the emancipation of the people and a liberal democratic and progressive Pakistan.

As an intelligent politician and superb tactician she came out of the wilderness of exile by manoeuvring her way to capture centre stage of mainstream politics while successfully presenting her self as a genuine liberal democratic alternative to an authoritarian and isolated Musharraf who was losing ground for his half-measures in every sphere, including the war on terrorism. She even made some unpopular but realistic moves to ensure her and other popular leader Nawaz Sharif’s entry into Pakistan while forcing Musharraf to doff his uniform and lift emergency. As the King’s parties and other opposition parties dragged their feet in standing up to the lethal challenges posed by the terrorists and extremists, there was no one else except Benazir Bhutto who took a clear and determined stand against the murderous forces of darkness and medievalism. No doubt she symbolised the unity of federation, she now also symbolized all values of liberal democracy. She not only forced Musharraf to go on back foot, but also the major electoral parties to take the route of electoral mass mobilization to turn the tables on the authoritarian manipulation of the electoral process and democracy.

Her charismatic appeal across the country was at its peak and she succeeded in pulling millions of people to her public rallies in her aggressive election campaign. In the course of two weeks, she along with the PML-N succeeded in brushing aside the big chaudharys of so-

called secure constituencies in the Punjab and elsewhere. The PML-Q turned out to a house of cards while facing the two-pronged massive electoral campaigns being run by two popular former prime ministers in the Punjab.

Interestingly, she was fast emerging as the only prime ministerial candidate in a three-way contest in the Punjab and NWFP after having achieved a sweeping position in Sindh. And this was the turning point for the powers that started panicking as they saw the electoral game they had setup slipping out of their hands. Bhutto had to be neutralized by those rogue elements within the establishment and their outlawed terrorist comrades who saw in her a powerful liberal adversary emerging. It was an unholy alliance between the rogue elements within the establishment that preferred to criminally neglect her security to facilitate the job of terrorists once aligned with it.

The conflict between the popular aspirations of the masses and an authoritarian establishment remains irreconcilable, so is it between the Bhuttos and the garrison who is intolerant to anyone who challenges their monopoly over Pakistan. There is a clear historical link between the judicial murder of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, death and killing of Shahnawaz and Murtaza Bhutto and now Benazir Bhutto who was the last among the second generation of Bhuttos to keep the PPP's defiance going. The Bhutto phenomenon, unlike its populist counterparts elsewhere in the third world, has shown remarkable resilience and survived the changing times of history with communism coming to an end.

In the void, thus created by the exit of strong leftist movements from historical stage, it was incredible for Bhutto's populism to survive while keeping the hopes of the people alive in their possible emancipation.

This was Ms Bhutto who intelligently transformed the PPP into a more liberal and social democratic party than Z. A. Bhutto had perceived. She professed democratic values, abandoned anti-India chauvinism, adopted more secular traits and married the PPP's socialism to sustainable economic development. Unlike her father she nursed no vendetta or personal enmity. She, rather, bridged Bhutto anti-Bhutto divide by practicing pluralism and showing greater tolerance for the critics and adversaries. That is why when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was hanged the parties of the PNA distributed sweets and did not send a message of condolence to the bereaved family or the party. But on Ms Bhutto's demise the whole nation, regardless of ethnic or political divides, is beating its chest in grief.

That shows her magnetic appeal across all divides. Although Ms Bhutto's assassination has left a great void that cannot be filled since it takes decade to build an international icon of her stature, she in her death has galvanized the PPP beyond its traditional constituency. Her elimination may appear to strengthen garrison or benefit extremists, but a charged populist democratic PPP will defeat the designs of her murderers. The PPP at the worse moment of its history has remarkably behaved with patience and perseverance. It showed its formidable presence in all the four provinces and demonstrated its will to keep the unity of federating units above all ethno-regional cleavages. This show of greater unity by the people and the

PPP rank and file also call upon the children of the Bhuttos to burry their differences and jointly pursue the behest of their elder Bhuttos.

The PPP's central executive, in the aftermath of the death of their beloved leader, has taken remarkable decisions. By bringing Bilawal as chairman they have kept the Benazir factor in keeping the unity of party intact. By asking Asif Zardari to co-chair party organization to help party surmount its current predicament, the party has taken a wise decision since Mr Zardari has shown the necessary talent and courage to face hardships. He is in fact a true jiyala and a great loyalist of Bhuttos. In his first test of leadership, Mr Zardari has proved his mettle while defending the PPP's federalist stand against secessionist tendencies. By nominating the gentleman from Sindh, Makhdoom Amin Faheem, as PPP's candidate for prime ministry the party has removed the possibility of confusion and a tug of war for the top slot. The most intelligent desion that it has taken is to go along the elections on January 8 while keeping the PML-N on board. This has put the establishment and its surrogates in a quandary.

Why should a winning PPP riding the wave of sympathy for Benazir run away from the electoral contest? The lines are now drawn and the democratic forces must not let Benazir's great sacrifice go in vain. Benazir has become immortal; let us build a truly democratic republic in her sweet memory. My last tributes to her and I have no words to pay my respect to a very kind friend and leader.

The writer is editor current affairs, The News, and editor South Asian Journal

‘You can name Musharraf as my assassin if I am killed’: Benazir

Amir Mir

Her exchange of e-mails with a confidant shows Benazir was on the verge of exposing an ISI operation to rig the January 8 election.

On November 13, 2007, I had a one-to-one meeting with former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto at the Lahore residence of Senator Latif Khosa. She said she had no doubt about the people who had masterminded the attack on her on October 18, the day she had returned to Pakistan from exile. Benazir told me, “I have come to know after investigations by my own sources that the October 18 bombing was masterminded by some highly-placed officials in the Pakistani security and intelligence establishments who had hired an Al Qaeda-linked militant—Maulvi Abdul Rehman Otho alias Abdul Rehman Sindhi—to execute the attack.” She said three local militants were hired to carry out the attack under the supervision of Abdul Rehman Sindhi, an Al Qaeda-linked Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) militant from the Dadu district of Sindh.

Before Benazir arrived in Pakistan, Sindhi had been mysteriously released from prison, where he had been incarcerated for his role in the May ‘04 bombing of the US Cultural Centre in Karachi.

She said she subsequently wrote a letter naming her would-be assassins. When I asked her who the recipient of the letter was and whether she had named Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf as well, she had smiled and said, “Mind one thing, all those in the establishment who stand to lose power and influence in the post-election set-up are after me, including the General. I can’t give you further details at this stage. However, you can name Musharraf as my assassin if I am killed.”

Twenty-four hours after Benazir was assassinated, Asia Time Online, a Hong Kong-based web newspaper, reported that Al Qaeda had claimed responsibility for her killing, further adding that the death squad consisted of Punjabi associates of the underground anti-Shi’ite militant group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, operating under Al Qaeda orders.

“We terminated the most precious American asset who had vowed to defeat the mujahideen.” These were the words of one Mustafa Abu al-Yazid, a top Al Qaeda commander for the Afghanistan operations as well as an Al Qaeda spokesperson. “This is our first major victory against those (Benazir and Musharraf) who have been siding with infidels (the West) in the fight against Al Qaeda...”

Interestingly enough, Sindhi—the person whom Benazir had named in our conversation—is an LeJ member. But few here believe LeJ could have managed to carry out the attack without assistance from sections in the establishment. Analysts believe Al Qaeda has become a

convenient smokescreen to explain motivated attacks on political rivals. The question people are asking is: What motive could the establishment have in killing Benazir?

Top political sources told Outlook that hours before Benazir was assassinated, she was on the verge of exposing an ISI operation to rig the January 8 general election. They say she had been collecting incontrovertible proof about a rigging cell allegedly established at an ISI safe house in Islamabad. The cell was tasked with changing the election results in favour of the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q) on the day of the polling. Sources say a close confidant of Benazir had sent an e-mail message on December 25 to her informing her that Brigadier Riazullah Khan Chib was working in tandem with Intelligence Bureau director Brigadier General (retd) Ejaz Hussain Shah to manipulate election results.

The PML-Q (a party of Musharraf loyalists) was in power before the National Assembly was dissolved, and was the instrument through which Musharraf had ruled Pakistan over the last five years.

The e-mail message to Benazir said the so-called Election Monitoring Cell was to ensure that ballot papers in over 100 constituencies of Punjab and Sindh were stamped in favour of the PML-Q. These ballot papers were to be stamped at the ghost polling stations established in the provincial headquarters of the ISI and the IB, and were to be counted before the presiding officers were to announce the results. "All this is being done because of the fact that Musharraf simply can't afford a hostile parliament as a result of the 2008 polls," the e-mail message said.

Benazir replied to the e-mail message from her Blackberry the same day. She wrote, "I was told that the ISI and the MI have been asked not to meddle. But I will double check." On December 27 at 1.12 pm, a few hours before she was assassinated, Benazir sent a mail to the confidant asking, "I need the address of the safe house (in Islamabad) as well as the phone numbers of the concerned. Pl try and obtain ASAP. Mbb, Sent from my BlackBerry(r) wireless device."

The confidant wrote back at 3:06, "I have re-checked the information with the same source which earlier said the ISI and the MI have been asked not to meddle. The source claims that Brigadier Riazullah Khan Chib retired from the ISI a few months ago but was re-employed, since he belongs to the arm of the artillery and considered close to Musharraf who too comes from the same wing of the army. The source says Chib's cover job is somewhere else but he is actually supervising a special election cell which is working in tandem with the chief of the Intelligence Bureau. I have further been told that Brigadiers Ejaz Shah and Riaz Chib are close friends because of their having served (in) Punjab as the provincial heads of the ISI and the Punjab regional director of the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) respectively in the past. Both are considered to be loyalists of the Chaudhries..." It was the powerful Chaudhry brothers of Punjab province (Shujaat Hussain and Pervez Elahi) who spawned the PML-Q after engineering a split in the PML (Nawaz).

The confidant's message further stated: "The rigging cell/safe house in question is located on Shahrae-Dastoor, close to the Pakistan House Bus Stop in Sector G-5 of Islamabad. It is a double-storey building, without inscribing any address, as is the case with most of safe houses. The cell consists of some retired and serving intelligence officials, which will show its magic on the election-day. Let me further inform you that Musharraf had granted Sitara-e-Imtiaz Military to Brig (Retd) Riaz Chib on December 17, 2007, for his meritorious services in operational field. Before his retirement, Chib was in charge of the ISI-led Joint Intelligence Bureau (JIB) which used to deal with the internal security matters, Azad Kashmir and Gilgit and Baltistan."

Weeks before her return on October 18, Benazir had been accusing Ejaz Shah of plotting to kill her. She told me in our meeting that she was in London when she was told about the conspiracy to assassinate her. She then added, "Having come to know of the plot, I instantly wrote a letter to General Musharraf, naming those in the establishment possibly conspiring to kill me, seeking appropriate action. However, it did not occur to me then that I was actually committing a blunder and signing my own death warrant by not naming Musharraf himself as my possible assassin.

It later dawned upon me that Musharraf could have possibly exploited the letter to his advantage and ordered my assassination." Following the October 18 attack, it was disclosed that Shah was one of the three persons whom Benazir had named in her letter to Musharraf. However, a week before my conversation with Benazir, a high-level meeting reportedly presided over by Musharraf in Islamabad had already dismissed her accusations as "childish". Those who participated in the meeting were informed that the suicide attack on Benazir bore the hallmarks of Al-Qaeda, arguing that she has incurred the wrath of militants because of her support for the military operation against the Red Mosque fanatics in Islamabad in July and for declaring that she would allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to question the father of the Pakistani nuclear programme Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan about his proliferation activities.

Days before her return to Pakistan, Benazir told The Guardian that she felt the real danger to her came from fundamentalist elements in the Pakistan military and intelligence establishment opposed to her return. She scoffed at the assassination threats of Pakistani Taliban commander Baitullah Mehsud, saying, "I am not worried about Baitullah Mehsud. I am worried about the threat within the present government. People like Baitullah are mere pawns."

Asked in an interview on NBC a day later whether it was not risky to name a close friend of Musharraf (Shah) as being someone who's plotting against her, Benazir said: "Well, at that time I did not know whether there would be an assassination attempt that I would survive. And I wanted to leave on record the (name of) suspects. I also didn't know that he (Shah) was a friend of General Musharraf. But I asked myself that even if I knew that he was a friend and I thought of him as a suspect, would I have not written? No, I would have written." But this isn't to say that investigations into the assassination of Benazir will reveal the names of those who masterminded it. Like all infamous assassination cases, the

mastermind will remain a shadowy figure on whose role people will only speculate about in whispers.

Martyr of democracy

S. Prasannarajan

Benazir Bhutto's homecoming came to an abrupt end at 6.16 p.m. in Rawalpindi on Thursday. For someone who has mystified herself as the Daughter of the East, home has always been a privileged place in history. When she came home in October, though, it was arguably the most merciless place on earth, caught between radical Islamism and military dictatorship.

She was, predictably enough, welcomed by bombs, for she was the usurper who challenged the conceit of the General as well as the rage of the mullah. For the Islamist, she was the one who made an unholy pact with the Evil Imperium of America. Her democratic credentials were overshadowed by her subservience to the satanic enemy in Washington.

For the ruling establishment, she was a difficult democrat who refused to play along: Benazir had all along been suspicious about Pervez Musharraf's idea of a democratic Pakistan. It was an idea subordinated to the indispensability of the President. On Thursday, Benazir died while struggling to regain home. It was the struggle of a lone woman pitted against those who claimed absolute control over the lives of a people.

In retrospect, Benazir's struggle, to quote a novelist, was the "struggle of memory against forgetting". More than 27 years ago, in the Rawalpindi District Jail (which is not far away from the hospital where she breathed her last), her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, whose prime ministership in 1973 marked Pakistan's first tryst with genuine parliamentary democracy, was hanged.

Recently she wrote in an op-ed piece, *"I have buried a father killed at age 50 and two brothers who were killed at the prime of their lives. I raised my children as a single mother when my husband was arrested and held for eight years without a conviction – a hostage to my political career. I made my choice when the mantle of political leadership was thrust upon my shoulders after my father's murder. I did not shrink from my responsibility then I will not shrink from it now."*

Such self-appraisals may be a familiar passage from the narratives of sub-continental Dynasty (and aren't we too familiar?). Still, Benazir's story was exceptionally singular as it evolved in an underdeveloped civil society where power was nasty, brutal, tribal and masculine. In 1988, when she became the first woman to lead an Islamic country, it was the beginning of a dangerous liaison with a political culture soaked in the blood of the deviant.

"When I first got elected", she wrote, "they said, 'A woman has usurped a man's place! She should be killed, she should be assassinated, she has committed heresy!'" Who were they? She didn't say. Today, "they" don't require names or faces for us to identify them. In a world re-shaped by 9/11, they embody everything that negates the spirit of Benazir. In today's Pakistan, Benazir meant more than a counterpoint to Musharraf. Her audacity in the face of life-threatening adversity was redeeming as well as liberating.

It was a repudiation of the un-freedom that envelops Pakistan, the unofficial headquarters of jihad. America's most important non-NATO ally in the fight against Islamist terror is the last refuge of radical Islamism. Musharraf, as a bargainer, benefited both financially and politically from America's war on terror – and from the warrior's fear and paranoia.

For Musharraf, everything—jihad, democracy, justice—was negotiable. Except his own primacy as the supreme arbiter of national destiny. When Benazir came home, Musharraf was at the peak of his desperation. Her freedom struggle coincided with the private struggle of the dictator, whose very existence was democratically illegitimate. He talked democracy and silenced dissent. Benazir quoted Stalin to call Musharraf's bluff: "Those who cast the vote decide nothing; those who count the vote decide everything." Musharraf, obviously, wanted to be the decision maker.

There is someone else beyond him—and because of him—who wants to have the last word. He doesn't count the vote. The jihadi holds the Book—and the bomb. Benazir's struggle threatened his fantasy as well. The daughter of a heartless history had always known there was someone beyond the adoring crowd, determined to deny her home. Pakistan is a darker place without her. Such self appraisals may be a familiar passage from the narratives of sub-continental Dynasty (and aren't we too familiar?). Still, Benazir's story was exceptionally singular as it evolved in an under-developed civil society where power was nasty, brutal, tribal and masculine. In 1988, when she became the first woman to lead an Islamic country, it was the beginning of a dangerous liaison with a political culture soaked in the blood of the deviant.

Benazir is dead!

Kamran Shafi



I first met Benazir Bhutto when she was elected prime minister in 1988, and asked to see me at her Rawalpindi office to be interviewed by her for the post of Principal Information Officer (PIO). The thing that I remember most is that she stood up when I walked into the room where she sat on a long sofa with, if memory serves, Major General (ret'd) Nasirullah Babar and Wajid Shamsul Hassan, at that time chairman of the National Press Trust.

This was the elected prime minister of Pakistan, and a lady to boot, standing up to receive her guest, even if he was to be appointed to a lowly Grade-20 position. I remember remarking to friends that she came out as someone from one's own family: relaxed, easy, and eager to put her guest at immediate ease. I saw Benazir in many situations, at many times, and always found her to be a good person; she was what in Punjabi is called a 'Chunga Banda'. Indeed, I saw her relate to ordinary people, and relate well to them, often being moved to tears hearing their problems.

Benazir was a very decent person at heart. In whatever I saw and heard of or from her as PM, she reacted well and appropriately to situations where her instructions were needed or asked. I so remember a time when some of her most trusted advisers suggested that the government go public on a private affair where someone who was her leading tormentor had been caught *en flagrante delicto* and she came down hard on the persons making the suggestion in no uncertain terms.

There are two more instances that come to my distraught mind at this time: One had to do with the fact that as PIO I was overwhelmed by the *lifafa* culture of the time and the bad press this 'Sindhi' was getting at the behest and urging of the Establishment that was always looking for ways to put her down. I asked to see her and she invited me to come to the PM's House at her walk time. A whole lot of officials used to be present on these walks and were asked, by turn, to walk with her so she could hear what they had to say.

I told her straight away that I needed some funds to match the *lifafas* of the opposition because it was using money to influence the more purchasable parts of our press. "Are we like them (the Establishment)?" said Benazir. "No, prime minister," I said; "but we must play by the rules of the game as set by the all-powerful Establishment". "No" she said emphatically, "we will not. Let them do what they want; we will not do the wrong thing".

The other instant I remember was when I sent her a file one day and heard that same evening that she had left for Karachi to have Bakhtawar without announcing the impending birth of her child. What proved beyond a shadow of doubt that Benazir was a woman with great diligence (and extreme courage) was when the file landed back on my desk on the third

day of my having sent it with a long remark duly written by herself! Meaning that she worked on it on the day after Bakhtawar's birth! She was a good woman, was Benazir.

I have to add that the country's politics are in a state of devastation now that she, another Sindhi leader, has been so cruelly assassinated. It is not enough to ask any more to ask that a day may come when we Pakistanis can breathe a little easy. The time is here to ask whether our country can remain a country under dictatorship.

To Asif and the children, my heartfelt condolences. May Benazir rest in eternal peace.

The void left behind

Ahmed Rashid

The assassination of Benazir Bhutto has left a huge political vacuum at the heart of this nuclear-armed state, which appears to be slipping into an abyss of violence and extremism.

The question of what happens next is almost impossible to answer, especially at a moment when Bhutto herself seemed to be the only answer.

Pakistanis are in shock. Many are numb, and others are filled with unimaginable grief. Thousands have taken to the streets, burning vehicles and attacking police stations in an explosion of violence against the government.

Bhutto's death will almost certainly lead to the cancellation of the January 8 parliamentary elections and the possible imposition of extraordinary measures by the military - another state of emergency or even martial law. President Pervez Musharraf's own political future has never been less certain.

Bhutto's death leaves the largest possible vacuum at the core of Pakistan's shaky and blood-stained political system. Twice elected prime minister in the 1990s, twice dismissed on charges of corruption and incompetence by the military, Bhutto was a giant of a politician in a land of political pygmies and acolytes of the military.

Bhutto and her Pakistan People's Party were the closest anyone in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan has ever gotten to espousing a secular, democratic political culture. In a country where political advances have been made recently only by the Taliban, the role Bhutto filled, trying to bring modernity to this nation of 165 million people, was immensely brave and absolutely necessary if Pakistan is to remain in the polity of nations. Whatever her shortcomings, she loved her country and gave her life for it.

She and her party commanded the die-hard loyalty of at least one-third of the electorate. Her supporters were vehemently against army rule and extremism. In recent weeks, she had publicly taken on the Taliban extremists - something Musharraf has not dared to do, despite all his bluster and bonhomie with President George W. Bush since the attacks of September 11, 2001. With Bhutto gone, there is no one who can play such a role.

Her longest-running battle was not with the extremists but with the army, whose leaders never trusted her. She was too secular, too worldly and perhaps too wise. Bhutto was killed leaving a political rally in Rawalpindi, just two miles from where her father, prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was hanged by another military dictator 30 years ago.



The tragedy of the Bhutto family - her brothers also were killed, one poisoned, one shot, and her husband spent seven years in prison - has become part of the saga and struggle by Pakistanis to create a viable democratic, modern state.

On Thursday, her party's stalwarts were on the streets, accusing Musharraf and the military of perpetrating the latest murder of a Bhutto. That is extremely unlikely, not least because Thursday night the government itself was in despair.

The attack bore the hallmarks of training by the Al Qaida terrorists ensconced in northwest Pakistan. Her death only exacerbates the problems Pakistan has been grappling with for the past few months: how to find a modicum of political stability through a representative government that the army can accept and will not work to undermine, and how to tackle the extremism spreading in the country. If the elections are cancelled, it is imperative that Musharraf drop his single-minded desire for power and establish a national government made up of all the country's leading politicians and parties.

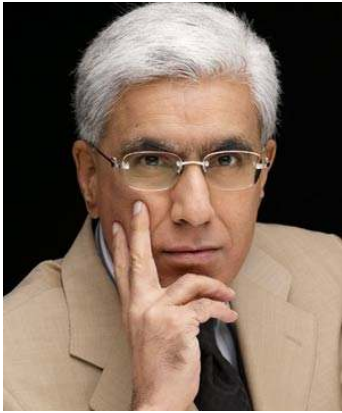
Together, they may agree on how to conduct an orderly election while trying to beat back the spectre of extremism that is haunting this benighted land. But Musharraf may not survive the fallout of Bhutto's death. His actions have not been honourable, and none of the political opposition is willing to sit down with him. It is unlikely that they will accept Musharraf's continued presidency.

If rioting and political mayhem worsen, if the opposition refuses to cooperate with Musharraf and the United States finally begins to distance itself from him, then the army may be forced to tell Musharraf to call it a day. If that happens, it will be even more urgent that the world support a national government, elections and a speedy return to civilian rule - and not another military dictatorship.

Ahmed Rashid, a Pakistani journalist, is the author of Taliban and Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia

A warm, understanding and caring person

Karan Thapar



Benazir was 19 when I first met her. I was the same age. At the time she was vice president of the Oxford Union and I was her counterpart at Cambridge. Benazir had a sense of timing, sense of humour and deft ability to riposte. But there was another side to Benazir – the warm, understanding, caring and deeply human.

Many years later, in '89 when she was the Prime Minister of Pakistan for the first time, my wife was in a coma at a hospital in London with encephalitis. I had just returned from a visit to Pakistan where I had met Benazir. Suddenly, one morning when I visited the hospital, the nurses were all aflutter.

There was an enormous bouquet that looked like a tree in Nisha's room. "What's this?" I asked. "It is from the Prime Minister of Pakistan!" one of the nurses blurted out excitedly. Later that evening, Benazir rang and asked why I hadn't told her about Nisha. I muttered something but she interrupted and said, "Remember Karan, We are friends". For the next 3 weeks as Nisha lay dying in London, Benazir made a point of ringing late at night at least every other day. I never forgot what she repeatedly said: "Karan, you must learn to talk about what you are going through. Believe me, it is the only way of coming to terms with it. I have been through it and I know what I am saying."

Benazir was a supremely confident person. She had a great ability to determine how people saw her. But inside she was a lady who often had deep doubts. She never showed them but they made her human. She told me about the last moments on the plane in 1986 which was the first time she returned to Pakistan and took the country by storm. She deliberately chose to fly back via Lahore. As she said, I have to make an impact in Lahore If I am going to make an impact in Pakistan. She took a Pakistan International Airline flight from Saudi Arabia to Lahore and sitting in first class, alone she stared out of the window into the clouds and said to herself, in just a couple of hours I will know if I have a future or not.

When the plane landed, she scanned the horizon from the windows dismayed that the airport looked empty and there wasn't a soul in sight. As she told me later, "my heart sank". When she walked out of the plane, there were three solitary figures at the bottom of the stairs. They were from her party. They looked at her, "Bibi jaan, don't, there are a million people outside but Zia won't let anyone into the airport".

It took her over 19 hours to travel from the airport to the centre of town and in those 19 hours, a new political star was born. She repeated that performance day later in Peshawar, then Quetta and then finally, at her home, Karachi.

By the end of that first week, Pakistan knew its future prime minister would be Benazir Bhutto. It was just a matter of time before she took over.

My last conversation with Benazir was four days ago. Roughly a week before that, I had interviewed the National Security Adviser, MK Narayanan, who had expressed doubts about Benazir's ability to deliver on her promises to India. He pointedly mentioned that in 1988 she had made certain commitments to Rajiv Gandhi, which she had, he claimed, failed to deliver on.

This infuriated Benazir. Within hours of the interview being broadcast, she rang me, upset and angry. "Why did he say this?" she asked. "If he had questioned my constitutional position caught between the President and army chief, I could have understood, but he didn't. Instead, he questioned my ability to deliver. He seemed to be questioning my integrity."

I tried to assure her. I told her that she was reading too much but she would not listen. "What is worse", Karan, she added, "is that he then went on to mention an incident in 1988 when he claims I made a commitment to Rajiv which I did not deliver on... The truth is that Rajiv made a commitment to me that Rajiv backed out of. But I never spoke about that and I never will. So why are these false allegations being made."

Days later, I mentioned this to G Parthasarthy. In '88, Partha was part of Rajiv's PMO and had visited Islamabad with Rajiv. Years later, Partha was high commissioner to Islamabad. Partha confirmed that what Benazir said was correct and the NSA's scepticism of Benazir was misplaced. Partha told me that Rajiv had made commitment on Siachen which he had not been able to keep. When I said if he would say this in public and set the record straight, he laughed but declined: "I can't defend Benazir by letting down Rajiv."

Tonight, when Benazir is dead, and so tragically killed, I hope Partha will understand if I make this story public and I hope the NSA will appreciate the reason why I am sharing with the world Benazir's side of the story.

That conversation led to two or three more. I warned her to be careful. "Don't take silly unnecessary risks," I said. Benazir laughed. It was an infectious little girl laugh. "Karan, I can't live with fear in my heart. I can't fight terror scared of the terrorist. And if ordinary people have to face up to death, then politicians must be ready to face that situation first."

Tribute to Benazir

Sardar Aseff Ahmad Ali

Lie in eternal peace, O daughter of Indus.
So cruelly they took you away from us.
By your slain father and siblings rest.
Your courage heavens will now attest.
We'll cherish your beautiful memory, your sacrifice.
Tears of unbearable grief will never suffice.
Will your glorious dream ever realize,
for a land you said was full of promise?
We now mourn in grief and despair
of the wicked hand that's ever unfair.
Pristine Karakoram glaciers shed sad tears,
millions look helpless with new found fears.
Deodars and junipers bend in homage;
Valley of grains and greens is in rage.
The five rivers moan in sad sorrow.
They've taken away our hope of tomorrow.
The last hope of helpless is alas gone,
anguish is rife and on us upon.
You were in gardens of thorns a rose.
In you did we our confidence repose.
In despair and despondence we may seem,
Yet we too had dreamt your dream.
We shall triumph over evil for sure,
Your memory upon us will endure.
We'll celebrate your beauty, your courage;



We'll honor your memory in our age.
A new republic we will win
from hollow generals of tin.
With toil we will pay our tribute,
to the splendid city we'll our blood contribute

We are all Bhuttos now

Fasih Ahmed

Ms Bhutto will be far more dangerous in death than she was in life for those who feared and vilified her. Her assassination has shattered the nation. The nation will never forget her sacrifice.

Twenty-eight years ago a military C-130 aircraft conveyed the body of an assassinated prime minister from Chaklala Airbase to Larkana in the dead of morning. Last night, another military C-130 left the same airbase for the Sindh town at 1.30 am carrying the body of that prime minister's assassinated daughter, Benazir Bhutto.

Ms Bhutto's historic homecoming on Oct. 18 was marred by one of the worst suicide bombings in Pakistan's history which left at least 190 dead and hundreds injured. Ms Bhutto barely escaped that attempt on her life. Despite her repeated exhortations, no adequate or independent inquiry has thus far been made into that massacre. Foreign news channels have shown pictures of authorities zealously fire-hosing the road where Ms Bhutto was fatally shot barely an hour after the incident took place. All forensic evidence that could have provided additional answers is irretrievably lost.

It is imperative now that the nation ask the questions Ms Bhutto had been asking. Among them: Why are PPP demands for an independent inquiry into the Oct 18 and May 12 incidents being resisted? Why are the election rallies of certain prominent PMLQ leaders never attacked by gunmen and suicide bombers? It is very unlikely that the nation will accept or believe any answers that come from the present regime.

Throughout her storied and tragic life, Ms Bhutto had shown insuperable courage. Her family and friends had been beaten, tortured and killed. Yet, despite the threat to her life, she barnstormed from Khyber to Karachi in stark contrast to how those from the PMLQ have been conducting themselves.

Last May 12, hours after 40 people were killed in political violence in Karachi, the ruling party put on a distasteful show outside the Presidency with the country's rulers speaking to their rent-a-crowd from behind a tall bullet-proof glass perched atop commercial containers. In Lahore, Zahoor Elahi Road is currently barricaded and cordoned off from end to end.

No minister, no judge, no soldier has had the moral courage or integrity to disassociate himself from the present regime. These people have chosen to dismiss everything Ms Bhutto gave her life for. They have chosen to stand in support of a callous, cold-hearted and utterly unaccountable regime that has casually presided over the worst crises in our 60-year history. In so doing, these people have shown abject disdain for the sentiments of an inconsolable nation – and world – in mourning.

The last I had the privilege of meeting Ms Bhutto was in November in Islamabad. This was the third such occasion since her historic homecoming on Oct 18. "I agree with you Fasih," she said, referring to a press clipping she had read. "This is a war between Wahhabism and secular values." She repeated what she had said to me onboard her flight home on Oct 18. "These people don't scare me," she said, "remember that it's all in God's hands." I gloomily told Ms Bhutto that her homecoming had represented light at the end of the tunnel, but after the bombings and all that followed it was now more "tunnel at the end of the light". She tossed her head back and laughed. "It's not all that bad Fasih," she reassured me, "It's going to be alright."

In the last speech of her life at Liaquat Bagh, named after Pakistan's first prime minister, who was assassinated there in 1951, Ms Bhutto proved just why she alone represented any hope for a country going to pieces. Her message was one of compassion, reason and peace, and it was delivered defiantly and courageously. She had been smiling and waving goodbye to her supporters from the sunroof of her armoured SUV when she was mortally hit. Ms Bhutto died as she had lived: defiantly and in high spirit.

Ms Bhutto will be far more dangerous in death than she was in life for those who feared and vilified her. Her assassination has shattered the nation. The nation will never forget her sacrifice. The nation will never forgive all those who are complicit in her murder. Today, we are all united in grief, we are all Bhuttos now.

Fasih Ahmed is a freelance columnist

A death foretold

Irfan Husain

Days after he announced that elections would be held in a couple of months in 1977, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was asked by a western journalist how many terms he expected to win. That was a time when there was no political threat on the horizon, and Bhutto reigned supreme. "I am not looking beyond the next term," he replied. "The Bhutto men do not live very long." Nor, it seems, do the Bhutto women. I did not use this particular quotation during Benazir's lifetime as I thought it would have been insensitive.

Since she returned on Oct 18, I had feared that she would be the victim of an assassin. When the terrible attack on her cavalcade killed 150 of her followers, but spared her, I was relieved, but not reassured about her safety.

Over the years, I have written many articles critical of her policies and her conduct. But I never stopped respecting her as a person. Although some have accused her of arrogance, as a civil servant and a journalist, on every occasion we met, she was always warm and courteous to me. Our last meeting was in Lahore about three weeks ago. I was there on a brief visit, and rang up my old friend Asma Jehangir, human rights lawyer and activist, to ask if I could drop by to say hello that evening. She replied that Benazir was coming over, and I should be there by nine. When I arrived, I ran into many old friends. Asma had gathered a number of people from civil society to talk to the PPP leader and express their concerns. Benazir looked her usual supremely confident self as she walked in.

When she saw me, she stopped to greet me and ask how I was after all these years. Then she proceeded to give a brief talk in which she outlined her party's priorities and goals. During the question-answer session, she was relaxed and, even when she disagreed with an observation or comment, she maintained her poise. There was no hesitation or attempt to dodge a tough question. As she got up to leave, she stopped to chat with me again, thanking me for an article I had written on the eve of her return to Pakistan in which I had welcomed her back. Her last words were to ask me to see her in Karachi. This meeting did not take place, alas, as she hit the campaign trail, and I flew to England.

While I worked as a young deputy secretary on her father's speech-writing staff in the mid-seventies, she was abroad, first in the US, and then in England. It was not until General Zia overthrew ZAB in 1977 that I first saw Benazir. She was a slim, awkward-looking girl as she stood on the stage in Rawalpindi to address an opposition rally. Her first public speech was brief and hesitant, and her Urdu was frankly terrible.

Over the years, I heard her speaking in public many times, and she improved with each outing. On her return after years of self-exile, I noticed how much more fluent in Urdu she had become. Many people have compared her unfavorably with her father, but I have always thought she was a much kinder and more humane person than ZAB. Indeed, her

weakness as a prime minister lay in her inability to be tough with people when it was necessary. Margaret Thatcher, a politician Benazir admired greatly, never had this problem.

During her second stint as prime minister, Saeed Hasan Khan, the writer and raconteur, once told me he was sitting in the office of Tanveer Ahmed Khan, then information secretary to the government. The green (secure) telephone rang with the PM at the other end. Saeed Bhai heard his host say that he did not know who Mazdak was, and nor was he aware why he had started writing against her. End of conversation.

Those were the days when I was a civil servant, and wrote under the pseudonym of Mazdak. Benazir Bhutto was well aware of this, but never used her prerogative as prime minister to have me dismissed, or otherwise disciplined, even when I was very critical of her government in this newspaper.

Her father would have had no compunction in having an insubordinate civil servant sacked. As a matter of fact, he had many removed or suspended for far lesser sins. For all these and many other reasons, I was sickened, saddened and angered at her assassination. It seems such a waste of so much potential. For years, there has been a concerted campaign to smear her reputation in the media and in the drawing rooms of the privileged of Pakistan. Orchestrated by intelligence agencies, it has resonated deeply among the chattering classes. As it is politically incorrect to openly support the army, the rich and the powerful have taken to talking down politicians and the political process. This justifies the presence of the army, and this in turn suits those whose only concern is the accumulation of wealth.

But talk to the dispossessed of Pakistan, and you soon discover the PPP's true constituency. You will also find out why, despite the army's best efforts over the years, the Bhutto name is such a force in Pakistani politics. Many of her detractors among the well-to-do are of the view that Benazir was elected prime minister twice simply because she was ZAB's daughter. This might have been true in the initial phase of her political career, but after the years she spent in jail and under house arrest under Zia, she had gained an independent stature.

One thing she shared with her father was his genuine concern for the poor. Unlike those who practised their politics in drawing rooms and military establishments, both Bhuttos spent much time with the dispossessed and the vulnerable. Neither achieved as much for them as they would have liked, as they were not given enough time by their many enemies.

Until recently, my brothers and I had three nurses to look after my mother who needs a certain amount of help in her old age. Two of them are Christian, and when I asked them whom they would vote for, both replied that they and their families always voted for the PPP.

While the rich hate the Bhuttos, the poor love them. This is the legacy Benazir Bhutto is leaving behind. May she rest in peace after all these years of adversity.

Hope and dream of the poor

Aqil Shah

In the wake of Benazir Bhutto's shocking assassination, there is understandably more fog than clarity about the future of Pakistan. As her rightfully angry supporters take to the streets, Pakistan's viability as a state is even under deeper scrutiny than usual from within and outside.

It is obvious that her loss will be felt in our politics and society for years to come. But right now, hours after ingesting non-stop televised doses of the horrific news of her demise, it still seems like a dreadful nightmare. With nightmares, however, there is at least the benefit of eventually waking up. In this case, there is just seemingly endless despair, helplessness and disbelief.

She cannot possibly be dead. If only she had stayed inside the car. If only this or that had happened, she would still be alive. But slowly denial turns to outrage. The state could have done more to save her. She was the democratically elected prime minister of Pakistan, twice. She had been asking for more robust security, which was denied her time and again.

This is no time to point fingers, but her death is not something that the establishment should be allowed to sweep under the carpet. It is a crime against the people of Pakistan, and they deserve to know at least for once why a popular leader has been killed and by whom?

Her chilling email message to Mark Siegel, her friend and confidante in Washington, DC, written on Oct 26 points to the complicity of the highest office of the state. In that message which was to be disclosed in the event of her death, she wrote: "I have been made to feel insecure by his (Musharraf's) minions...There is no way what is happening in terms of stopping me from taking private cars or using tinted windows or giving jammers or four police mobiles to cover all sides could happen without him."

Be that as it may, how does one respond to her loss? There is little consolation in believing that popular leaders live in their death more than in their mortal life. It would not be unreasonable to say that by following in her father's footsteps, she has once again immortalized the Bhutto legacy and charisma. But her death feels like a mortal blow in the gut, and not only because it is a cruel reminder of our own mortality.

The larger than life Benazir Bhutto, the public orator, the populist politician, the former premier, is no more and there is nothing anyone of us can do about that. She was flesh and blood like all of us. But she was much more.

She represented the hope, the desire, and the dream of a better Pakistan for poor, working class Pakistanis unable to cope with the grinding poverty and inflation rained upon them by the bureaucratic-authoritarian coalition that rules Pakistan by coercion. It was no surprise

that they turned out in the hundreds of thousands to greet her despite a clear and present danger to their own lives.

She was not perfect. But no one is, at least not in the overexposed world of public life. It is no surprise that she had many detractors, especially on the right of the political spectrum. The military establishment was always suspicious of the 'populist' legacy she inherited and espoused, not to mention her conciliatory policy towards regional conflicts. So they left no stone unturned to tarnish her political credibility by singling her out as the "most corrupt politician".

The extremists loathed her bold stance against their violent, anti-democratic politics. Even for many so-called democratic-liberals in civil society, she was just a power grabbing politician disguised in secular/moderate trappings, who had cut a deal with the generals to conceal her corrupt practices.

But in her conviction to stick her neck out for her political beliefs and in her death, she has silenced her detractors. After all, she did not have to expose herself and her family to the risk of her violent death. But she chose to.

They say there is the Kennedy curse. There surely is the Bhutto curse too. Virtually the entire family has been wiped out in this or that criminal conspiracy. But as distasteful as dynastic politics might be to Pakistan's anti-political state and societal elites, the fact is that political leaders enjoying nationwide support are not born every day. They cannot be harvested, or genetically incarnated, and not for lack of trying. After all, the military, at least since General Ayub Khan's time, has tried and failed to master that science.

Her death is a loss to Pakistan and its people -- an exceptional calamity whose significance extends far beyond the end of her life. Given her international stature and her domestic legitimacy, she offered the hope of a progressive Pakistan at peace within and with its neighbours. As a national leader whose appeal stretched from Khyber to Karachi, she symbolized Pakistan's ability to exist as a viable democratic nation capable of dealing with its internal divisions peacefully.

Before her assassination, Pakistan was potentially inching closer to a democratic centre that she and the country's only other national leader, former premier Nawaz Sharif, were trying to build despite their differences. Today, we are in a veritable mess. She is gone forever and he stands wrongfully disqualified from holding public office. Elections or no elections, the real question remains: How many more national leaders and tragedies would it take for the generals to realize that they have basically taken us to hell in a hand-basket?

The end of a journey

Iqbal Jafar

So the much feared end has come. Benazir Bhutto is no more. Ever since she was sworn in as prime minister 19 years ago, she had lived under the shadow of sudden and violent death at the hands of those who bitterly opposed her in the name of religion, patriotism, or out of sheer hatred of her for she was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's daughter. Today they have succeeded and all of us have lost.

One is unable to reconcile with the fact that Benazir is no more, but the reality, howsoever nightmarish, cannot be blotted out of one's mind. It cannot be wished away. Our days of mourning are going to be long, hard and bitter. Long will we helplessly fiddle with the possible consequences we cannot guess, with the future we cannot know, with the ramifications we cannot comprehend yet.

Long will we remain mired in ever new controversies, conflicts and uncertainties, but one thing is for sure: mad men will have more influence on our lives than the sane, even if they are much larger in numbers.

In a moment like this one feels bitter about things that ordinarily do not cross one's mind. Why do, one may ask, good men and women fall easy prey to killers and murderers, while the evil men generally do not? Gandhi, Kennedy and Sadat fell easily with a single shot, but no one ever attempted to kill Stalin, Franco, or Pol Pot.

Hitler even survived a bomb blast. Benazir Bhutto dodged fate for two decades but, at last, fell to the assassin's bullets. Such are the puzzles of life that we mortals are asked to unravel. Much will be written and spoken about Benazir by her friends and foes, admirers and detractors, for years to come. A lot of it will be based on half-truths, hearsay or deliberate effort to edit the truth either way. Such is history as told by historians, often if not always. She did, indeed, make mistakes, even blunders, as all great leaders have, but, surely she had some great qualities that made her a leader of global charisma. She did indeed inherit the formidable mantle of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, but was not worn down by the weight of it. Instead she gave it a touch of her own that fascinated, inspired and enchanted millions of her admirers across the country and abroad. Often in most unexpected places. Within one week of her taking over as prime minister in December 1988, the hastily reassembled prime minister's secretariat (it had been disbanded after the dismissal of the Junejo government) was flooded with more than one hundred thousand letters and telegrams from across the country and all over the world.

The small staff at that time could hardly cope with that. Most of it remained unopened and unread. Among those that were read was a letter received through the Soviet embassy. It was a letter sent by an octogenarian from Uzbekistan who was that very day celebrating the birth of his 28th grandchild.

He had written the letter to Benazir to congratulate her and inform her that he had named his newly born grand daughter Benazir. All of us in the secretariat were thrilled at the thought that an old man in Uzbekistan, who probably did not even know who the queen of England was, or who the president of the US was, knew our prime minister and was inspired by her. Such was her global charisma. But how about her blunders?

It is commonly believed, and almost taken for granted that her first administration failed to complete its constitutional tenure because of her inexperience and her arrogant disdain for the 'seniors' of the party. This day is, perhaps, as good an occasion as any to correct this notion while memory serves.

There are many examples that would clear this notion but let us consider the biggest cause of controversy: her moves against the provincial governments of Punjab and Balochistan during the early months of her first administration.

One of her staff members suggested to her as early as April 1989 that in order to have a stable civil administration, free from the machinations of the visible and invisible hands, she should try to form a coalition with the Muslim League. The coalition government should be led by the Muslim League in the Punjab and by the People's Party at the centre. It may surprise most of the readers that contrary to the assumptions, impressions and stories about her confrontational politics, she liked the idea and found it worth pursuing further. But that could not happen.

The 'seniors' assured her, instead, that the Punjab government would be 'toppled' in a matter of weeks, and one senior party leader wrote a two-page letter explaining to her how the Balochistan government could be toppled. In the context of current politics, this is the most significant fact of her political life that should be widely known.

Had Benazir followed her own instincts (her first reactions were usually correct) our history after 1988 would have been quite different. Her phenomenal memory, her amazing stamina for work, her charming sense of humour, her courage and determination, her global support, would have steered the course of our history to a far better future.

But we cannot re-write history. For Benazir it is the end of her journey. For Pakistan it could be the beginning of the end.

The writer was Additional Secretary (Personal) in the PM's secretariat in Dec 1988-Dec 1989

The face of challenge and inspiration

Ashfaq Ahmed

Those who attack a woman will burn in hell and no true Muslim can kill a woman," I recall the late Benazir Bhutto saying in Dubai a day before her historic return to Pakistan on October 18. Bhutto, who lived in Dubai for eight years in self-exile, seemed to have a premonition of what awaited her if she went back to Pakistan, but she was determined nevertheless to return in a bid to restore democracy.

"You should all be vigilant while taking part in processions and public meetings in Pakistan. Keep an eye on suspicious people and grab anybody who tries to put his hand under his shirt," Bhutto advised her party supporters at the Eid Al Fitr reception at her house in Dubai's Emirates Hills. "I have given my word to the people of Pakistan and I cannot stay away from them, never mind the threats," Bhutto told her supporters when they raised security concerns about her visit. "I've gotten so many life threats ... from Afghan militants, Red Mosque militants and Arab militants. But I will not be intimidated because Allah will protect me," she told a press conference in Dubai just before leaving for Pakistan.

Unafraid to travel down the road that seemed full of challenges and life-threatening dangers, Bhutto was respected not only by her party supporters but everyone in the UAE and around the world. Even her fiercest opponents admired her intellectual insight, political, academic and leadership qualities. Bhutto was always kind to people and never refused a photograph with anyone. She even attended iftar and birthday parties of children of ordinary party workers in Dubai.

I went to her house dozens of times and attended most of her gatherings in the UAE and even traveled with her on the same plane on her historic return to Pakistan, and found her a determined and committed leader -always passionate about Pakistan and its people.

She came out of exile the strongest and boldest female leader in the history not only of Pakistan but the world. She told me in Dubai that her fight was not for power but to alleviate poverty and make her father's slogan of 'Bread, clothing and shelter' for all a reality.

I personally believe that her assassination spells the death of democracy in Pakistan.

They are killing women!

Mohammed Almezel

Why would anybody kill a woman? Obviously for what she represents, and certainly if what she represents poses a threat to those who don't believe in women leaders.

According to Pakistani officials, Al Qaida militants, and probably their Taliban allies, were behind the cowardly assassination of Pakistan opposition leader Benazir Bhutto. It is logical, isn't it? They said they would kill her if she returned to Pakistan. And she did in October, ending an eight-year self-exile.

She was back to fight an overdue battle "to restore democracy" in her country, polarized by subsequent coups and military take-overs. She died fighting that battle. She was leaving an election rally in Rawalpindi, standing in the open sunroof of a car, when a gunman shot her in the neck and chest. Seconds later, the attacker blew himself up, killing at least 20 people. She saw that coming, telling everybody as she boarded the plane from Dubai to Pakistan on October 18 she was "going back to [her] death."

She knew her killers. She pointed them out. We know them very well. Who else would kill themselves to kill a "woman", and 20 other innocent people, but them? Bhutto was a rare Muslim woman who won worldwide respect and admiration from other Muslim women when on December 1, 1988, aged 35, she won parliamentary elections to become the first woman prime minister of a Muslim nation.

This gave all women in this troubled part of the world power. Other women, inspired by her, went on to lead other successful attempts. And for that she became a natural enemy of the extremists, who were disappointed by her repeated statements condemning their demagogic, and indeed masculine, hegemony over her native society.

Al Qaida and its affiliates must be stopped. The so-called War on Terror doesn't seem to be working. As the George Bush-led war continues, the extremists seem to get stronger. Everyday, literally, they prove they can hit anywhere anytime. They can only be stopped when we challenge them on their home turf by spreading freedom and multilateralism to defeat their backward ideology and isolationism. And for that Muslims are in dire need of more Benazirs. Every Muslim woman should be Benazir, think and fight like Benazir.

An iconic loss

Shamshad Ahmad

Benazir Bhutto's assassination is a tragedy of an unimaginable magnitude. She was targeted and could not escape the sniper's bullet, which has deprived the country of a leading player in the decisive process of its return to peace and democracy. She was a world renowned leader and leaves behind a void that will not be readily filled. No amount of condemnation will make up for the enormity of the loss.

It is an indescribable grief and irreparable bereavement for the Bhutto family, which deserves utmost sympathy and commiseration. But this is an iconic loss for the entire nation and a serious blow to the country's future. Everyone mourns this tragic loss. The people are aghast, the world at large is stunned. The UN Security Council has also met to express its condemnation of the "suicide attack" killing Ms Bhutto.

No one knows who killed her and why? No one knows what lies ahead for this tortured nation, which stands completely torn apart and emotionally dismembered. Pakistan as envisioned by its founders now agonizes in its total helplessness and hopelessness. The Quaid did not live long to personally steer Pakistan to be what he thought and aspired will be "one of the greatest nations of the world". Had the Quaid lived longer, he would have only been embarrassed to see how miserably we and our successive leaders have failed to live up to his vision of Pakistan and to protect and preserve our national unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Alas, on our part, we are not even ashamed of what we have done to his Pakistan.

Will there be ever an end to crises and tragedies in our country? Did Pakistan come into being to perennially remain afflicted with a culture of blood and bullet? Are we doomed forever to military or military-controlled rule? Why don't we learn lessons from our traumatic past? Are we destined forever to meet unanticipated times? Don't the people of Pakistan have any urge to change their destiny?

These are heart-rending questions, which require an agonizing soul-searching by the nation itself to be able to find their answers. Unfortunately, Pakistan's difficulties have been aggravated by decades of military rule, constitutional usurpation, institutional paralysis, incessant corruption and general aversion to the rule of law.

During the last two decades, Pakistan has become the hotbed of religious extremism and obscurantism. Proxy wars have been fought on our soil. Pakistan today is a country where Muslims are killing Muslims. Even mosques, churches and religious congregations have not been spared as venues of cold-blooded communal and sectarian killings.

Pakistan's sole identity today is only as the "ground zero" of the "war on terror" and the sole "breeding ground" of "obscurantism and militancy" with a full-fledged war being waged on its own soil. There has been a huge collateral damage in this ongoing military operation. The biggest casualty, however, is Pakistan's own dignity and credibility.

It has staked everything in this proxy war, and has killed thousands of its own people, yet it has been blamed for "not doing enough". Pakistan continues to bleed in this ongoing war on terror. The culture of uncontrollable suicide attacks has added a new worrisome dimension to the ongoing national crisis that has engulfed our country in recent years.

Last eight years have particularly been a painful period in our country's history. What is most worrisome at this juncture is that Pakistan's national edifice is being dismantled methodically, block-by-block, by keeping it engaged on multiple external as well as domestic fronts and by emasculating its constitutional institutions. Questions now abound about the very future of Pakistan.

Pakistan has seen a constant struggle between power and polity since the very beginning of our independence. Might always and everywhere considered wrong has never been claimed so "right" as in Pakistan. In this process, we have lost half the country and also our "*raison d'état*." Political regimes have been overthrown in military coups and elected leaders either executed or banished in exile.

A nation's strength always lies in its people and institutions. In our Pakistan, both have been denied their role or relevance. The country has been stripped of its democratic ethos. Constitutions have been violated in letter and in spirit with impunity. Institutional paralysis has kept the whole nation disenfranchised. It is unsure of what its own original rationale was and what it stands for today.

Today's Pakistan has nothing right in its political system. It is neither parliamentary nor presidential, and is without any parallel in contemporary history. Poor governance is its constant hallmark. Crime and corruption are rampant and galore. Law and order are nowhere to be seen. We are mired in domestic chaos and instability as a result of serious constitutional and political crisis since March this year.

We are even ashamed of our image problems that have aggravated over the last couple of years. We have been in global headlines for frequent blasts and suicide attacks, killing hundreds of innocent people including civilians and security personnel. Benazir Bhutto's assassination now brings us another wave of global ignominy and opprobrium. The UN Security Council in an emergency meeting condemned the terrorist attack in which besides Benazir Bhutto, scores of other lives were also lost.

Like an 'enfant terrible' we feel proud in being censured in global forums. Only last month, we were expelled from Commonwealth for violating its fundamental values of freedom and democracy. We were in the impressive company of an island country called Fiji, which is not

even a full-fledged state when it was being indicted for its military dictatorship at the 53-member Commonwealth summit in Kampala.

We are not moved even if the world community at large, especially our friends and allies, are seriously disappointed or even embarrassed on the fate of democracy in our country and the plight of the judiciary, the media and the people of Pakistan. We don't take anything to heart. Look, how gracefully we digested the tragedy of 1971, the worst that could happen to any country or a nation. We did not make it an 'issue of our core' for we had other 'core issues'.

The world watches us with anxiety and concern as we continue to replay our blunders and aggravate our crises. The worst has been judicial maelstrom that has gripped our country since March this year, followed by many tragedies including the May 12 carnage and subsequent October 18 blasts in Karachi and the November 3 extra-constitutional emergency 'blitz' which was an assault in one stroke on our constitution, our judiciary, media and our fundamental freedoms and rights.

Both the judiciary and media, two powerful pillars of the state, remain "in the line of the fire." This state of affairs is certainly not conducive to successfully tackling the numerous challenges now facing our nation, including the challenge of terrorism which will not be eliminated through military operations or killing of innocent people. It will not be contained through cosmetic approaches or campaigns motivated by retaliation and retribution.

Only a steady, measured and comprehensive approach encompassing both short-term and long-term political, developmental, humanitarian and human rights strategies that focus on the underlying disease rather than the symptoms would bring an enduring solution to this problem. The complexity of Pakistan's challenges requires a non-combative approach with the full support and backing of the people of Pakistan.

To address the underlying causes of this menace, the world community also needs to build global harmony through mutual understanding and tolerance, promote peace and stability, pursue poverty eradication and sustainable development and ensure socio-economic justice, political freedom, genuine democracy and respect for fundamental rights of people, particularly the inalienable right of self-determination.

World's major powers, our friend and allies must also recognize that a Pakistan under a democratically elected civilian government and with stable institutions will be a more reliable, more effective and more appropriate partner of the free world in pursuit of common goals including our common resolve to make the world free of want and fear, and in defence of our shared values. Benazir Bhutto's assassination is a national tragedy and a huge loss to the country's political process.

This tragedy changes the dynamics of the overall situation in the country altogether. Elections in the current environment will further aggravate the wounds of our nation. We

need a healing period of at least six months and a remedial process, which requires an immediate change in the political dispensation of the country.

There is no hope for normalcy under the present system in any shape or form. What the country needs immediately is a new national consensus government with the participation of all major political parties during the healing period. Caretakers of any breed or creed will not do. It is time for someone to convene an all parties emergency conference to plan Pakistan's recovery from its current political morass.

We as a nation are at crossroads of a critical juncture. The stakes are very high. We need to wind down our confrontational and combative mode before it is too late. We cannot afford any more national tragedies and debacles. Pakistan owes its existence to a courageous and visionary lawyer and constitutionalist wedded to the rule of law. Let us revive the Quaid's legacy. Let us behave as a civilized nation.

Benazir's legacy!

Raouf Hasan

Benazir Bhutto's elimination from the national political scene is a monumental tragedy pregnant with grave consequences for the country and its future. She is the third in line of the Sindhi prime ministers, sitting or former, who have been eliminated through unnatural death within the precincts of the province of Punjab. Liaquat Ali Khan fell to an assassin's bullet in 1951, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was a victim of judicial murder and was hanged at Rawalpindi jail in 1979 and, now, Benazir Bhutto has been eliminated under similar circumstances. Do we simply call it a tragic coincidence, or is it all part of a murderous conspiracy that Pakistan has been resonating with through the tumultuous years of its independence?

Truly, it is a horrific end to a unique and distinctive political career of a woman who rose to fame as a brave and heroic personage defying the shackles of military dictatorship at its most brutal. She was subjected to inhuman and prolonged incarcerations, even solitary confinements, but never compromised in the face of grave and daunting odds. She came back to Pakistan to a rousing and rapturous welcome in 1986 and walked into the echelons of power as the first elected woman Prime Minister of a Muslim country. Sent packing after only seventeen months in power through the use of the draconian 58 (2)-B, she staged a comeback for another stint as Prime Minister in the mid nineties.

An early termination of her second tenure, again through the use of undemocratic means, led to a prolonged self-exile that finished with her triumphant, but sullied, return earlier this year. For the first time in her illustrious career, she carried the indelible stigma of a purported compromise with the sitting military ruler in the shape of the National Reconciliation Ordinance. Her version was that she was struggling for the advent of democracy in the country, while her adversaries dubbed it as a painful and self-serving surrender before the dictate emanating from the barrel of the gun.

To facilitate her homecoming, she may have inflicted a mortal wound on the nascent democratic aspirations of the people of Pakistan and offered another lease of life to the rule of an army general that looked extremely shaky in confronting the judicial crisis and the subsequent protest, vociferously led by various segments of the civil society. Her continual denial to sit with the opposition, on one pretext or the other, was also a principal reason for the elusive unity within their ranks that frustrated the prospect of a joint struggle to permanently dismantle the edifice of the military rule from the country.

This is now part of history as is the legacy that she has left behind, but there is no denying her sagacity in the face of indomitable odds and threats. Her recent return to the country was, by itself, an act of remarkable courage. She knew there were lurking dangers for her. She knew there would be elements out to eliminate her. She knew the ignominious role of

the establishment in the task of sabotaging all pursuits for the initiation of a democratic polity in the country. She knew all that, maybe some more, but she staged a courageous comeback to lead her party and her supporters to the elections.

Blaming the terrorists alone for this heinous act is a gross travesty of justice. Who has nurtured these wicked nurseries of hatred? Have the trees been laden with them that they have just popped down to vandalize the country? In whose tenure have they sprouted forth and what are the reasons and motivations behind their evil emergence? What policies have contributed to their rapid and rampaging flourishing? Who engineered them and whose purpose are they serving? Is there a Machiavellian intent to their presence here and the tasks that they are rendering? Observe this for instance: the manner in which Benazir's body has been removed to her hometown is eerily reminiscent of the mysterious circumstances that surrounded the dispatch of her father's remains - the flight of a C-130 shrouded in the dark of the night!

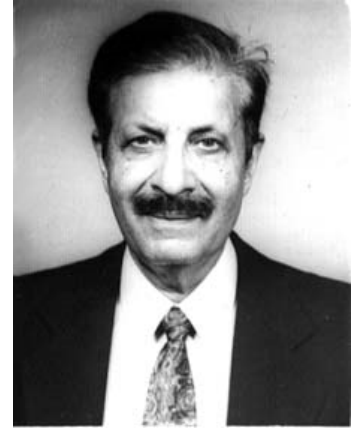
With her tragic and dastardly elimination, the forthcoming farce, called the national elections, has lost all relevance. Not that they ever carried any credibility in the first instance, but, in the drastically changed circumstances, even a thought of participating in the proposed sham would be tantamount to a political death that would descend swiftly. With the paradigm shift that is now shaping the events in the country, only a one-point agenda stands paramount: General (Retd) Musharraf should exit forthwith facilitating the way for the holding of free, fair and transparent elections under a genuinely neutral national caretaker government. Nothing less than that will work for this country that stands gravely imperiled due to the wanton and unending machinations woven by the self-seeking and self promoting battalions of cronies, toadies and sycophants who sit atop all positions of power. Short of this minimum, all political forces should step forth to join hands in a collective boycott of any proposed election farce and wage a struggle for the introduction of a genuine democratic polity in the country. It may be a long battle, but it is a battle that has to be fought and won. Only that can sow the seeds of a sovereign, stable and progressive Pakistan.

With that must also come to an end any political role that the army may have envisioned for itself in a future dispensation. The line should be clearly and distinctly drawn between the constitutional role of the army and the role of the political institutions and leaders. The two cannot be intermixed, and they should not be, as all myopic and self-centered efforts to do this in the past have brought incalculable damage to the country, including its tragic break-up. Pakistan cannot afford another mishap as it has already endured prolonged and unnecessary captivation at the hands of its undemocratic rulers. The aberration of dictatorship should be permanently banished and the enduring polity of democracy fondly embraced. Pakistan owes it to its teeming, suffering millions. Pakistan owes it to Benazir Bhutto!

The death of Benazir Bhutto

Air Marshal (Retd) Ayaz Ahmed Khan

Benazir Bhutto's return home had brought hope of return to democracy, political stability and prosperity. Coming out of the aircraft on that bright day, she had raised her hands in prayer, with tears in her eyes. It was a blessed day for her and for the Pakistani people, who wanted to give her a befitting reception after eight years self-imposed exile. People had descended on Karachi from far away places - Azad Kashmir, Bajaur, and Malakand.



A huge crowd of excited and happy Pakistanis turned out at the rally. With all the roads clogged, her bullet proof vehicle was an easy target for hired terrorists. The joy turned into grief when a suicide bomber blew up, killing 150 people and injuring several hundred. She survived. She had already received death threats. With suicide bombers creeping everywhere, her party leaders should have given top priority to her personal security.

There was no need of driving in a motorcade to Quaid-e-Azam Mazar. Being a populist political leader she disregarded official warnings. She expressed her aversion to terrorism by stating that terrorists are against democracy. But they have penetrated and are busy sabotaging Pakistani culture by violence, bigotry and extremism. Unfortunately the Pakistani brand of terrorism was flowing out of Madaris funded by outsiders. Some of the warlords in Waziristan, had been openly talking of eliminating her. The Karachi suicide bombing should have brought home the lesson that she will remain vulnerable and that she should be provided fool-proof security.

On 27 December 2007, Benazir Bhutto, a politician of outstanding qualities, political acumen and potential was murdered in full view of the world by a hired killer at the same place where Pakistan's first Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan was killed by an assassin in 1951. Pakistan never recovered from that shock. She is a martyr who has died in the service of her country. Common men and women in Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, NWFP, FATA and Azad Kashmir were awaiting her return to power in search of their dreams. The large crowd at her rallies provided evidence of her popularity. Her popularity was upsetting her detractors. Leaders of her charisma are not born often. The lack of security around her at Liaquat Bagh was apparent. It was the responsibility of the Rawalpindi administration and of the interim government. Both have miserably failed in it.

The killer with an automatic rifle most probably AK-47 Kalashnikov heading towards Benazir would have been easily detected, had some one been alert to the possibility of a terrorist attack. It is said that Benazir Bhutto was twice shot at close range, before the

terrorist exploded the bomb. But there is no sign of the rifle, Kalashnikov or hand-gun used by the killer. TV footage or press photographs from the scene of crime did not show the weapon. It must be produced to prove that she was shot at close range before the bombing device exploded. The criminals involved in this unforgivable assassination have done great damage to Pakistan's polity and psyche.

Today the nation is bewildered, grief stricken, in despair and leaderless. One cannot imagine the grief and anguish of her husband Asif Zardari and children. Reportedly her son Bilawal had been telling her not to expose herself to the possibility of sniper attack and terrorist bombing. May God give them the courage to bear the loss. The Pakistan Peoples Party should elect a leader, who ensures that the party does not become rudderless. It is a great tragedy that almost entire Bhutto family has been wiped out.

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The tragedy of the Bhuttos

Fakir S. Ayazuddin

She was a brave heroine of Sindh, who gave her life in pursuing her dream of democracy for her Pakistan. She died doing what she loved best, addressing her workers and in the company of her admiring followers.

She was a consummate politician, born into politics, nurtured by her father, himself a leader steeped in the Byzantine intrigues of Sindh, who rushed straight into the hurly-burly of the Martial Law regimes of the fifties. But the proximity of the army in Pakistan's politics was never really accepted by Mr. Bhutto, and eventually Ziaul Haq ousted him and then cruelly eliminated probably the most charismatic leader Pakistan had seen till that date. This was the beginning of the sad history of the Bhuttos. While the world leadership cried out for Bhutto's life to be spared, Bhutto did not wince, nor did he for a moment beg for forgiveness. His strength and resolve sealed his fate.

His hanging set the seal of the Bhutto name on the body politic of Pakistan forever. And so when Benazir stepped into the 1988 election, she assumed the mantle and legacy of the Bhutto legend, with consummate ease. Moving into the campaign mode, she won and was sworn in as Pakistan's first woman Prime Minister, with the whole world charmed by her appearance, and by her communication skills, she moved on the international stage with the skill of a born leader. Her confidence and presence was equal to any foreign leader, and Pakistan benefited from the exercise of these skills.

Unfortunately she was removed from office on charges of corruption which were still pending against her at the time of her tragic death. Having lost her two brothers earlier, both in tragic circumstances, it is a pity that she is the fourth of her family to have been cut short of their natural life. She could have done so much more for Pakistan, and her Party. More unfortunate is the vacuum left behind within the Party, for the Party without a Bhutto has not been conceivable as yet. For the PPP was an anti-establishment party, founded by Mr. Bhutto, and in his image, for even when he was President of Pakistan he was vehemently antiestablishment. And Benazir was cast in the same mould, as strong, and as rigid as her father before her.

She had not realized that after eight years this was a different Pakistan, and the undercurrents were far more sinister than she could imagine. I have written earlier that the Lal Masjid affair was not just an aberration but a grim reality of the enemies in our midst. President Musharraf has said this time and again, but to no avail. This now was a dramatic example of their ability to strike at will, and their callous disregard of any human values.

It is a pity their target, Benazir, was so valuable to Pakistan, and the loss of whom may lead to destabilizing our country whose future is now in serious jeopardy. The country should

take a deep breath and analyze the malaise in our system. All the political parties should get together on this issue for it is their collective job to join against this monster. Luckily for us none of the political parties can possibly have any link with these criminals, but we need to make this a declared common enemy, if we are to remain a cohesive state.

Surely the enormity of this crime should not be used to launch a move that could degenerate into a fierce bloodletting, which will benefit no one. And will certainly be playing into the hands of these fiends. Many innocent lives are at risk here and enough blood has been and is being spilt. The whole country is living through a horrible trauma. We can only pray for Asif and his children to have the courage to sustain and recover from this tragic, tragic loss.

Tortured land

Dr. Farrukh Saleem

When I breathe, I feel guilty
Guilty because she can breathe no more
When I think, I feel guilty
Guilty because she can think no more
When I sit down to eat, I feel guilty
Guilty because she can sit down no more
Because she can eat no more.
Tortured land soaked in blood
Red blood, blood of another Bhutto;
Forces of darkness thirsty for her blood
Drink all you can, drink all month long
Drink till your dark heart's content;
With so much evil all around
One could easily die of guilt.
Forces of darkness everywhere
Those who talk about religion the most
Know it the least;
Death worshippers wherever you go
Songs of death they sing
Dances of death they dance;
They eat our young
Venom is what they secrete
Human blood is what they drink.
Living in this theatre of destruction
Drinking from streams of blood
Surrounded by walls of hate

Living in this pool of poison
One might as well die of guilt;
Living in this culture of death
One might as well die of guilt.
Living with hope for long
Hope now dead and buried;
Faces depressed, eyes soaked wherever I go
Miserable, dejected, low and disheartened
No hope, no love, no soul
No joy, no delight, no cheer;
If a hundred sixty million weep all month long
Will hope come back, the sun shine again?
Cry my countrymen – and women
Living on the edge for long, now fallen off the cliff
All pain and no hope, no sleep and no dream.
Daughter of destiny was back
Nerves of steel were back
She's been the PM, not once but twice
She's seen fame and glory
She's been an icon and an idol
She's been a luminary and a leading light;
Daughter of a PM, granddaughter of a PM.
Mother of Bilawal, Bakhtawar and Asifa
A mother's life on line, a wife's life at stake
Tortured land your saviour is no more.
How much blood can we drink?
We let our country burn
Helpless, defenceless and friendless
Paralyzed, pinned and powerless
How many more seasons in the abyss?

She was magic, she connected like no other
She won hearts – and minds;
Her own life at stake, her country's future on the edge;
Democracy, moderation, army all under attack;
For democracy, the Champion of Democracy was back;
For moderation, the Face of Moderation was back
Tortured land your saviour is no more.
She had no guns, she had no bombs
She wanted a peaceful transition
From despotism to democracy
From despair to hope
She wanted end to violence
Violence in the name of religion
Violence in the name of God;
Symbol of federation no more.
She wanted no mayhem, no chaos
Let's make her happy if only for once
Keep calm, no mayhem no chaos
Let's put our act together
Let's put our country together.
Cry my countrymen – weep, howl or wail
I have never heard a story more painful than this before;
Full of pain, misery and grief
Sorrow, regret and disbelief
I have never told a story more painful than this before;
Will I be able to think again?
Will I be able to write again?
Will I be able to love again?
Bilawal, Bakhtawar and Asifa cry no more
God loved Benazir more than we did

God wanted her more than we did
With angels our angel now sleeps.

How a 'wisp of a girl' conquered Pakistan

Mohammed Hanif

With half her adult life spent either in exile or in prison, Benazir Bhutto might have lived like a medieval princess, but she died like an ordinary, modern Pakistani. When the assassin struck, Ms. Bhutto, the former prime minister, was doing what so many Pakistanis most love to do: electioneering.

Two months earlier, when she had arrived in Karachi after eight years in exile, there were legitimate questions about her democratic credentials. Even her die-hard supporters were embarrassed by her blatant deal with Pakistan's military ruler, President Pervez Musharraf, the very man who had publicly vowed that she would never return to the country.

Yet when she arrived at the Karachi airport, her reception was spectacular - the biggest street party the city had seen in decades. My friend Moeen Qureshi, a lapsed Bhutto supporter, took his children to the rally "just out of curiosity, to relive my youth." Fortunately, he left before two suicide bombers struck her convoy, killing more than 130. "This woman," Mr. Qureshi told his children as they later watched Ms. Bhutto on TV being sped away from the devastation, "is bulletproof Bhutto."

After that attack, she did seem like the prime-minister-in-waiting. Her party was resurgent, the United States was backing her, and even President Musharraf had started telling journalists - in a purposefully coy tone - that they shouldn't be so sure that she would return to office a third time.

By this time, I, too, was back in Pakistan. As I travelled from the capital, Islamabad, to my hometown of Lahore to Karachi, everywhere I went she seemed to have kindled a new optimism. It was both endearing and pathetic how, with every stop she made, the local politicians would practically stumble over each other to be seen with her, to receive her blessing.

After the Karachi attack, Ms. Bhutto confided to another friend of mine, a former police officer who knew her well: "I am not sure if they are actually trying to kill me or just scare me. But if I get scared and confine myself to my house that will be my political death."

Much has been made since her death of her apparent recklessness. But she had done her calculations and reached the conclusion that the only way she could rally her supporters was by going to them. "She wasn't as reckless as people are making her out to be," the former police officer told me over the phone. "The bulge that you saw under her shalwar kameez wasn't extra pounds that she had put on during exile. She always wore a bulletproof vest in public."

I last saw her in a London flat, at a press conference shortly before she departed for Pakistan. There were more than 100 journalists crammed into the small living room of the home of her security adviser, Rehman Malik. She was asked questions concerning the safety of Pakistan's nuclear programme, about the judicial crisis in the country and about her party's election platform.

As I listened to her feed sound bites to the Western news media, I remembered seeing her as a child campaigning on behalf of her father, then on death row - "a wisp of a girl that generals were scared of," in the wonderful phrase of the poet Habib Jalib. (How hard it was for me to reconcile, years later as a journalist, the image of that child with the new one of the former prime minister who, according to her many detractors, would barter her country's hopes for a diamond necklace.)

In the London press conference, she was asked about her deal with Mr. Musharraf, which was going to allow her to return without facing charges for the rampant corruption that occurred under her watch. It was a question that had become the bane of her existence. Suddenly, her calculated, irritated voice mellowed and she spoke like the naïve, passionate activist I had seen as a child: "I lost my father. Both my brothers were killed violently. Scores of my party workers have died in the struggle for democracy, and now our citizens are being killed indiscriminately every day. We have to stop this. And in order to stop this I'll talk to anyone that I have to."

Throughout her career there were attempts to portray her as a Westernized woman. Shortly after her death, I was talking with another friend, one who had never thought much of her. "Remember those leaflets we used to collect before her election?" he asked. He was referring to the 1988 election campaign, when her political rivals hired planes to throw leaflets with photographs that were doctored to show her wearing bikinis and miniskirts and dancing at college parties. It did not stop the people from voting her into power.

For Pakistan's military-mullah establishment, she always remained a bad girl. Not just any ordinary privileged heir to a political dynasty, but a girl half the nation swooned over; a sharp political operator, a speaker who even in her stilted Urdu could have a million people dance to the wave of her hand. And she was not a revolutionary by a long shot - but she could bring people to her rallies and more important, polling stations by promising them jobs and reasonable electricity bills.

On Thursday a heartbroken Bhutto-lover called and left a teary message on my voice mail. He just wanted to share his grief, but reminded me of something else: "She might have lost her political battle, but look at it this way. She raised three kids, took care of an ailing mother and still managed to stay in marriage."

Benazir Bhutto died only a couple of miles from the Army House in Rawalpindi, President Musharraf's official residence, a place with such excellent security that he has refused to vacate it even since his retirement from the army. Obviously, there is no such safe haven for ordinary Pakistanis, or for the politicians who want to reach out and touch their lives.

BB showed way to future

Rasul Bakhsh Rais

Nobody in Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party can match her charisma, talent and quality of leadership. But the party has very capable, intelligent and seasoned political leaders who can pull the party and the country out of the current uncertainty.

Benazir Bhutto styled herself as a "Daughter of the East", but she was in fact one of those rare creative blends of tradition and modernity, assured of her eastern Islamic moorings and equally confident in the value of her western education and progressive politics.

Bhutto was the only woman leader with such a popular, mass support base in any Muslim country; indeed she enjoyed far more respect than any leader among the Islamic states today. She was truly a modernist person with a liberal and progressive vision for society, and she had the will to push for the social and economic change that Pakistan desperately needs.

The most important thing on her agenda was how to get the country back on the democratic track. This, she thought, was the most essential element in defeating the forces of religious militancy and extremism that the dictatorial regime of General (ret'd) Pervez Musharraf has bred during the past eight years.

Bhutto was mindful of structural obstacles in her way and also of the dangers she faced on the campaign trail. But she was not deterred by threats on her life and wanted to continue her struggle for the restoration of democracy and civility in Pakistan.

In doing so, she faced the twin problem of a military-backed authoritarian system and religious extremists attacking the state on several fronts, including suicide terrorism in our largest cities. Never was Bhutto comfortable with the reality that Pakistanis were squeezed between a dictatorial system and religious extremism; both being intolerant of dissent, democratic values and fresh ideas about the organization of society along modern lines.

With her assassination, Pakistan has lost much of its hope for a liberal, moderate and progressive society that she wanted to create. These ideals are the longstanding legacy of her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was sent to the gallows nearly 27 years ago in Rawalpindi by another military dictator, General Zia-ul Haq. She picked up where her father had left off – aiming to build a mass democratic movement with an ideology of social welfarism.

Under the harsh and oppressive political environment of the mid-eighties, she decided to confront the military regime. That confrontation resulted in her enduring long years of imprisonment, house arrest and exile.

Pakistan's ruling establishment had hoped that the hanging of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto would eradicate all traces of his radical political influence. But those hopes collapsed when Bhutto resurrected his fragmented party, reviving its social support base. This is exactly what she began to do in October this year, after her return from eight years of exile.

Now Pakistan has been deprived of an outstanding charismatic leader with support in every nook and corner of the country. In a society divided along ethnic, religious and sectarian lines, and facing frequent outbursts of violence, Bhutto was a unifying force. Having a broad constituency of support in all provinces of the country, she was one of the few truly national leaders with mass following. In her tragic murder, Pakistan has lost a critical link among the federating units, diverse social groups and polarized political factions.

Her loss leaves many questions un-answered. Who will really pick up her struggle, mission and leadership of the party? How will Musharraf, his allies and opposition parties play out the political game in the coming weeks and months?

Nobody in Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party can match her charisma, talent and quality of leadership. But the party has very capable, intelligent and seasoned political leaders who can pull the party and the country out of the current uncertainty and the looming dangers of political chaos. This is evidenced by Asif Ali Zardari's intelligent handling of a potentially explosive situation in the country where he exhorted PPP supporters to convert their anger into a victory at the polls. By presenting his party and the party programme as federal and democratic, he and the party leadership behind him have allayed many fears in the minds of Punjabis and many others.

One of the silver linings, if any, in this tragedy is that democratic forces in the country represented by the lawyers' movement, students, civil society and opposition parties are going to rally behind Bhutto's party. Her party may find greater support and sympathy for its cause than ever before. But this greatly enlarged reservoir of support might also be a challenge for the new leadership of the party as it moves forward from this moment of enormous pain. Greater support for the party also means there will be more voices competing for various policy directions, and there will be no Benazir Bhutto to rally and unite those voices.

The Central Executive Committee of the PPP yesterday demonstrated that unity in taking a crucial decision in black and white, leaving no ambiguity about what the party stands for and its political strategy to restore democracy in the country. The decision to participate in the elections on January 8 is quite rational, and both in the self-interest of the party and political stability in the country. And that is in line with the wishes of Bhutto; despite all the misgivings about impartiality of the electoral machinery and the role of invisible hands, she wanted to go ahead with elections.

The People's Party holds the key to Pakistan's political future at this juncture, as the tragic assassination of Bhutto has placed it at the centre stage of Pakistani politics. More than that,

there is a nationwide wave of sympathy that would translate into significant turnout of its own voters and millions more stamping on the electoral sign of its candidates.

The meaning of this sudden swing of public mood in favour of the PPP is not lost on the establishment and its allies. Knowing that time and destiny have turned against them, they seem to be seeking an escape route by suggesting postponement of elections on the pretext of "unrest". What irony! The same circles were strongly supporting the holding of elections on schedule until few hours before the PPP's decision. If that happens without taking the PPP and the PMLN into confidence, the nation might plunge into the worst kind of violence and unrest.

Pakistan's politics in the coming weeks and months will be shaped by opposite trends of reconciliation and confrontation. Reconciliation is more likely among the opposition forces with a focus on the Charter of Democracy that Benazir Bhutto fashioned with Nawaz Sharif last year in their collective effort to reclaim the country from Musharraf's arbitrary rule.

The signs are encouraging with Sharif and other opposition parties showing genuine solidarity with Bhutto's party. We are unlikely to see that sort of rapprochement between the opposition parties and Musharraf's camp, for the latter must account for how this tragedy happened under their rule. There are, meanwhile, ominous signs of confrontation with the Musharraf regime, with tens of thousands of angry people in every corner of the country protesting the assassination of Pakistan's only modern political figure. The only way out is holding credible free and fair elections and honouring the mandate of the people of Pakistan. Otherwise, the country might have to brace for greater unrest, violence and uncertainty, with fading hope in the ability of the current regime to return itself or the country back to normalcy.

We have lost much with the passing of Benazir Bhutto. A big part of us all is gone for ever, and has left a great void in our national life.

Elegy written in a country graveyard

Javed Hasan Aly

*Do not go gentle into that good night...
Rage, rage against the dying of the light
(Dylan Thomas)*

And she did not go gentle into that good night. She raged against oppression, against exploitation, against denial and disempowerment. The metaphor was populist, the atmosphere euphoric – right until she succumbed to her silencers. That was Benazir Bhutto.

She was an astute politician, with many dimensions and great public charm. She may have had her failings and indulgences but for someone, like me, having no personal relationship, she now seemed to have matured in her perceptions of public duty. Her exuding intelligence, her capacity to comprehend and analyze, endeared her to the non-governmental intelligentsia all over the world, but may have made her that less trustworthy in the eyes of the lesser intellects running the establishments.

Her courage is borne out by her death, needing no medallions of acknowledgment. And, therefore, she is grieved by so many – family, friends, party loyalists and people at large. Her friends are wailing and her enemies are stunned. The reality will dawn upon them all, sooner than later, and hopefully their reactions will be mellowed by maturity, and emotion will have a tinge of rationality. She died at the hands of terror, no doubt, but which terrorist did her in? A terrorist, of whatever claim, but foreign to our faith and culture and sharing no belief with us? Or a terrorist nurtured and nestled amongst us, by us? Perhaps our grand strategists got so swayed by the larger picture of the globe and the region that the picture of our own little Pakistan blurred before their eyes. While she may have paid the price of the larger picture, only the wild and the wilderness will survive to mourn the loss of a society unless individual ambitions of self-perpetuation can be buried and Pakistan is really our first concern.

She had always tried to pull all the people of this country together. Now many believe that the sharpshooter, bomber or whatever, may also have sounded the death knell of this country's unity. Already some knee-jerk reactions have poured in and some let go of reason. Most, though, are benumbed.

She is not mourned by family and party alone, but by all those who refused to let the country wither away. The immediate mayhem after the assassination might superficially appear to subside, but this is no ordinary law and order situation. These are symptoms of a greater malaise for which we need to find a cure, not just temporary relief from its pain. It may be impossible for the party to replace her person but the party will need to securely latch itself

to the ideals on which it was founded. Only then will some saner and mature leaders succeed in saving this country. And some seem willing.

She diligently cultivated the magnetic romanticism of her father and the charisma that she inherited. It is rare for progeny to get such charms in public life as a legacy. But she had it and not just in the Bhutto name itself, but equally in her persona. Let us mourn this country's loss, remembering the causes we espouse. Even her detractors need to realize that we, the small players in this lovely little theatre called Pakistan, will have our entrances and exits only if the play continues. Long live the establishment – but the establishment cannot live longer than the country itself.

The time has now come to stop flirting with terrorism – it is difficult to arrest terrorism with controlled deliveries. Also, terrorism cannot be touted and marketed in the name of religious fundamentalism. This is one word too often profaned. We all know that the so-called fundamentalists are totally unclear about the fundamentals of Islam; their knowledge deeply entrenched in ignorance. This great humanist religion cannot be protected, propagated or proffered on the platform of destruction.

Let the perpetrators of destruction in this country know that if individuals, groups or agents wish to put out the lights on this country, shove us into the darkness of oblivion, we will not go gentle into that good night. We will rage, rage against the dying of the light – as Benazir Bhutto did.

A patriot's tragic death

Cal Thomas

The assassination of former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto might have been prevented had she and her husband heeded advice from friends.

Former U.S. Ambassador Curt Winsor told me he had recommended that Mrs. Bhutto accept a team of retired U.S. Navy SEALs as her bodyguards. A similar team has effectively (so far) contributed to the protection of Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai. According to Mr. Winsor, Bhutto deferred to her husband, who declined the offer, believing her adoring crowds and local security would be sufficient. It was a tragic misjudgment.

Benazir Bhutto was a strong woman. Women who are strong in the things that matter most – courage and character – are a threat to weak men without such traits. Some men will go to any length to oppress such women, even invoking the “will of God” as the ultimate justification, when God wants to liberate women (and men), not subjugate them to self-righteous sinners.

The first thing most men – and many women – noticed about Bhutto was her striking beauty. At 54, her skin was flawless, and those dark eyes characteristic of people from her part of the world drew in all upon whom her gaze fell. The white head scarf added to her allure. In some ways, she reminded one of a younger Elizabeth Taylor. She could stop conversation and activity by entering a room. Like Miss Taylor, Mrs. Bhutto had more than political celebrity. She had star power. The second of her many noble qualities, like beauty that truly matters, was more than skin deep. She had a way of moving between two worlds – East and West; Muslim and Christian – that also threatened fanatics whose mission in life was to kill, not build; and oppress, not liberate.

She represented hope and a future separated from a culture that wants to drown people in the past. And this, too, was a threat to men with medieval minds. She was educated at Harvard and Oxford. To those indoctrinated in hate and fundamentalist religion, Mrs. Bhutto was a threat to their ignorance, a pin light in a cave of intellectual darkness.

At the end of September she was in Washington for meetings with supporters and a few journalists. Sipping tea with her was an experience I shall never forget. She knew the risks of returning to Pakistan, but accepted them because, “I love my country and my people.” That’s something else we don’t see much of today: patriots.

There are many politicians who, for reasons of ego and a need to satisfy their own narcissism, seek power, but hide their hunger with bows toward more noble objectives. Like all politicians, indeed like all humanity, Mrs. Bhutto was flawed, but she was less flawed and more principled than many others in her country. Women with a husband and children

don't jeopardize comfortable and relatively safe lifestyles for what awaited her in Pakistan. True heroism is to know the risks and to take them despite danger.

There were the usual statements of condemnation by world leaders. They mean nothing to religious fanatics who kill others and themselves in the process as Mrs. Bhutto's murderer did. Pakistan is in a fight for its life, and one wonders whether President Pervez Musharraf, having made bargains with some of the Taliban devils and warlords, will be able to fight the terrorists the way they must be fought in order for democracy to prevail. Pakistan will not prevail any other way.

What do democratic candidates running for president offer as a policy for combating the terrorists? Just varying degrees of pull out, quitting and surrender in Iraq and no credible plan for defeating terrorists elsewhere. Mrs. Bhutto is a threat to them, too. Her example of bravery is also a challenge to another woman, Hillary Clinton, whose true convictions are yet to be discovered. Leadership is more than biology. It takes a well-crafted ideology and goals beyond one's self. Mrs. Bhutto had them in abundance. While her death is a great personal loss to her family and to reformers in Pakistan, it is also a loss to the world, which suffers from too few patriots and too few leaders who put others before their own careers and power.

After Bhutto, the deluge

Mahmud Sipra

Those that planned and finally took her life may have succeeded in depriving her supporters and her young family of her physical presence but in doing so they have unwittingly unleashed a deluge that their misguided agenda will now find impossible to withstand.

To take Benazir Bhutto's name in the past tense is hard. It is going to be even harder to visualise Pakistan's politics without her towering presence. Like her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto before her, she strode like a colossus over Pakistan's political landscape during her short political life leaving an indelible imprint stamped on the psyche of a people. To Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, they came to listen to. To Benazir, they came not so much to listen to but to feel her reassuring presence. If ZAB was the stuff of legerdemain, his daughter Benazir will now be Joan of Arc.

No obituary, no eulogy, no amount of outpouring of grief at her tragic death will adequately explain the chemistry she enjoyed with the people. Her ability to photosynthesize with the people – that great reservoir of raw power from where she derived her own immense energy and political strength – was matched by only one other person before her – her father.

In politics, you were either for her or against her. In death, one can only be for her. She is now the daughter, the sister and the mother of every Pakistani man, woman and child. She recently returned after an eight-year hiatus under the aegis of a controversial arrangement offered to her by President Musharraf. An arrangement, in no less measure, encouraged and structured by Washington. That her return, triumphant as it might have been, suffered from a fundamental weakness – rightly or wrongly – of carrying the “Made in Washington” label. A label that exposed her immediately to the ever watchful and furtive eye of religious extremists, purists and her political detractors who now saw the Daughter of the East as not one of us but as one of them.

Her high profile return to a tumultuous welcome, marred within hours of her arrival by a suicide bomber, left over 130 dead. An attack she narrowly survived herself. The agonised cry of the injured and the maimed that rent the air that night was only to be the forerunner of a much darker day and nights ahead. But the night passed.

To exacerbate matters, Washington's blatant attempt at nation building with the noble intent of putting Pakistan on the fast track to democracy coincided with President Musharraf's own domestic problems.

Not the least of which was his imposition of an “Emergency” in the country. It backfired with dramatic repercussions. Forced on to the back foot by a plethora of internal and external

pressures – President Musharraf (then General) shed his uniform- and announced January 8, 2008 as the date for general elections.

In a just world it would have to be accepted that President Musharraf kept his word and Benazir kept hers – by going on the campaign trail with vigour. Somewhere between her brave journey into Balochistan and the North Western Frontier in rallies and speeches she said something that must have convinced those that straddle the borders with Afghanistan that this was no status quo lady – she meant business.

And the game got bigger and deadlier. With less than 12 days to go for elections, her election juggernaut made a scheduled stop in Rawalpindi for her speech at a venue where the country's first prime minister had fallen to an assassin's bullet. Not too far from where her late father had been executed.

Speaking extemporaneously with a voice gone hoarse from a gruelling campaign, she chided, she mocked and she challenged. "This is my country and I will rid it of all those who threaten it and its people...we will do it together, you and I." This is what the crowds had come to hear. This was vintage Benazir. The address over without incident, she left the stage among a sea of her supporters and security men.

Safe inside her bulletproof vehicle – her cavalcade sluggishly made for the exit gate breaching one of the basic rules of security: A fast exit is the safest exit. Her supporters gathered around the vehicle – forcing it to a crawl and to a stall. Then for some inexplicable reason – throwing caution to the winds – she emerged from the safety of her armoured vehicle through the sunroof. She didn't see it coming and it seems neither did her security detail. The staccato sound of gunfire and, a split-second later, a blast. Then mayhem. A limb here, a hand there and blood everywhere. The nightmare scenario of October 18 was being replayed all over again – only this time they succeeded. Overnight the dynamics changed.

The country went into a violent tailspin. While the world watched in horror and disbelief, President Musharraf quickly moved to calm an explosive situation by immediately declaring a 3-day mourning period. Washington uncharacteristically went silent leaving President Musharraf even more isolated than he already is. Giving quick currency to the thinking: it's his mess, let him sort it out.

Far away in chilly Iowa – Benazir's assassination and Pakistan became a campaign issue with both party candidates weighing in with their views. Significant among the comments, this nugget from Hillary Clinton, evidencing her foreign policy prowess: "What do you expect – it is a garrison town!" Really? The Republicans were somewhat more circumspect. The received wisdom from Senator McCain's stance could be interpreted as: losing one potential ally is bad enough; but to now undermine an existing one could not possibly be good policy or good politics. If he didn't say it maybe he should have.

Those that planned and finally took her life may have succeeded in depriving her supporters and her young family of her physical presence but in doing so they have unwittingly

unleashed a deluge that their misguided agenda will now find impossible to withstand. There being nothing more forceful or fearsome than the wrath of a wounded nation.

There is no dearth of forces political or religious, or the myriad other movements that seem set to destabilize Pakistan today. Any one who believes that Pakistan's problems are restricted to the troubled areas contiguous to Afghanistan is clinging to dangerous fiction. That wolf is not just at the door – he is amongst us!

Like all such tragedies, the assassination of Benazir will be open to questions conjecture and rumour. More than forty years and eight presidents later, the death of JFK remains shrouded in mystery. More recently the death of Princess Diana is still the subject of conjecture and conflicting “eye witness” accounts. Benazir's death – despite the presence of the world's press, news cameras, thousands of her supporters, her *janesars* and a security force provided by the government – is now becoming a circus of smoke and mirrors.

In life Benazir held out the promise of a moderate democracy – sadly a promise she was unable to keep. The void left by her untimely death in her party's hierarchy is now overseen by a triad: her young son, Bilawal; his father Asif Ali Zardari; and the avuncular Amin Fahim. But it was Mr. Zardari who struck a welcome new note by speaking of the “Federation” from Naudero the other day thereby immediately setting the pace towards bringing together a fragmented society, a fractious electorate and a people who till yesterday were suffering from apathy and political fatigue. All that may now change.

It is wisely said that when a group of people ask questions of others it is called an investigation but when the people start asking questions of themselves it is called self-examination. The time for that may have arrived.

If this comes about then it shall be the enduring legacy that Benazir Bhutto would have left behind.

A friend's farewell

Rehana Hyder

As worldwide condemnation grows and national outrage erupts, I mourn the tragic loss of a cherished friend, who happened to be a former and probably future prime minister of Pakistan. I first met Benazir in 1973 when Begum Nusrat Bhutto and she spent a few days with us in Bonn, my father being our ambassador there. They were travelling back from the US where they had accompanied the then Prime Minister Bhutto on his state visit, and Benazir was about to join me at Oxford. Though I knew my parents were old friends of Mr Zulfikar Ali Bhutto from his student days at Berkeley and Oxford when they has been posted in our Missions in Washington DC and London in the late 40's and early 50's. I could not be sure that it would be a difficult experience to look after them till I made their acquaintance. To my relief, since my mother was away and I was playing hostess, they were delightful guests, courteous, considerate and good company, and I enjoyed relaxing with them in the sun room overlooking the Rhine and showing them Beethoven's house in the old Town.

The last time I met her was some years ago at the Sindh Club when I was visiting from abroad and was able to introduce my son, about whom she always asked, to her. When she arrived in Karachi on October 18, 2007 I sent her a 'good luck' card saying 'take care' just hours before that evening's bomb blasts.

Benazir, I saw, possessed a spontaneity surprising in one born to fame, fortune and feudalism. As the daughter of a prime minister at Harvard and at Oxford she lived and dressed simply but stylishly, was hospitable but not ostentatious, as befitted anyone from a promising but poor country like Pakistan.

She had a ready smile for everyone, tea, cake and sympathy in her cosy little room at LMH for anyone in trouble; and a car ride for anyone who was exhausted, in her snappy little sports car. In her own words "I am happy just to sit on the floor and listen to music". Her fierce loyalty to her friends and compatriots is well known to us all. To cite an example, she once personally and furiously took to task a gossip columnist who had slandered a friend and fellow Pakistani. He apologized in the very next issue! She was sweet enough once to help my mother with her suitcase all over Oxford station, and she had a wonderful rapport with my father. Like our other Oxford contemporary, Imran Khan, she never forgot her many good friends in Pakistan and abroad. Whenever I have met her over these three decades, whether she has been in opposition or in office, the years in between have just melted away the camaraderie complete.

Her background had however imbued her with a strong sense of purpose and patriotism, and together with her formidable intelligence, powerful personality and impressive education, she could have contributed considerably to Pakistan in her original orientation of diplomacy or law. She had a strong sense of realism "If I joined the Foreign Service, they'd

throw me out the minute my father were out of office!" Then law would have been her alternative.

But her father had other plans for her, or perhaps it was her destiny. Justifiably proud of his eldest and brightest offspring, he urged and encouraged her into public life and its consequent addiction by urging her to aim for the prized position of the president of the Oxford Union and regularly - it seemed to us relentlessly - monitoring her progress. Certainly she could afford to be more relaxed academically than the rest of us, for at only twenty she was a "summa cum laude" from Harvard. But for her the tension rose whenever there were Union elections - every term! Though of course her wit and wisdom, her charm and charisma, her stature and sophistication, ensured her eventual success in Oxford, as later against an army of adversities at home.

Her repartee, like her father's was remarkable and often had one awed, as when she forcefully described political opposition as "vital to wake the sleeping man in power." Or in stitches, as when she dryly remarked to a parliamentarian's son who failed to turn up to a meeting she had called "I left the note in your hallway under your father's picture - it just shows how much you look at it!" Once asked why her pet name was Pinkie, she at once replied, "Because I was a socialist from the day I was born!"

Thus I was not too surprised when her mother told me during a visit to Moscow in 1975 that "She wants to enter politics, and is just waiting till she is twenty-five so that she can stand!" Career politicians everywhere are ambitious and aggressive by definition, and she was no exception. Some have been disappointed that despite her training in the traditions of accidental democracy and her experience in leading Pakistan's largest populist party, she occasioned certain controversy and criticism. But that can be said for all our contemporary leaders, and many abroad. Against this must be weighed the great sacrifices her family and she, in particular, have made for the survival of democracy in the country against extensive and intensive manifestations of dictatorship.

In her defence I shall always say that like many leaders, and most eastern ones, she has not always been served well by her advisors, and by her foreign supporters that propelled her into such danger for their own agendas. Yet 'nurturing the tender flower of democracy' was an ideal taught by her father, a similarly complex persona that I have heard her aspire to in all sincerity since her youth. Perhaps her initial involvement with Pakistani politics was a labour of love as an alter ego for her adored and admired father, an honourable, if personalized, endeavor. But over a period of thirty-years, including two terms in power, she has come full circle and given her calling and her country precedence over her family and her life.

So very sadly, yet most awesomely, her commitment and courage have been sanctified by the extraordinary scenes we have witnessed this Friday at Garhi Khuda Baksh and all over Pakistan, of tens and hundreds of thousands paying homage to this heroine, this martyr, this shaheed. From a living legend the world's youngest and first Muslim and Asian female head of state, and an international icon sparking away in her signature Pakistani green and white,

she has joined the pantheon of slain premiers and presidents and shall be hence immortalised, resting in the sacred, spiritual, sufic sands of Sindh. Pakistan has lost a great leader, but I, like many others, have lost a dear friend. May Allah bless you, Benazir, and keep your children safe.

What Pakistan loses most in Bhutto's death

Tanvir Ahmad Khan

Since the lapse of the British colonial rule, both India and Pakistan have lost some of their most outstanding leaders to violent death. India was able to contain the adverse impact of such tragedies better because its institutions were much stronger and the roots of democracy in its political class much deeper. In Pakistan, the assassination of the first prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, soon after independence turned out to be a major setback to the nascent nation-building process. In subsequent history, the hanging of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in the wake of a military *coup d'état* and the sudden, hitherto unexplained, death of General Zia-ul Haq created crises that have never been resolved.

Now in the tragic death of Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan may have suffered a bigger body blow. She has been cut down when she had, with extraordinary courage, given up her safe and secure exile in UAE to return home in response to a call that she alone could lead her people out of the chaos enveloping them since March 2007.

She was often described as a great political strategist with an uncanny gift of timing her moves. But I know that her decision was above all an act of faith, of acceptance of destiny and of submission to the will of God.

I met her in Dubai on May 16 last year after a long period bereft of a personal opportunity to assess how years of persecution had affected her thinking. There was not the slightest touch of bitterness or of political vendetta. Pakistan, she felt, was heading for destruction and she was not going to watch it idly.

Sensing that her long absence from Pakistan might have stood in the way of a realistic awareness of the perils that awaited her there, I spoke to her about them candidly. She understood them all but wanted me to remember that she was no more afraid of death than her illustrious father. I left her with foreboding which never went away, not even when she signaled her readiness to work with General Pervez Musharraf to usher in a new democratic era in Pakistan. This daughter of Pakistan was also the daughter of Duty and nothing would make her flinch from it.

Perhaps the burden was too heavy to ignore. She alone had the charisma needed to talk to all the peoples of a land facing discord and division. There is a mystical aspect to this strange attribute of human leadership and she had it in great abundance.

Not even the death of more than 150 of her followers in the ghastly bombing of the historic procession upon her return on October 18 deterred her people from flocking to subsequent addresses in all parts of the country. Each passing day strengthened the covenant with the masses and, as I had warned her, every success increased the danger to her life.

The covenant was not just of those misty heights of imagination and passion where reason gets obscured. It was also rooted in the memory of her politics. Like other human beings she was prone to error but nobody in Pakistan, not even her worst critics, could ever say that she ever weakened in her commitment to the unity of the country.

In a polity that remained brittle, she was a solid symbol of the federation. With her around, Pakistan would never face a crisis like the one in 1970. This is what brought millions to her meetings and made them hang on every word that she uttered.

For her to be the beautiful princess of hope that she was for a vast majority of the 160 million Pakistanis, there was another reason too.

A decade of slander directed against her had made hardly any dent in the perception of the toiling masses of her impoverished nation that she cared for them and that her homecoming meant a better tomorrow for them.

Her legacy, they believed passionately, was that of her father's promise that every member of Pakistan's sprawling under-class could aspire to food, shelter, education and health care. In her return lay an opportunity to peacefully redress the frightening imbalances of the economic elitism of several years. The terrible damage inflicted upon private property, banks and government installations by mobs outraged by her assassination was an index of what happens when this hope perishes.

Benazir Bhutto was expected to bring peace within by promoting national reconciliation and peace abroad by opening a new chapter in relations with neighbours. This expectation was widely shared. Upon her death, President Karzai, who met her hours before she was struck down, ordered the flag of Afghanistan to fly half- mast. Gracious and sympathetic words streamed across the border from India.

Pakistan needed her charisma, her unrivalled ability to relate with people, her tireless "sisterly" relationship with the people that became the locus of the political support she asked of them, her openness to the demands of our age, and in no small a measure, her extraordinary diplomatic skills.

I travelled with her to tens of capitals -from our second homes in the Arab world to lands that were not happy with Pakistan's policies - and I saw her modulate her communication to every change of inflection.

I remember her giving a highly professional presentation on India-Pakistan relations to President Hafeez Al Assad. The veteran warrior said that this being done it was time for him to speak to her about war and peace like a father, who had seen far too much of war, to a daughter who he hoped would never have to see it the same way.

This was a moment for a new semantics, a new commitment to peace, and an event which she often recalled in subsequent conversations with me. Pakistan could have it all but lost it in a flash of hell that would haunt it for decades.

Cry my beloved land.

Unfinished journey of Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto

Iqbal Tareen



I have been trying to reconcile with the tragic departure of our beloved leader and Sister Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. I attempted to write about it many times but ran into constant indignation, frozen thoughts, and total mental block. I did not know what to say and how to say it. I still don't know if I could ever give words to my feelings. We know for sure tragedy that landed into our lives on December 27, 2007 is here to stay forever.

But I wonder what if she was not forced to depart from her unfinished journey!

Assassination of Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto sets a new height of courage against extreme cruelty. By separating Mohtarma from people of Pakistan, enemies of peace and democracy assume they will impose rule of darkness forever. They are mistaken. Mohtarma's vision and dream can't be snatched away from people. It will live forever. Her life and message will resonate in the conscience of every person who ever knew her or knew about her. No matter how hard they try, they can't kill the hope for democracy and freedom she kindled in hearts and minds of 160 million people of Pakistan. Mohtarma lived and died as peacemaker and a warrior. She relentlessly fought for peace and democracy throughout her life. Although she inspired millions of people around the world but a few were extremely threatened by her existence. In popular rise of the people, they saw a sun quickly setting on their era.

Like their masters, Killers who took her life were also timidly intimidated by her. They couldn't dare to pull the trigger facing her so they shot her from the back. She willingly walked into the face of death was ready to pay with her life for all of us. The soul that departed her body shall lead our nation out of long and dark night of suppression, mockery, and tyranny. The politics of hate and pillage shall disappear from the lives people she loved.

Someday the people shall rise to free the nation from dictatorship, poverty, subordination, and lies. I believe that day will come sooner than later. People say "she shouldn't have exposed herself to dangers" Sure, they are making a point. But they forget she had chosen a lifestyle that traded safety and security for dreams and destiny for her people.

In her final sacrifice she made an ultimate point proving nothing else mattered to her but the cause she lived and died for. Nothing really mattered...

Let us pledge to finish Mohtarma's unfinished journey. Let us build Pakistan as she envisioned in her last speech. Let it be a nation inclusive of all religions, languages, nationalities, and ethnicities. Let us cherish rainbow of our nation's diversity and not be threatened by it. Let us pledge to empower our disadvantaged and oppressed brothers and

sisters to complete the circle of freedom. Let the canons of a few over many be the thing of the past. Let us turn the pyramid of politics base up.

Let us pay a corporeal tribute to Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto by restoring freedom and dignity of every child, woman, and man and make Pakistan a nation that we can proudly call our own. Let the supremacy of law and governance by people to be the new tenet of the future.

In Benazir's death

Raza Rumi

It was in the dargah compound of Ajmer when our phones started buzzing with friends and relatives wanting to share grief on the loss of a woman who was both loved and hated but never ignored. This was the typical winter dusk and we were returning from a soulful traditional dua-i-roshnayee (presunset prayer) where candles are lit in remembrance of the much revered Khawaja. Amidst frantic phone calls from grieving friends, the shock was cushioned in the mystical atmosphere as one reaffirmed that God's will was above everything. But the aching sense of loss for Pakistan haunted us despite the calming effect of Ajmer.

It was this strong faith in God and in her mission that brought Benazir Bhutto back to Pakistan after an exile of nearly a decade. She returned despite the knowledge that she was on borrowed time; and there were heinous elements who wanted to physically eliminate her. Benazir was a lover of the mystics and had visited Ajmer thrice as we found out from the deeply-shocked residents of this small medieval town. Coming from Sindh, the land of the Sufis and poets, Bhutto was a devotee of Khawaja Ghareeb Nawaz. Like a true Bhutto she was not afraid of death as the believers consider it to be ordained by God in the first place. But the truth is that she is no more; and this is hard to reconcile with.

One cannot miss the symbolism of the location where Bhutto was killed. The place, Liaquat Bagh, is named after Pakistan's first prime minister who was also shot here. The reasons for his death are still not known other than the simple imperative that in Pakistan, legitimate politicians need to be eliminated. This tragic place in Rawalpindi is also not far from the place where Benazir's father was hanged in 1979; and whose legacy refuses to go away.

At least in Benazir's case, the battle lines were clearer. A patently violent brand of political Islam masking itself as anti-imperial and aided by powerful elements within the Pakistani establishment is hell-bent on destroying Pakistan's political and social fabric. Contrary to what many believe, this embedded dysfunction is above all a threat to Pakistan and its burgeoning population. The region and the world come next. In India, the comparisons between Rajiv and Benazir have been unavoidable as the two countries have suffered from the endemic violence, dynastic politics and a symbiotic relationship defined by cyclical political turbulence.

Today's subcontinent has all but forgotten the tolerant and inclusive Islam that was practised by the Sufis and which in large measure shapes the belief system of a vast majority of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This is what the militancy and its official backers are now set out to achieve but they forget that centuries of tradition of peace and inclusion can be dented but cannot be reversed.

Bhutto's mass appeal remained a formidable challenge to the Pakistani establishment that failed to undo the legacy of people-centered politics for three decades. The Bhutto brand of politics came about without the manipulations of the bureaucratic steel-frame that shaped Pakistani politics, often in tandem with foreign interests. Benazir's return in October showed that her popular support was intact despite the corruption charges, trials -- real and media-led -- and continued impression of incompetence and opportunism in a culture of misogyny and violence against women. Her worst opponents could not deny her dazzling articulation and grasp of global politics. And, now like her father she also demonstrated an uncanny sense of history, of seizing the moment and dying for the cause of political process in the militarized Pakistan.

This fearlessness of death is a Sufi trait as death is just another phase in our journeys and struggles. The inclusive and multicultural legacy of the Sufis is endangered by the rise of militant Islam and politics of elimination. Benazir Bhutto had drawn on this legacy and in her death we are reminded of the urgency to revisit and build on that legacy.

It took bullets to stop her

Saba Naqvi Bhaumik

Benazir Bhutto, by her own admission, was the “daughter of the East” – the title of her autobiography. But she was more than just the chosen successor of a martyred father. “She was a personality in her own right,” says Union minister Mani Shankar Aiyar, who had a unique vantage view into the Bhutto home. Between 1978 and 1982, Aiyar, then a career foreign service man, was posted to Karachi as consul-general. His home, India House, was next door to the Bhuttos’ Bilawal House in Karachi’s plush Clifton area.

In 1979 Zulfikar Bhutto was hanged, and Aiyar says he saw in the young Benazir “a fierce determination to carry out her father’s legacy”. In death certainly, she followed the path of her father.

Both died young, with so much left to achieve. Both murders left an open wound on the soul of Pakistan, and dashed the hopes of millions. Pakistan watchers in India say that Benazir’s death is bad news for the sub-continent. Vikram Sood, former raw chief and now vice-president of the orf Centre for International Affairs, says when there is chaos in a heavily armed neighbouring country, it inevitably is bad news for India. “There is now uncertainty about the elections that lacked legitimacy to begin with, but would have at least thrown up a government people could deal with. The future now seems to suggest more killings and suicide missions, a growth in radical Islam and chaos in Islamabad.” The biggest worry for India, he says, can be summed in six words: who is in charge of Pakistan?

What’s more, Sood believes Benazir was genuinely inclined towards reviving the peace process. She may have reneged on some commitments to India during past tenures as prime minister, but analysts put this down to the schizophrenia every Pakistani premier has to contend with. Even the best intentions of peace and harmony go nowhere when trapped in the labyrinth of the military intelligence-army network that often reduces elected leaders to mere puppets. Sood is worried that if elections do not take place (or if it is a rigged franchise), then the centre could start to give way. “Currently, the army is engaged in fighting battles in Balochistan and the North West Frontier Province. It is suffering heavy losses. He says the apparatus to foment terror activity in Kashmir is intact, although infiltration has gone down. But then he asks – what if after taking a heavy beating on the western borders, army and ISI pressure is again pushed towards Kashmir as a diversionary tactic?

Brajesh Mishra, a foreign service man who rose to be principal secretary during the prime ministership of Atal Behari Vajpayee, says quite bluntly that “Pakistan is spinning out of control”. He sees an all-out battle between extremist forces and moderates. “All the bloodshed, the assassinations, the war against the army in the NWFP and the growing influence of the Taliban in Pakistan are signs of the increasing power of radical Islam,” he

says. India, believes Mishra, does not just have to be vigilant, but must be “proactive” in trying to curb the extremist forces. By proactive, he means coordinating intelligence with other countries and highlighting the gravity of the Pakistan problem at every international forum.

Mishra recalls meeting Benazir when she visited India in 2003. Although she was not a state guest, she was given an audience with both PM Vajpayee and L.K. Advani, besides a meeting with Brajesh himself. He points out that when Vajpayee had made the historic bus journey to Lahore in 1999, Nawaz Sharif was prime minister and Benazir the opposition leader. “But when we met her in India, I felt that she had mellowed. She had in the past taken some anti-India public postures, but over the years had realized the need for peace between the two nuclear neighbours.” Mishra, the ultimate insider, reveals another nugget – he believes Nawaz Sharif was genuinely committed to peace, even more than Benazir. One can draw the obvious inference that the Vajpayee-Brajesh establishment did not believe Sharif knew anything about the Kargil incursions that followed just two months after the bus journey.

But G. Parthasarthy, then India’s high commissioner to Pakistan, maintains that “no other personality in Pakistan other than Benazir could have pushed the peace process to a level where there would be some real movement.” He recalls meeting her at the height of the euphoria over the Nawaz Sharif-Vajpayee meeting in Lahore. Her words to the Indian diplomat were to be prophetic: “I am happy that a commitment to the Simla agreement was reiterated in Lahore. But watch out for the mullah, madrassa and military complex.”

Benazir knew exactly what she was up against. It certainly took courage to campaign publicly after she was greeted with an assassination attempt on October 18, the day she returned to Pakistan. Yet she was determined to fight an election, to fight for a democracy that has always eluded Pakistan.

Whatever lapses she was guilty of in the past, this time she was playing fair. It took bullets to stop Benazir.

The legacy of Benazir

David Ignatius



Try to imagine a young Pakistani woman bounding into the newsroom of the Harvard Crimson in the early 1970s and banging out stories about college sports teams with the passion of a cub reporter. That was the first glimpse some of us had of Benazir Bhutto. We had no idea she was Pakistani political royalty. She was too busy jumping into her future to make a show of her past.

I saw this effervescent woman many times over subsequent years, and I never lost the sense of her as an impetuous person embracing what was new -- for herself and for her nation. I remember encountering her once when she was a graduate student at Oxford, shaking up the august and occasionally somnolent Oxford Union debating society as its president. She was wearing a Rolling Stones T-shirt, the one with the sassy tongue sticking out, and I recall thinking that Pakistani politics would never be the same once she returned home.

In later years, I would see her during her periodic visits to Washington after she assumed her family's mantle of political leadership and became prime minister in 1988, at age 35. She changed in her outward appearance, wearing a head scarf and traditional clothes as she matured, but not in her inner passion for change.

Bhutto was fearless, from her college years in America to her cruel assassination yesterday. She had an unshakable belief that Pakistan should embrace the modern world with the same confidence and courage that she had. She believed in democracy, freedom and openness -- not as slogans but as a way of life. She wasn't perfect; the corruption charges that enveloped her second term as prime minister were all too real. But she remained the most potent Pakistani voice for liberalism, tolerance and change.

A less determined person would have backed off when her conservative Muslim enemies tried to kill her after she returned home in October. But Bhutto had crossed that bridge a long time ago. She was a person who, for all her breeding and cultivation, ran headlong at life. Her father and two brothers had died for their vision of a country where Islam and the modern world made an accommodation. Her only real fear, I think, was that she might fail in her mission.

Her assassination was, as President Bush said yesterday, a "cowardly act." It was a defining act of the politics of murder -- a phenomenon that we see from Lebanon to Iraq to Pakistan. If we forget, with the passage of time, the face of the Muslim extremism responsible for Sept.

11, 2001, here is a reminder: Bhutto's killers targeted her because she was modern, liberal and unafraid.

In the immediate aftermath of Bhutto's killing, many people feel an instinctive anger at her political rival, President Pervez Musharraf. We will have to wait for the facts, but my first reaction is that blaming Musharraf is a mistake. He has battled the same Muslim extremists who appear to have taken Bhutto's life. He has faced nine assassination attempts himself, by CNN's count. He angered Bhutto and her liberal supporters in part because he argued that Pakistani politics was still so violent and volatile that the army should impose emergency controls.

Bhutto's death is a brutal demonstration of the difficulty for outsiders in understanding -- let alone tinkering with -- a country such as Pakistan. The Bush administration attempted a bit of political engineering when it tried to broker an alliance between Musharraf and Bhutto and sought to position her as the country's next prime minister. Yesterday's events were a reminder that global politics is not Prospero's island, where we can conjure up the outcomes we want. In places such as Pakistan, where we can't be sure where events are heading, the wisest course for the United States is the cautious one of trying to identify and protect American interests. Pakistanis will decide how and when their country makes its accommodation with the modern world.

I think Bhutto was right about the future -- that the path to a more stable Pakistan requires precisely the democratic reforms she advocated. Musharraf and the army have tried to govern from too narrow and unstable a base; that's their mistake and their weakness. But the assassination of this brave woman is a warning that the path to the modern Pakistan she dreamed of creating won't be easy. The best memorial for Bhutto -- and the right transition for this nation in turmoil -- is to go ahead with the elections set for early January.

Bhutto wasn't afraid of that tumultuous and sometimes deadly process of change, nor should anyone be.

People's princess

Salman Tarik Kureshi

Benazir Bhutto will be remembered in our history books, even when this dangerously hypocritical regime is forgotten or, if it is remembered at all, bringing only a grimace of disgust. This writer first observed in person the late and much-lamented Benazir Bhutto in 1986. She was leading the mammoth, million-plus procession – the greatest this city had ever seen – that welcomed her back to Karachi. It was growing dark as we turned from Nursery into Shahrah-e-Quaideen, but someone in a small jeep in front of the truck in which she rode was shining a spotlight onto her face. She seemed almost haloed there – a fair princess, defying the all-pervasive darkness of Zia's tyranny.

One saw her again a year or more later, during her wedding to Asif Zardari, flitting with great energy and speed from one guest to another. For a while thereafter, she was relatively inactive. Concentrating on her role as a new wife, she seemed at times almost to have retired from politics. And then Zia died and she led her party into the elections that followed, winning the largest number of seats despite the forces of the establishment working heavily against her. This is when she made her first set of 'deals' with the powers-that-be and was accepted as prime minister. The symbolism of her assumption of office after the nightmare of the black Zia years was irresistible. But her performance can best be described as disappointing...and still more so the second time around. Whether it was the constraints imposed by her 'deal' or inadequate executive competence or alleged corruption, she accomplished very little in her two terms in office, proceeding in due course into exile again. But we in this country are desperately short of heroines or, indeed, heroes of any gender. Bhutto possessed both charisma and personal courage in extraordinary measure and she very quickly regained her status as the People's Princess while in exile. Again making what this writer considers an entirely gratuitous set of 'deals', she returned to Pakistan. To extraordinary popular acclamation and adulation.

To bombs. And bullets. And death.

Her death was an event of fearful magnitude. The assassin's bullets got her and she fell back into her bullet-proof Land Cruiser. The impact of her fall was seismic. A shock wave raced around the world at electronic speed, shaking and sundering consciousnesses as it went. It toppled stock markets in Karachi, New York, London, Tokyo, and rocketed the prices of oil and gold through the ceiling.

Disbelief, horror, anger, fear (no time yet for grieving) clutched people's hearts. For the world, the best known South Asian personality – for many Pakistanis, the People's Princess – the charismatic Benazir Bhutto had been murdered.

She was a true titan of our land and our times. One recognises this objective fact, although (let it be stated quite clearly) this writer counted himself among her detractors. One mourns her passing hugely and acknowledges her extraordinary stature in our failing history. In the wake of this immense event, the petty-minded functionaries of an Establishment ignorant of the grand, unforgiving sweep of history mouthed inanities.

One particular 'spokesman' continued to insist, in an extraordinarily tasteless and obtuse manner, that her death had been somehow brought about by the poor safety standards of the Toyota Motor Company. As a wag remarked, "If bumping one's head causes instant death, then, considering how often they've been hit by police batons, there should have been many thousand dead lawyers by now."

Recently General (redt) Pervez Musharraf implied that it was her own fault for "sticking her neck out" of the sunroof. Yes, General, sticking her neck out is indeed what she had been doing, perhaps quixotically, taking risks with enormous courage. However flawed her legacy, she will be remembered in our history books, even when this dangerously hypocritical regime is forgotten or, if it is remembered at all, bringing only a grimace of disgust.

The ordinary people mourned her killing more dramatically. It was a savage grief, a violent commemoration. Fire and smoke devoured the peace in our cities, an enormous suttee in reverse, as might have been part of the mourning rites for barbarian kings of ancient times. In the words of William Shakespeare, "Nor heaven nor earth have been at peace tonight". The crowds in the streets were "ranging for revenge" and, in a cacophony of angry voices, they cried "Havoc!" That this foul deed shall smell above the earth With carrion men groaning for burial.

It is not the purpose of this article to speculate over why or by whom she was murdered. And the establishment's role in encouraging an enabling environment for terror is also a topic for others. What is clear is only that the citizens of this country will no longer accept the present dispensation. There has to be a fundamental change. More, there must be seen to be a fundamental change. Regrettably, our retired general-president and his cohorts clearly demonstrate their intention to continue clinging stubbornly to power.

What, then, can be done to bring about the essential change? There are only three possible paths to change: the ballot box, the bullet and the street. The first of these will be (and was always going to be) rigged to give 'favorable results'. Therefore, while not ever to be 'boycotted' and thereby conceded by default; elections alone will not serve to bring that change.

The second path, inherently undesirable in its very nature, is what is already being pursued by the militants and terrorists. The only real hope is the path of peaceful agitation that had been adopted by the lawyers' movement and the students of Lahore. But that had not earlier succeeded in involving the masses and has since been somewhat eclipsed by the violence of recent events. Let us see what actually takes shape.

But one thing is very clear, if no kind of strategy for democratic change succeeds, the consequences are too dreadful to envisage. To return again to the words of Shakespeare:

A curse shall light upon the limbs of men;
Domestic fury and fierce civil strife
Shall cumber all the parts of Italy (read 'Pakistan');
Blood and destruction shall be so in use
And dreadful objects so familiar
That mothers shall but smile when they behold
Their infants quartered with the hands of war;
All pity choked with custom of fell deeds.

Bhutto dynasty survives

Husain Haqqani

In 1979, two years after seizing power from Pakistan's first elected leader Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, military dictator General Ziaul Haq executed him after a show trial. That did not end the elder Bhutto's influence.

His daughter Benazir, then only 24, took over the mantle of leadership. For three decades, Pakistan has witnessed a struggle between the country's military-led establishment and populist forces led by the Bhutto family. Benazir Bhutto's assassination is the latest twist in that conflict. The Bhuttos generate a lot of passion both for and against. In the days to come we will read and hear many facts, factoids and falsehoods about the strengths, weaknesses and paradoxes of Benazir Bhutto.

To me these are merely the subtext. The headline is that the Pakistani establishment's nemesis has been removed from the scene, ostensibly by terrorists who have flourished in establishment-dominated Pakistan.

But the Bhutto family's role in Pakistani politics is far from over. Other members of the Bhutto family likely will become the rallying point for those who refuse to let generals, civil servants and technocrats manage Pakistan like a corporation rather than letting politicians lead it as a nation.

Benazir Bhutto had the combination of political brilliance, charisma, popular support and international recognition that made her a credible democratic alternative to Pervez Musharraf. Her elimination from the scene is not only a personal loss to millions of Pakistanis who loved and admired her. It exposes Pakistan's vulnerability, and the urgent need to deal with it.

Bhutto's assassination could be a setback to populist-democratic forces. But it also has the potential to mobilize strong backlash against the militarist and overly centralized paradigm of the Pakistani state.

Getting through elections that his King's Party would almost certainly lose if they were fair is not the only challenge facing Musharraf right now. With the help and support of the military, he can weather any immediate challenge to his authority. But Bhutto's murder adds to Musharraf's legitimacy problems.

Her assassination highlights the fears about Pakistan that she voiced over the last several months. Years of dictatorship and sponsorship of Islamist extremism have made this nuclear-armed Muslim nation of 160 million people a safe haven for terrorists who threaten the world. She had the courage and vision to challenge both terrorism and the authoritarian

culture that nurtured it. Her assassination has already exacerbated Pakistan's instability and uncertainty, inciting riots and anger. The tragedy of December 27 may have been the work of a terrorist, but for Bhutto's supporters the government is not without blame. Musharraf refused to accept Bhutto's requests for an investigation in the earlier attempt on her life on October 18, assisted by the FBI or Scotland Yard, both of which have greater competence in analyzing forensic evidence than Pakistan's notoriously corrupt and incompetent law enforcement. The circumstances of the first assassination attempt remain mired in mystery, as has often been the case with murders of Pakistan's high profile political personalities.

Television images soon after Bhutto's assassination showed fire engines hosing down the crime scene, in what can only be considered a calculated washing away of forensic evidence. Bhutto had publicly expressed fears that pro-extremist elements within Pakistan's security services were complicit in plans to eliminate her. Instead of addressing those fears, Musharraf cynically rejected Bhutto's request for international security consultants to be hired at her own expense.

This cynicism on the part of the Pakistani authorities is now causing most of Bhutto's supporters to vent anger against the Musharraf regime for her tragic death. The United States might not be willing at this stage to review its policy of trusting the military dominated regime led by Musharraf to secure and stabilize Pakistan. But as Musharraf becomes less and less credible in the eyes of his own people, it might have to.

The U.S. should use its influence, acquired with more than \$10 billion in economic and military aid, to persuade Pakistan's military to loosen its grip on power and negotiate with politicians with popular support, most prominently Bhutto's successors in her Pakistan People's Party and the Pakistan Muslim League leader Nawaz Sharif. Instead of calibrating terrorism, as Musharraf appears to have done, Pakistan must work toward eliminating terrorism, as Bhutto demanded.

The postponement of parliamentary elections, originally scheduled for January 8, to February 18 as a consequence of the assassination has accentuated the Pakistani opposition's doubts about Musharraf's intentions to share or relinquish power.

Some international election monitoring teams, including the National Democratic Institute and more recently the International Republican Institute are refusing to monitor the election unless serious changes are made to the poll rigging structure already in place for the benefit of the King's Party, PML-Q.

The Pakistan People's Party led in opinion polls, followed by Sharif's PML-N even before Bhutto's assassination. Now the PPP is likely to benefit from a strong sympathy vote. The appointment of Bhutto's 19-year old son, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, and her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, as co-chairmen of the party will help keep the party unified. It will also help ride the sympathy wave. The government would appear ungracious and would lose votes if it goes too far in attacking the widower and the son who have just suffered a major personal loss. Pakistanis are an emotional people, and the national sentiment is now against Musharraf.

Without major concessions to the opposition, Musharraf's legitimacy problems will continue to grow and a flawed election would only exacerbate his lack of credibility.

In her death, as in her life, Benazir Bhutto has drawn attention to the need for building a moderate Muslim democracy in Pakistan that cares for its people and allows them to elect its leaders. The war against terrorism, she repeatedly argued, cannot be won without mobilizing the people of Pakistan against Islamist extremists, and bringing Pakistan's security services under civilian control.

Epilogue

When I return to Pakistan

Benazir Bhutto

I am returning to Pakistan on Oct. 18 to bring change to my country. Pakistan's future viability, stability and security lie in empowering its people and building political institutions. My goal is to prove that the fundamental battle for the hearts and minds of a generation can be accomplished only under democracy.

The central issue facing Pakistan is moderation vs. extremism. The resolution of this issue will affect the world, particularly South and Central Asia and all Muslim nations. Extremism can flourish only in an environment where basic governmental social responsibility for the welfare of the people is neglected. Political dictatorship and social hopelessness create the desperation that fuels religious extremism.



Throughout Pakistan's 60-year history, weaving between dictatorship and democracy, from free elections to rigged elections to no elections, religious fundamentalists have never been a significant part of our political consciousness. We are inherently a centrist, moderate nation. Historically, the religious parties have not received more than 11 percent of the vote in national elections. The largest political party is mine, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Pakistan's political landscape has been molded primarily by the moderate PPP, which has demonstrated strong and continuous support from the rural masses and the urban elite. Extremism looms as a threat, but it will be contained as it has been in the past if the moderate middle can be mobilized to stand up to fanaticism. I return to lead that battle.

I have led an unusual life. I have buried a father killed at age 50 and two brothers killed in the prime of their lives. I raised my children as a single mother when my husband was arrested and held for eight years without a conviction -- a hostage to my political career. I made my choice when the mantle of political leadership was thrust upon my shoulders after my father's murder. I did not shrink from responsibility then, and I will not shrink from it now.

I am aware that some in Pakistan have questioned the dialogue I have engaged in with Gen. Pervez Musharraf over the past several months. I held those discussions hoping that Musharraf would resign from the army and restore democracy.

My goal in that dialogue has never been personal but was always to ensure that there be fair and free elections in Pakistan, to save democracy. The fight against extremism requires a national effort that can flow only from legitimate elections. Within our intelligence and military are elements who sympathize with religious extremists. If these elements are not answerable to Parliament and the elected government, the battle against religious militancy, a battle for the survival and future of Pakistan, could be lost. The military must be part of the battle against extremism, but as the six years since Sept. 11, 2001, have shown, the military cannot do it on its own.

Many issues remain unresolved in our political structure. Musharraf is precluded from seeking reelection in or out of uniform. Pakistani law requires a two-year wait before a member of the military can run for the presidency. The general can respond to the people's desire for legitimate presidential, parliamentary and ministerial elections, or he can tamper with the constitution. The latter choice would risk a fresh confrontation with the judiciary, the legal community and the political parties. Such a confrontation could lead to another declaration of martial law, civil unrest, or both. Civil unrest is what the extremists want. Anarchy and chaos suit them.

The political element in Musharraf's party that presided over the rise of extremism has worked with every Pakistani administration since my government was destabilized in 1996. Its members are blocking the democratic change I have tried to achieve with Musharraf. They fear that democracy will be difficult to manipulate to the benefit of extremists and militants. My dialogue with Musharraf aims to move the country forward from a dictatorship that has failed to stop the tribal areas from becoming havens for terrorists. The extremists are even spreading their tentacles into Pakistan's cities.

Last week brought a fresh challenge. Just days ago, Pakistan's election commission arbitrarily amended the constitutional provision regarding the eligibility of a person competent to contest for the office of president. As the constitution can be amended only through a two-thirds majority in Parliament, a judicial hornet's nest has been stirred.

My party and I seek fair, free and impartial elections to be held by an independent election commission under an interim government of national consensus. We want a level playing field for all candidates and parties.

In words commonly attributed to Joseph Stalin, "Those who cast the vote decide nothing. Those who count the vote decide everything." That's why we have stressed electoral reforms -- although our efforts have so far been in vain. President Bush has rightly noted, "The most powerful weapon in the struggle against extremism is not bullets or bombs -- it is the universal appeal of freedom. Freedom is the design of our maker, and the longing of every soul."

When my flight lands in Pakistan next month, I know I will be greeted with joy by the people. I do not know what awaits me, personally or politically, once I leave the airport. I

pray for the best and prepare for the worst. But in any case, I am going home to fight for the restoration of Pakistan's place in the community of democratic nations.

The Washington Post
September 20, 2007







EDITORIALS

AND

NEWS REPORTS

The Pakistan Test

The Washington Post
December 29, 2007

The assassination of Benazir Bhutto presented U.S. presidential candidates with a test: Could they respond cogently and clearly to a sudden foreign policy crisis? Within hours some revealing results were in. One candidate, Democrat John Edwards, passed with flying colors. Another, Republican Mike Huckabee, flunked abysmally. Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican John McCain were serious and substantive; Republicans Mitt Romney and Rudy Giuliani were thin. And Barack Obama -- the Democratic candidate who claims to represent a new, more elevated brand of politics -- committed an ugly foul.

Let's start with Mr. Edwards, who managed not only to get Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf on the phone Thursday but also to deliver a strong message. The candidate said he had encouraged Mr. Musharraf "to continue on the path to democratization [and] to allow international investigators to come in and determine what happened, what the facts were." Those are words the Pakistani president needs to hear from as many Americans as possible. He has yet to confirm that the Jan. 8 parliamentary elections will go forward and risks a destabilizing backlash against his own government unless he delivers a full and credible account of the authors and circumstances of Ms. Bhutto's killing.

Ms. Clinton and Mr. McCain also endorsed Pakistan's continued democratization. Each cited an acquaintance with Ms. Bhutto or Mr. Musharraf and opportunistically trumpeted their foreign policy experience -- but both also offered some cogent analysis. Ms. Clinton rightly cited "the failure of the Musharraf regime either to deal with terrorism or to build democracy," adding that "it's time that the United States sided with civil society in Pakistan."

At the other extreme was Mr. Huckabee, whose first statement seemed merely uninformed: He appeared not to know that Mr. Musharraf had ended "martial law" two weeks ago. That was better than the candidate's next effort, when he said an appropriate U.S. response would include "very clear monitoring of our borders . . . to make sure if there's any unusual activity of Pakistanis coming into our country." The cynicism of this attempt to connect Pakistan's crisis with anti-immigrant sentiment was compounded by its astonishing senselessness.

By comparison, the Giuliani and Romney statements were anodyne -- they deployed slogans about fighting terrorism or "jihadism" while avoiding serious comment about Pakistan. Mr. Obama similarly began by offering bland condolences to Pakistanis and noting that "I've been saying for some time that we've got a very big problem there."

Then Mr. Obama committed his foul -- a far-fetched attempt to connect the killing of Ms. Bhutto with Ms. Clinton's vote on the war in Iraq. After the candidate made the debatable assertion that the Iraq invasion strengthened al-Qaeda in Pakistan, his spokesman, David Axelrod, said Ms. Clinton "was a strong supporter of the war in Iraq, which we would submit was one of the reasons why we were diverted from Afghanistan, Pakistan and al-Qaeda, who may have been players in the event today."

When questioned later about his spokesman's remarks, Mr. Obama stiffly defended them -- while still failing to offer any substantive response to the ongoing crisis. Is this Mr. Obama's way of rejecting

“the same Washington game” he lambasted earlier in the day? If so, his game doesn’t look very new, or attractive.

After Benazir Bhutto

The New York Times
December 28, 2007

Benazir Bhutto was a flawed and undeniably courageous leader. Her return to Pakistan two months ago raised hopes that her country might find its way toward democracy and stability. Her assassination on Thursday is yet one more horrifying reminder of how far Pakistan is from both — and how close it is to the brink.

Ms. Bhutto's death leaves the Bush administration with no visible strategy for extricating Pakistan from its crisis or rooting out Al Qaeda and the Taliban, which have made the country their most important rear base.

Betting America's security (and Pakistan's nuclear arsenal) on an unaccountable dictator, President Pervez Musharraf, did not work. Betting it on a back-room alliance between that dictator and Ms. Bhutto, who had hoped to win a third try as prime minister next month, is no longer possible.

That leaves Mr. Bush with the principled, if unfamiliar, option of using American prestige and resources to fortify Pakistan's badly battered democratic institutions. There is no time to waste.

With next month's parliamentary elections already scrambled, Washington must now call for new rules to assure a truly democratic vote.

That means a relatively brief delay to allow Ms. Bhutto's party, probably the country's largest, to choose a new candidate for prime minister and mount an abbreviated campaign. Washington must also demand that Pakistan's other main opposition leader, Nawaz Sharif, be allowed to run. And it must insist that Mr. Musharraf reinstate the impartial Supreme Court judges he fired last month in order to block them from overturning his rigged election.

Mr. Musharraf is stubborn. Washington will need to send the same message to Pakistan's military leaders, perhaps the ex-general's only remaining backers.

Ms. Bhutto and her father and political mentor, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, were democratic, but imperfect political leaders — imperious, indifferent to human rights and, in her case, tainted by serious charges of corruption. The father was deposed by a military coup and then hanged. The daughter was twice elected and twice deposed. But both had one undeniable asset: electoral legitimacy — legitimacy that the generals and the Islamic extremists could only seek to destroy or, in Mr. Musharraf's case, hope to borrow.

The Bush administration has to rethink more than just its unhealthy and destructive enabling of Mr. Musharraf. It also must take a hard look at the billions it is funneling to Pakistan's military. That money is supposed to finance the fight against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. As a report in The Times on Monday showed, Washington hasn't kept a close watch, and much of it has gone to projects that interested Mr. Musharraf and the Pakistani Army more, like building weapons systems aimed at America's ally, India. Meanwhile, Al Qaeda and the Taliban continued, and continue, to make alarming gains.

The United States cannot afford to have Pakistan unravel any further. The lesson of the last six years is that authoritarian leaders — even ones backed with billions in American aid — don't make reliable allies, and they can't guarantee security.

American policy must now be directed at building a strong democracy in Pakistan that has the respect and the support of its own citizens and the will and the means to fight Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Pakistan is a nation of 165 million people. The days of Washington mortgaging its interests there to one or two individuals must finally come to an end.

A Nation Convulsed

*The Guardian, London
December 29, 2007*

As Benazir Bhutto was buried yesterday beside the grave of her father, the profound implications of her assassination were only just starting to sink in. Everyone sensed this was a transformational moment, and the bar is set high in a country which lurches from one national crisis to another. But into what mutation of military rule would the country now be plunged? Even Bhutto's enemies spoke of their deep sense of foreboding. Outside, her furious supporters ransacked banks, waged shoot-outs with police and burned trains. More than 30 died, including four policemen, as the country was convulsed in one of the worst waves of political violence it has seen for some time. Troops were called out and paramilitary rangers given orders to shoot on sight. The violence was worst in Bhutto's native Sindh province, where protesters shouted: "Bhutto was alive yesterday. Bhutto is alive today."

The deep, seething resentment in Sindh may not be, as Islamabad hopes, a passing phenomenon. Bhutto was the last popular national leader to come from a smaller province. The way her supporters see things, if the Pakistan military establishment killed the entire Bhutto clan - the father, the two sons and now the sister - it is because they were Sindhi. The territorial integrity of Pakistan will be maintained by the army, but one large pillar of its political integrity crumbled with her death. One of the targets of the rioters' rage was the railway line that connected Karachi, the capital of Sindh province, to the eastern Punjab province. If Bhutto had lived to fight the election, she would have been a strong enough national figure to straddle the divide with the Punjab.

Pervez Musharraf now has to pacify an angry nation in the knowledge that declaring another state of emergency would only ignite more fires. This time it is not the middle-class rage of the liberal establishment - judges, lawyers and journalists - that he has to face, but the popular wrath of a movement deprived of a leader who promised deliverance from his misrule. Mr. Musharraf may call for calm, but he has few means at his disposal, other than applying more force, to deliver it. He may have had no personal hand in the killing of Pakistan's most popular politician, but in the popular mind (and not just a Sindhi one) he has a general in his ranks who has. Unable to guarantee the security of the most high-profile terrorist target in the land, other than him, the president now has the blood of a Bhutto on his hands. Mr. Musharraf is about the last man who can stage the act of national reconciliation needed to pull the nation together.

So, it was with some haste that the government released claims that they had intelligence intercepts indicating that one of Pakistan's most wanted militant leaders in South Waziristan, Baitullah Mehsud, was behind the assassination. This could well be the case, but it will not be the full story and Mr. Musharraf is unlikely to cede to opposition demands for a genuinely independent inquiry into Bhutto's killing. Mr. Musharraf remains the linchpin of Washington's and London's counter-terrorism strategy in the region. For all the unrest he has fermented, he is still thought of as the cornerstone of that strategy and the guarantor of regional stability. He is instead becoming an increasingly powerful magnet for instability.

He should go and the west should stop supporting him. The army should guarantee the stability of the country and its nuclear arsenal, if necessary under foreign supervision. All political parties should be

invited to convene a national conference whose task would be to form a government of national unity. The government would restore the judiciary, appoint an independent election commission and hold free elections. If the military establishment wanted an orderly transition to democracy, this would be one way of securing it. This is far from happening. Mr. Musharraf was last night playing for time, time which he has not got.

Assassination of Benazir Bhutto

The Japan Times
December 30, 2007

Like her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a Pakistani prime minister who was executed by the military in 1979 after being ousted from power, Ms. Benazir Bhutto, the charismatic opposition leader died an unnatural death — shot to death by an assassin Thursday. Her death, which occurred only 12 days after President Pervez Musharraf lifted a six-week state of emergency is a tragedy for Pakistan. It put the country into further disarray and the effects extend beyond the country's borders.

Ms. Bhutto became the first female prime minister in the Muslim world in 1988 and again took power in 1993. She came back to Pakistan in October after 8 ½ years of self-imposed exile to lead Pakistan's secular forces.

She was the country's most pro-Western political figure, and a foe of Islamic extremist forces. The United States, which treats Pakistan as a frontline state in its fight against terrorism, apparently hoped for a power-sharing arrangement between Mr. Musharraf and Ms. Bhutto as a means of maintaining stability in the country.

With Ms. Bhutto's death, the U.S. will be forced to rethink its approach. Meanwhile, her death will serve as a boon to extremist forces, including Taliban and al-Qaida forces in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region. The situation could lead to more attacks on Afghanistan by Taliban forces.

The assassination of Ms. Bhutto has strengthened the impression that Mr. Musharraf lacks the capability to ensure security in his country and to prevent the destabilization of the first nuclear-armed Muslim country. The worst scenario would be Islam extremists getting hold of nuclear weapons.

Supporters of Ms. Bhutto accuse Mr. Musharraf of having failed to provide sufficient security for her. Mr. Nawaz Sharif, another two-time former prime minister and main opposition leader, announced that his party will boycott the Jan. 8 general elections. Even if Mr. Musharraf wins, his legitimacy will be weakened and protests against him are likely to grow fiercer. Mr. Musharraf faces his biggest crisis.

World plunged deeper into crisis

The Australian
December 29, 2007

Benazir Bhutto was the best hope of returning democracy and stability to Pakistan. Now she's gone

THE gloomy predictability of Benazir Bhutto's assassination cannot detract from the diabolical crisis into which it has plunged Pakistan and the free world's struggle against Islamic fundamentalism. Ms Bhutto's death potentially holds the seeds of international catastrophe, allowing radical forces to move one step closer to gaining control of the world's most unstable nuclear-armed state. In her final months, Ms Bhutto foresaw the murderous attacks against her and warned that, left unchecked, Taliban forces would be marching on the Pakistan capital, Islamabad, within two years.

Despite her chequered history as two-time prime minister of Pakistan, Ms Bhutto undoubtedly represented the country's best prospect of a smooth return to democratic rule following President Pervez Musharraf's declaration of emergency rule in November. She was also the West's best hope to help close off Pakistan's border region with Afghanistan for use as a safe haven by Islamic militants engaged in a war against the West.

Whoever is found to be responsible for Ms Bhutto's death, it represents a significant boost for the extremists, including Osama bin Laden and al-Qa'ida. The shooting-and-bombing murder of Ms Bhutto has already unleashed explosive forces of protest, aimed initially at Mr. Musharraf, Ms Bhutto's main political opponent, who has responded by putting the country on red alert. Planning for national elections, scheduled to be held on January 8, has been thrown into disarray.

Ms Bhutto's assassination may initially strengthen Mr. Musharraf's claim that the alternative to his authoritarian rule is extremist-led chaos. But Ms Bhutto's death is also confirmation of Mr. Musharraf's failure on many fronts. Despite the known dangers, he failed to provide adequate security for the political contest that was supposed to restore democracy. Rather than contain the extremists, Mr. Musharraf has run roughshod over Pakistan's democratic institutions for little apparent dividend. Distracted by power, the Pakistani military is split and less potent.

The fact is, Ms Bhutto's murder was the latest in a series of suicide attacks that mirror al-Qa'ida's insurgent campaign that crippled Iraq. Radical forces linked to al-Qa'ida and the Taliban now occupy large areas of Pakistan, including the former tourist destination and skiing resort Swat Valley, north of Islamabad. This year, there was a bloody showdown in the capital to root out Islamic militants from a two-month occupation of the Red Mosque compound, which they had used as a base from which to impose Islamic law.

The spiraling escalation of violence underscores the extraordinary bravery shown by Ms Bhutto in returning voluntarily to re-enter Pakistan's political fray. As a woman and symbol of modernization and democracy, Ms Bhutto has long been a prime target for the radicals. She was the target of a bomb attack in October, immediately following her return to Pakistan after brokering a deal with Mr. Musharraf that decades-old corruption charges against her be dropped.

As the daughter of the nation's first democratic Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Ms Bhutto held a status akin to dynastic royalty. Educated at Harvard and Oxford, her passion for politics and desire to

bolster democracy in Pakistan was forged in the state execution of her father by General Zia ul-Haq's military dictatorship in 1979. In 1988, at 35 years of age, Ms Bhutto became the first woman elected prime minister of any modern Muslim nation. Hostility from clerics and others towards her progressive agenda prevented Ms Bhutto from firmly taking the reins of government, allowing the country to slide into economic crisis. Within two years, Ms Bhutto's first government was controversially dismissed by the military-backed president and an election called, in which her party, the Pakistan People's Party, was defeated. In 1993, Ms Bhutto was re-elected but again dismissed three years later on the grounds of mismanagement and corruption. Ms Bhutto later claimed radical Islamic elements were behind both dismissals. She said Osama bin Laden had contributed \$10 million to the Pakistan intelligence service, the ISI, to help it overthrow her first government. The Pakistani Army's decision to terminate her second government followed Ms Bhutto's pledge to crack down on terrorism.

Pakistan's current crisis began in March, when Mr. Musharraf sought to dismiss the country's Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, whom his government accused of abusing the perks of his office. The move sparked pro-democracy protests, with lawyers and others taking to the streets against Mr. Musharraf. At the same time, despite resistance among Pakistan's growing middle class, extremism began reaching into big cities. Today, Pakistan remains split between those who want civil liberties and others seeking to establish a strict Islamic state.

Mr. Musharraf has been embraced by the West as an ally in the war on terror. But there are growing suspicions that he is either unable or unwilling to deliver on promises to clamp down on the emergent radical forces. One view is that continued secular violence provides Mr. Musharraf with the justification to bolster his authoritarian rule. But Mr. Musharraf overplayed his hand in November when he declared emergency rule, suspending the constitution and forcing the resignation of judges, jailing opponents and taking popular television broadcasters off the air.

For the West, Ms Bhutto was considered to be the logical vehicle around which to rebuild democracy and to provide greater co-operation for international efforts to root out terrorists in the Afghanistan border region. Ms Bhutto's assassination has removed the clear path forward for those who oppose the rise of radical Islam in the region and increased the alarming prospect of al-Qa'ida one day getting its hands on Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. As such, is it difficult to overstate the size of the victory her death represents for al-Qa'ida and the loss it poses for moderate Pakistanis. The violent immediate reaction throughout Pakistan to Ms Bhutto's murder is testament to the size of the loss and the challenge it presents to Mr. Musharraf. Ms Bhutto's death has weakened Mr. Musharraf's legitimacy at a time when it desperately needed to be bolstered. The natural response will be to attempt to further consolidate power under the guise of the need for emergency powers. But the big challenge remains to put Pakistan back on the road to democracy. To abandon the promise of free elections now would serve only to amplify the unwelcome success that the extremists have achieved.

Bhutto risked all for democracy

The Star
December 28, 2007

With Benazir Bhutto's murder, Pakistan has yet another martyr for democracy. During a storied political career, including two stints as prime minister, Bhutto was a charismatic, courageous champion of rule-by-the-people who risked everything challenging generals and mullahs who felt they knew best. She embodied Pakistan's recent hope of breaking with military rule and countering the religious fanaticism that threatens to tear apart her fragile country.

Bhutto made history in 1988 as the Muslim world's first woman prime minister. She followed her late father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Pakistan's first popularly elected prime minister before Gen. Zia ul-Haq deposed him in 1977, then hanged him. She again won office in 1993.

"It's a passion for me, to save my country," she told the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. She also wrote, presciently, that her patrician life reflected Pakistan's "turbulence, its tragedies and its triumphs."

Her assassination yesterday clouds Pakistan's future, deprives her Pakistan People's Party of an imperious and polarizing but forward-looking and able leader, even as it demoralizes progressives and destabilizes the nuclear-armed nation of 165 million.

Yet the attack in Rawalpindi that killed Bhutto and many others cannot legitimize another long night of military rule. However President Pervez Musharraf may seek to exploit the situation, Canada, the Commonwealth and the world must send a blunt message that the democratic transition must survive this attack, and continue.

Musharraf is utterly discredited, after having imposed an unjustified state of emergency Nov. 3 to secure his own re-election, firing the Supreme Court and jailing civil libertarians. Now the promised Jan. 8 election has been subverted. Bhutto's party is in disarray. And former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who heads the Pakistan Muslim League, is threatening a boycott. Yet credible elections must be held once this trauma is past. Anything less would reward murderers.

Whatever the failings of Pakistan's corrupt, family-dominated, feudal political system, rule by junta has never been a good alternative. Pakistan's current turmoil proves it. For all his talk of "managed democracy," Musharraf has not reformed and strengthened politics, cleansed the army of extremists, suppressed terror or stabilized the country. The death of one woman has plunged the nation into crisis.

Some will reflexively turn to Musharraf and the army as guarantors of stability. But as news spread yesterday of Bhutto's death, protesters chanted "Dog, Musharraf, dog," and demanded he resign. For many, Sharif included, one-man rule is the problem, not the remedy.

Bhutto, in contrast, would have placed her faith in the people, civil institutions and the rule of law. After Pakistan's three days of national mourning are over, leaders of all the secular parties should press for the swift restoration of credible civilian rule through free and fair elections. That is the best way to honour a brave woman's memory, and serve the country she had a passion to save.

Bhutto's death kills best chance for democracy

*New Zealand Herald
Saturday Dec 29, 2007*

Belittling Benazir Bhutto had become fashionable. She was, said critics, a failure during her two terms as Prime Minister of Pakistan, less popular in her own country than infatuated foreign media supposed. But whatever the germs of truth in such claims, her assassination by a suicide bomber in Rawalpindi has put them in stark context. Above all, she represented Pakistan's best chance of restoring democracy, and the West's best chance of a strong ally against Muslim extremism.

Her death raises serious questions about the only Islamic nation with nuclear weapons. Shattered are the hopes of elections next month ushering in a stable coalition government headed by Bhutto and President Pervez Musharraf, the latter an increasingly unpopular figure who has made few inroads in the war on terror. Bhutto's mass appeal to Pakistan's poor was to be the catalyst for a liberal, pro-Western administration capable of fighting Muslim radicals.

Now, there is only danger and unpredictability. Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party was essentially her vehicle; there is no strong heir apparent. In any event, the elections have become untenable, especially since the third contender, former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, has announced a boycott. The West has little choice, in the short term at least, but to support Musharraf, the one remaining bulwark against fundamentalism.

The only winners are the fundamentalists of al Qaeda and the Taleban, either of which probably supplied the assassin. Religious tolerance has lost out to extremism. Bhutto's limitations may, again, have been laid bare in a third premiership. But there can be no doubting her bravery or her commitment to democracy. Or the grim situation following her death.

Pakistan's bitter political harvest

Canberra Times
December 29, 2007

There are many who will mourn the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, but none more so than the majority of Pakistanis who though they yearn for peace, justice and prosperity have had to settle for decades of corruption, mismanagement and political paralysis served up by the country's military and political elites.

Bhutto was very much part of Pakistan's political elite and disliked, even hated, by some Pakistanis for her pro-Western views, but at the time of her death she and her Pakistan People's Party enjoyed considerable support for their efforts to restore democracy to the country that has endured eight years of divisive military rule under President Pervez Musharraf.

Whether Bhutto could have managed the country's transition to stable democracy as prime minister under Musharraf, let alone meet even some of the aspirations of its grassroots supporters, is questionable, but there is no doubt that she was a symbol of hope to millions of Pakistanis.

What is beyond doubt was her courage not only for returning to an increasingly lawless and divided Pakistan in October after several years in exile, but for remaining there after an attempt was made on her life the day she arrived. Bhutto is now the fourth member of her immediate family to die a violent death; such are the political chasms that divide Pakistan. Perhaps because her family name was closely associated with martyrdom [her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was hanged by the military after being ousted in a coup in 1979], Bhutto considered it her destiny to again lead the country, despite the allegations of fraud, corruption and familial strife that marked her first two terms as prime minister.

She was the politician most likely to deliver Pakistan from years of unpopular and increasingly repressive military rule, but she erred in concluding a deal with Musharraf that would allow her to come home to Pakistan and contest parliamentary elections in return for agreeing to allow him to remain as president. Though the deal was good for her and the PPP, it was fundamentally undemocratic in that it allowed Musharraf to sideline Nawaz Sharif, the leader of the other large opposition party, the Pakistan Muslim League, and Bhutto's only real rival in the general election scheduled for next month.

Why Bhutto agreed to this deal, brokered by the Bush Administration in an attempt to force Musharraf into making further democratic concessions, when she knew it would be anathema to the country's increasingly assertive extremists and fanatics, is not clear. But it was a big mistake. Most likely she thought a cooperative Musharraf would provide adequate protection, but as Thursday's events have shown, a determined suicide bomber will test even the tightest security.

The violent removal of Bhutto from the political scene offers the military the opportunity to delay, possibly for years, any transfer of power to a civilian administration firstly by postponing next month's election. But whether Musharraf remains as head of state is open to question. If the army is blamed for the Bhutto's death and there is a popular backlash against military rule, then Musharraf could be made the fall guy, clearing the way for a new generalissimo. While the military is as faction-ridden as any of Pakistan's institutions, an ambitious officer may well see an opportunity in the current climate of crisis to reassert strong central authority.

Also likely to be conflicted is the White House: does it persevere with its efforts to oversee a transition to democracy, in this case by pressing Musharraf to make an accommodation with someone like Sharif, or does it acquiesce in a continuation of military rule? The prospects of Sharif cooperating with Musharraf look slim, however.

Sharif was deposed and tried for treason by Musharraf, and has said consistently that he will not serve under him as prime minister although Bhutto's death might prompt a change of heart. But a political accommodation of any kind with the unpopular Musharraf carries considerable risk.

A better scenario, certainly for the long-suffering people of Pakistan, would be the emergence of a credible successor to Bhutto from within the PPP one able to harness popular and international pressure to demand an unequivocal return to civilian rule. Alas, because the country's largest party has been run more or less as a Bhutto family enterprise for four decades, there are no obvious alternative leaders.

Bhutto's death is undoubtedly a blow for the restoration of democracy in Pakistan, but not necessarily a final one. While it has underscored the spread and danger of extremism in the country, it is also likely to steel the resolve of those determined to restore civilian rule. And while Musharraf may well exploit the opportunity to extend his tenuous grip on power, he must now recognize the price of failing to heed the popular will for change.

Beyond Benazir

Los Angeles Times
December 29, 2007

With Bhutto assassinated, turmoil -- even civil war -- loom for nuclear-armed Pakistan.

Before the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on Thursday, Pakistan was arguably the world's most unstable nuclear power. Now there's no argument. With the country's strongest hope for a democratic future now lying entombed near her martyred father, Pakistan faces at best a long period of turmoil and uncertainty, and at worst a civil war. Its nuclear arsenal has never been less secure, and Al Qaeda and its sympathizers have never been closer to realizing their dream of obtaining a nuclear device.

Those eager to lay blame for this catastrophe have plenty of targets. At the top of the list is President Pervez Musharraf, who many Pakistanis believe had a hand in Bhutto's murder. That's unlikely, given that her death further weakens his political standing; his best hope to remain in office was to form a coalition government with Bhutto. Musharraf also is being blamed for failing to provide enough security, another questionable charge given Bhutto's insistence on appearing before crowds and standing up through the sunroof of her bulletproof vehicle. Yet Musharraf isn't without fault. The emergency rule he imposed in November shut down private TV and radio stations, and even when channels reopened recently, they were forbidden from airing political content, thus forcing Bhutto and other candidates to do their campaigning via public appearances.

The United States now finds itself with no strong ally in Pakistan besides Musharraf, and no good options remaining for promoting democratic change -- a situation for which the Bush administration is partly to blame. Washington invested all its hopes in Bhutto, failing to cultivate relationships with other Pakistani political leaders.

Yet the person most to blame for the dangerous situation Pakistan now presents to the world -- besides the assassin and his backers -- may be Benazir Bhutto. Her Pakistan People's Party, the country's largest political group, was a dynastic organization ruled entirely by one woman; Bhutto sidelined charismatic leaders who rose within the ranks, seeing them as potential rivals. As a result, there is no one to take her place. To put her own life at enormous risk was certainly courageous, but it also could be seen as reckless and arrogant.

For now, the hopes of Pakistan are riding on Bhutto's party. If it can produce a new leader and call for calm and restraint rather than violence and street protest, there's a chance that elections could still go forward -- if not on Jan. 8, then soon after. Other likely scenarios, such as another declaration of emergency rule by Musharraf or an indefinite postponement of balloting, would only make a bad situation worse.

Bhutto, an aristocrat who championed democracy

*By: Henry Chu, Los Angeles Times
December 28, 2007*

Entering politics after her father's death, she always believed she was the best person to lead Pakistan.

She was, by her own account, a "daughter of destiny," a pampered girl from an aristocratic Pakistani family who inherited her father's political mantle and went on to become the Muslim world's first female prime minister. But in the end, that destiny proved a tragic one: Like her father, Benazir Bhutto was killed for her political ambitions.

The assassin who cut short Bhutto's life on Thursday brought to a close a remarkable biography encompassing a privileged childhood, degrees from Harvard and Oxford, stints in jail as a political prisoner, and mass adulation and contempt alike for her two terms as Pakistan's prime minister. After eight years of self-imposed exile, Bhutto, 54, had returned to her native land in October to try for a third term.

Bhutto's triumphal return was marred from the start by violence, when a suicide bomber struck her motorcade and killed more than 140 people in the southern port city of Karachi.

"I have many enemies -- I'm a security target," Bhutto told The Times in June. "But this is a most critical time for the country."

A defiant and strong-willed figure, instantly recognizable in her trademark white scarf, Bhutto never flagged in her belief that she was the best person to lead her nation to democracy and prosperity. That confidence led her to declare herself "chairperson for life" of her Pakistan People's Party and to an imperious style that rewarded loyalists but alienated many others.

Her charisma and skillful political maneuvering were undeniable -- and sometimes masked the fact that her double stint as prime minister was at best a mixed bag, dragged down by allegations of massive corruption and criticism of her lavish lifestyle.

But Bhutto made an indelible mark not just on her home country but on the international political scene, both for her gender and her outspoken insistence on the need for Pakistan to remake itself into a secular, liberal state.

Despite her shortcomings, "what will remain is a commitment to democracy -- to moderate, centrist values, tolerance, a role for women and an accommodation with India," Stephen Cohen, a South Asia expert at the Brookings Institution, said Thursday. "She helped create a new identity for Pakistan as a place where women could be prime minister."

Anil Kalhan, a visiting professor at Fordham University School of Law, agreed. "Certainly for women leaders she played an inspiring role, even though she ascended to that role in a dynastic way," he said. "She was always a very charismatic person who had a tremendous following because of her father's legacy as a populist but also in her own right. . . . She had people who adored her and detractors who couldn't stand her."

Her death leaves a huge void at the top of her party, one that will be difficult to fill in a region where personality cults reign. Bhutto's three children, all in their teens, are too young to continue the dynasty begun by her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who served as president and prime minister before being deposed and hanged by dictator General Zia ul-Haq.

Benazir Bhutto was born on June 21, 1953, the eldest of four children in a well-to-do landowning family in the southern province of Sindh. In what remains a largely feudal society, Bhutto grew up in a mansion in Karachi with the trappings and perks of Pakistan's postcolonial, English-speaking elite. She was attended to by an English governess, called by her nickname, "Pinkie," and enrolled in elite Roman Catholic schools.

From a young age, she was witness to her father's political career, which included Cabinet posts and stints as the head of Pakistan's delegation to the United Nations. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto delighted his children with stories about famous historical figures such as Napoleon and Alexander the Great, as well as with gifts of chocolates and clothes from Saks Fifth Avenue, which bred a taste for luxury in his eldest daughter that persisted throughout adulthood.

So sheltered was Bhutto's life that at 16, she was completely unprepared for life at Radcliffe College, Harvard University.

"I cried and cried and cried because I had never walked to classes in my life before," she once told an interviewer. "I'd always been driven to school in a car and picked up in a car, and here I had to walk and walk and walk. It was cold, bitterly cold, and I hated it . . . but it forced me to grow up. There was this huge hall and you had to serve yourself and sit down somewhere next to someone, which meant I had to talk to people, and Americans are very talkative."

From Harvard, she went on to Oxford University to study politics, philosophy and economics, an arena where she honed her skills by becoming the first Asian woman to be elected president of the prestigious Oxford Union debating society.

Her sights were still set on a possible career as a diplomat rather than a politician. But soon after her return, in 1977, her father was ousted as prime minister in a military coup and imprisoned, and martial law was declared. Two years later, he was executed, and his death became the defining moment in Bhutto's life, launching her full-bore into politics.

"I told him on my oath in his death cell, I would carry on his work," Bhutto later said.

She paid a price for her promise. Over the next five years, with the Pakistan People's Party outlawed, Bhutto was in and out of detention, sometimes under house arrest, or in prison, under harrowing conditions. In her autobiography, "Daughter of Destiny," she recounted her experience in solitary confinement in a desert cell in 1981, where the heat was almost unbearable.

"My skin split and peeled, coming off my hands in sheets. Boils erupted on my face. My hair, which had always been thick, began to come out by the handful. Insects crept into the cell like invading armies," she wrote. "I tried pulling the sheet over my head at night to hide from their bites, pushing it back when it got too hot to breathe."

She was allowed to leave Pakistan in 1984 for treatment of a serious ear infection. She settled in London, but the Shakespearean drama of her family's life continued with the mysterious death of one

of her two brothers, Shahnawaz, at his home on the French Riviera. Some accounts suggested that he had been poisoned, which Bhutto believed to be the handiwork of Pakistani agents. When Zia lifted martial law in Pakistan in December 1985, Bhutto felt the time had come to return. Her homecoming in April 1986, in the ancient city of Lahore, was tumultuous, celebrated by hundreds of thousands of Pakistanis who thronged the streets and forced her motorcade to slow to such a crawl that it took 10 hours to travel eight miles.

In her elegant British-inflected accent, she called on Zia to resign, saying that it was “a bad year for dictators” -- a reference to the fall of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines and Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier in Haiti. The momentum of her rapturous welcome propelled her on a national tour and then her party to victory in elections in November 1988, months after Zia’s death in a mysterious plane crash.

Governance, however, proved difficult for Bhutto in both her terms as prime minister, from 1988 to 1990 and 1993 to 1996. She was credited with immediately ending media restrictions and speaking out for women’s rights, but she was constrained by the military and the mullahs, Pakistan’s two most powerful groups.

Although Bhutto’s domestic rhetoric echoed the populism of her father, with its promises of basic necessities for all, inflation continued to hurt the poor and foreign debts grew. And though the West saw her as a glamorous symbol of moderation, she was unable to curb Islamic and ethnic militancy.

Most damaging of all were the accusations of corruption that began to surface. Bhutto made little secret of her love of the finer things, and she and her husband, businessman Asif Ali Zardari, lived lives beyond the imaginings of most Pakistanis, with residences in London and New York. The money to finance such opulence was suspected to have come from kickbacks and other shady deals by Zardari, who was nicknamed “Mr. 10%.” Despite his unpopularity, Bhutto gave him a Cabinet post during her second term.

The corruption allegations drove her from office and eventually the country. Her husband spent eight years in prison, though without a formal conviction. Investigations were opened in Britain, Spain and Switzerland.

Four years ago, a Swiss investigative magistrate convicted Bhutto and Zardari of money laundering. The judge ruled that Swiss firms had bribed the couple in return for a Pakistani government contract. But an appeals court set aside the verdict and the investigation was open at the time of her death.

Last month, Spanish prosecutors closed their three-year investigation of Bhutto and Zardari, citing a lack of evidence. The British case, a civil lawsuit by the Pakistani government involving the purchase of Bhutto’s multi-million dollar estate in England, is still pending.

Bhutto’s reputation was further damaged by the fatal shooting of her other brother, Murtaza, by police in 1996 in Karachi. Some believe Bhutto, who was prime minister then, herself engineered, or at least tacitly approved the killing, because he challenged her status as party leader. Different factions within the family remain politically at odds with each other; last month, Murtaza’s daughter Fatima Bhutto lashed out at her aunt in a Los Angeles Times opinion piece, saying that her return could mean the death of the democratic movement in Pakistan.

In self-exile, from her bases in London and Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Bhutto continued to hold sway over her party, contesting the corruption charges and traveling the world promoting her vision of a democratic Pakistan.

“She really believed that. There’s no question that her upbringing and her background and her experience in the West was part of her identity. That was what she stood for,” said Cohen of the Brookings Institution.

Exile seemed to have mellowed her. “I found her to be thoughtful and reflective and more willing to admit errors than she did before. I think she matured as a politician in exile,” he said. “She was 100% politician. She worked at her job very, very hard.”

Before her return to Pakistan in October, Bhutto was working on a controversial power-sharing deal, backed by the U.S., with President Pervez Musharraf. Her willingness to deal with an army general who came to power in a coup and whom many of her compatriots consider a ruthless dictator compromised her standing to some extent.

But reading the public mood, as well as Musharraf’s apparent reluctance to bend on key points, she announced last month that she would no longer negotiate with him.

Instead, she took to campaigning for her Pakistan People’s Party in the elections scheduled for Jan. 8, hoping to recapture some of the magic and popular acclaim that had greeted her on her first homecoming in 1986.

At that time, she had invoked her father’s spirit in words that would prove prescient more than 20 years later.

“He told me at our last meeting at Rawalpindi jail that I must sacrifice everything for my country,” she said. “This is a mission I shall live or die for.”

Apart from her husband and their three children, son Bilawal and daughters Bakhtawar and Asifa, Bhutto is survived by her mother, Nusrat, and sister, Sanam.

In Pakistan, it was a rally like many others

*By: Laura King Los Angeles Times
December 28, 2007*

Her voice was hoarse from days of campaign rallies. Her black hair was covered by the white head scarf she was rarely seen without, but the tunic of her traditional Pakistani outfit was a brilliant, jewel-toned purple.

She basked, as always, in the cheers of the crowd. She pumped her pale hands into the air in rhythm with its chants.

“Prime Minister Benazir!” the people shouted.

She smiled at that.

In many respects, Benazir Bhutto’s last rally was much like dozens she had held in the weeks since she came back from self-imposed exile in October.

The crowd was large, in the thousands, but not as big as might have been expected 12 days before parliamentary elections. Fears of an attack just like this one and like the one she survived 10 weeks earlier upon her return have kept many people away from large open-air gatherings.

On her final day, as often happened, Bhutto was running late. Supporters had gathered hours earlier, filling a park in the center of Rawalpindi, a sprawling, raucous city where Pakistan’s army has its headquarters.

The midday sun was beating down when the crowd began arriving. A late-afternoon chill had already set in when Bhutto made her triumphal entrance.

She sat, looking tired but regal, while half a dozen party leaders spoke. The crowd fidgeted impatiently. The cheers built like a wave when she stepped to the microphone.

As she had throughout her political life, Bhutto invoked the name of her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the former prime minister who was hanged by a military dictator in 1979. A giant portrait of him and his daughter served as a backdrop.

“I hope you will support me as you did my father,” she told the crowd, which roared its approval.

To get into the park, people passed through metal detectors and were frisked by police. But the police presence was relatively light; far more formidable-looking were Bhutto’s own private guards, who stood in front of the high stage with assault rifles.

And as always, when her vehicle came and went, it was surrounded by a human shield. The all-volunteer force of young men was known as the Janisar-e-Benazir, or those willing to die for her. They were believed to have made up the majority of the 20 or more people killed in the bombing and gunfire of the attack.

As her convoy pulled away from the park, Bhutto was standing up in her vehicle, her torso exposed above its sunroof. She was waving to the crowd.

Witnesses said there was a volley of gunfire, followed almost immediately by the thunderous blast of the suicide bomb.

Bhutto had been fatalistic about the threats against her. In speeches and interviews, she spoke of the constant threat of violence but insisted that she would not be deterred from going out among the people.

At her last rally, she had said as much once again.

“The people and I,” she told the crowd, “can make any sacrifice for our country.”

Bhutto's long and tangled list of enemies

*By Josh Meyer Los Angeles Times
December 28, 2007*

Analysts suspect that Al Qaeda had a hand in the assassination, possibly along with other extremist groups.

The crowd in the Rawalpindi park waited impatiently for Bhutto, and she did not disappoint them. Then shots and a blast.

It may have been a single assassin who killed former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, but if so, he could have been working with any number of Islamic extremist groups, U.S. intelligence officials and South Asia analysts said Thursday.

Bhutto had returned from eight years of self-imposed exile with a pledge to reform Pakistan in ways that would upset entrenched political interests, powerful fundamentalist religious organizations, and Al Qaeda and the Taliban. She was aligned with the U.S., and vowed to crack down on the increasingly popular radicalism spreading through the country. And she had publicly accused the government's military and intelligence establishments of coddling terrorists.

As a result, the list of people and groups considered Bhutto's archenemies was a long one. But determining who killed her, and why, could be a complicated and confounding investigation, say current and former U.S. officials and analysts. They say it is not likely that someone working alone killed the daughter of a Pakistani political dynasty.

A more likely scenario, they say, is that Al Qaeda was ultimately responsible, because it has long targeted Bhutto and stands to gain the most from the political destabilization that is certain to follow her slaying. If that turns out to be the case, it is also likely that additional extremist organizations were involved, analysts say.

Within Pakistan, Osama bin Laden's global network group has worked closely with more than a dozen radical fundamentalist Islamic organizations in Pakistan that have grown in power and popularity.

Two of them, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad, changed their names to avoid U.S. and Pakistani sanctions after they were designated as terrorist organizations. Other groups include Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan. All are Sunni Muslim-based and oppose Bhutto in part because she was female and Shiite Muslim. Though they have links to Al Qaeda, such Sunni Muslim extremist groups have their own leaders and their own agendas, and potentially thousands of foot soldiers.

Another suspect is Baitullah Mahsud, a Taliban commander operating in Pakistan's tribal areas, who reportedly pledged before Bhutto returned to Pakistan in October to dispatch suicide bombers against her, say current and former U.S. intelligence and counter-terrorism officials. Mahsud has denied that.

Complicating the situation is the fact that many of the extremist groups have ties to Pakistan's political establishment, including elements of the government loyal to President Pervez Musharraf, as well as close ties to the military and its intelligence agencies. Bhutto had long criticized such links, and in the

wake of her killing Thursday, some of her supporters accused the government of playing a role. One senior U.S. counter-terrorism official also said Washington suspected that rogue officials within the military or intelligence agencies could have been involved, noting that though there is no evidence, they have detested Bhutto for more than a decade.

U.S. intelligence and counter-terrorism agencies, and groups such as the Sept. 11 commission, have said that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency in particular has cultivated relationships with radical groups, using them as proxies to wage war against India while protecting Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan.

U.S. intelligence officials said they were investigating but could not confirm an initial claim of responsibility for the attack that reportedly came from an Al Qaeda leader. An Italian website said Mustafa Abu al Yazid, Al Qaeda's commander in Afghanistan, told its reporter in a phone call, "We terminated the most precious American asset which vowed to defeat [the] mujahedin."

The website also said the decision to assassinate Bhutto was made in October by Al Qaeda's No. 2 leader, Ayman Zawahiri.

Ross Feinstein, a spokesman for the Directorate of National Intelligence, said authorities were "obviously looking into" such reports but had not yet been able to confirm them.

Even if Al Qaeda does claim responsibility, current and former U.S. intelligence officials said they would be skeptical that it acted without help from Pakistan-based groups, whose members are less likely to stand out.

"We're still early on piecing it together," a U.S. intelligence official said. "There are any number of groups within Pakistan that could have mounted this attack."

In Pakistan, Musharraf blamed Islamic extremists and pledged to redouble efforts to fight them. "This is the work of those terrorists with whom we are engaged in war," he said in a nationally televised speech.

President Bush described the slaying as a "cowardly act by murderous extremists" trying to undermine Pakistan.

White House spokesman Scott Stanzel stopped short of accusing Al Qaeda or the Taliban, but said the attack used methods with which "Al Qaeda is very familiar."

Bruce Riedel, a former Pakistan expert for the CIA, the National Security Council and the State Department, said his "hunch" was that Al Qaeda was responsible.

"They have been trying to kill her for years," he said. "They had motive: Destabilize Pakistan further. And means: dozens of martyrs ready to die."

However, Al Qaeda has rarely, if ever, used gunmen in assassination attempts.

Some U.S. intelligence experts and analysts said that there are so many tangled alliances between the extremist groups and Pakistani government agencies that it would be virtually impossible to get to the

bottom of who killed Bhutto unless the perpetrators came forward -- with proof. The FBI has offered to send investigators, but Pakistan has not responded, FBI spokesman Richard Kolko said.

“There are just too many different groups that both have the desire to do this and also . . . the capacity to do it to make any sense of it until one of them convincingly comes out and suggests that they did it,” said Daniel Markey, who oversaw South Asia policy for the State Department until February.

Markey also wondered whether U.S. officials should trust Pakistan to aggressively investigate the slaying. “I have zero confidence that the Pakistan government will get to the bottom of this, if they want to or if they don’t want to, no matter who is actually responsible for it,” he said.

The extremist groups, Markey said, have “their tentacles already extended into the organs of the Pakistani state, which is what makes this so troubling.”

Stanzel told reporters in Crawford, Texas, that it was “up to the Pakistani officials” to determine who killed Bhutto. He declined to say whether the Bush administration believed Pakistan was up to the task.

Bhutto had suggested that alliances between extremists and the government had put her country in a stranglehold, and that some combination of those forces might someday kill her.

“I have long claimed that the rise of extremism and militancy in Pakistan could not happen without support from elements within the current administration,” Bhutto wrote in a commentary last month for CNN.

Before her return to Pakistan, Bhutto said she feared that retired army officers were plotting to assassinate her. In an interview with Britain’s Guardian newspaper, she noted that Mahsud, the Taliban commander, had threatened to send suicide bombers against her. But she said real danger came from extremist elements within the country’s military establishment that were opposed to her return.

“I’m not worried about Baitullah Mahsud, I’m worried about the threat within the government,” she told the Guardian. “People like Baitullah Mahsud are just pawns. It is those forces behind him that have presided over the rise of extremism and militancy in my country.”

Pakistani officials angrily denied such allegations. They did so again after Bhutto narrowly escaped injury Oct. 19, when suicide bombers attacked her homecoming parade, killing more than 140 people. No group has claimed responsibility for that attack.

But Bhutto described it as an attempt to silence her and her opposition candidacy, and called for international assistance in identifying the perpetrators. The Musharraf government declined to seek outside help, and the investigation appears to have made little progress.

On Thursday, Pakistani officials noted that radical extremists had also displayed an interest in going after Musharraf and his loyalists. The groups have launched several failed assassination attempts against Musharraf. And in recent weeks, suicide bombers have repeatedly targeted military and intelligence targets in Pakistan, including the military garrison in Rawalpindi where Musharraf stays.

Assassination shatters hopes for stability in Pakistan

*By Paul Richter, Los Angeles Times
December 27, 2007*

For months, the Bush administration's hopes for stability in Pakistan rested on the rising influence of Benazir Bhutto. Her death Thursday shattered those hopes and threatened to paralyze U.S. priorities there: fighting terrorism, ensuring the safety of Pakistan's nuclear weapons and preventing regional chaos.

The administration had a huge stake in the pro-Western former prime minister. U.S. officials were banking heavily that Bhutto's party would win enough seats in upcoming elections to become an effective force in the government again. In Pakistan, her death leaves the party in disarray and the elections themselves in doubt. For the White House, it leaves a void that will take time and work to fill.

The assassination dealt a blow to an even closer U.S. ally, President Pervez Musharraf, who now may lose the electoral blessing he needs to restore his sagging credibility and legitimacy. Worse, many Pakistanis hold the president and those around him responsible for the assassination, if only because they failed to prevent it.

The setback comes at an especially bad time for the United States, with Islamic militants resurgent in neighboring Afghanistan and focusing more intently on attacking Pakistan itself. The United States has been spending about \$1 billion a year in Pakistan.

"A bad day for Pakistan; a bad day for the United States," said Daniel Markey of the Council on Foreign Relations, who was a senior State Department official until earlier this year. "We're going to be paying a price for it for a while."

U.S. officials said their foremost concern was the possibility of civil upheaval. One official said that the greatest risk was that violence would prove too much even for the Pakistani army, which plays a pivotal role in keeping the country together. Until last month, Musharraf served as military chief of staff, a position he renounced only under intense pressure from domestic and foreign critics.

With Bhutto dead and hopes for an alliance between her and Musharraf now gone, U.S. officials must decide which Pakistani leaders can help wage war on Islamic militants and stabilize a nuclear-armed country.

Even Musharraf has failed to show results on many fronts. For instance, Osama bin Laden, who many believe has found shelter in Pakistan, is still at large. And some U.S. military intelligence officials believe that a significant portion of the billions of dollars in U.S. aid since the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks has not been spent on the "war on terror."

Now, Musharraf's power appears to be in decline, leaving U.S. officials to face the question of whether to try to repair their badly damaged relationship with former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who unquestionably stands to gain leverage in the fractured political system.

Although Sharif has often denounced the United States, he is considered a pragmatic if nationalistic politician by those at home. Even so, the White House would have to overcome the doubts of many administration insiders, who consider him dangerous and unreliable, before seeking a rapprochement.

Peter Rodman, who was the top international security affairs official at the Pentagon until last month, said Sharif is “a wild card and not to be trusted.”

Rodman said it was unlikely that a deal with Sharif would provide the same benefits as a deal with Bhutto.

Nevertheless, U.S. officials are “reaching out to a wide range” of Pakistani political figures, said one senior U.S. official, who declined to be identified because of the sensitivity of the situation.

Bhutto’s assassination revived questions about whether the administration has focused too much of its support on top allies, such as Musharraf and Bhutto, rather than spreading it’s more broadly through the Pakistani government and civil society.

“If you want to be a friend to the nation, you may have to do a little better job of being somewhat more balanced with respect to the various legitimate political actors,” said John Schlosser, a former State Department official who is now a vice president of Stonebridge International, a consulting firm. “We have over-personalized our relationship with Pakistan; we need to depersonalize it.”

The administration insisted that Bhutto’s assassination brought no immediate policy changes. But U.S. officials signaled flexibility Thursday on one of their top goals, parliamentary elections scheduled for Jan. 8.

Publicly, the administration said Bhutto’s death should not be allowed to force a delay. But privately, officials said they would accept a postponement as long as the Musharraf government did not use the assassination to cancel its promised return to more democratic governance.

Markey, the former State Department official, predicted that the administration “will recognize the situation has gotten a great deal messier and won’t push too hard, at least in the medium term, as long as it looks like the elections are not indefinitely delayed.”

But officials said Washington would not favor a return by Musharraf to the emergency rule that he ended only this month. Although U.S. officials are worried about violence, they do not believe that added presidential powers are needed to suppress disorder.

And emergency rule likely would compound public unhappiness with Musharraf, who lifted emergency rule earlier this month but continues to detain the country’s deposed chief justice and other senior judges, among other measures. Arif Rafiq, an analyst at Pakistan Policy Blog, said Musharraf is likely to face new skepticism and sharp public scrutiny as his government launches its investigation of how Bhutto was assassinated.

As heavy a blow as it was to U.S. interests, Bhutto’s death will be even more damaging if it comes to be widely seen in Pakistan as a demonstration that militant groups can strike at the heart of the government with impunity.

C. Christine Fair, a former U.S. official now at Rand Corp., said it would be a “silver lining” if the attack caused Pakistan’s security establishment to reconsider a long-standing reliance on militant groups. Many Musharraf critics believe that despite his persistent denials, officials in Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence agency support the Taliban in neighboring Afghanistan as well as at least some of its allies.

But Fair added: “That’s a low-probability event.”

The Benazir I knew

*By Amy Wilentz
December 28, 2007*

Remembering the Pakistani leader, who was a former college classmate and recent interviewee.

I interviewed Benazir Bhutto just a month before she returned to Pakistan in October after almost 10 years in exile.

I'd known her for years, on and off -- mostly off -- since we'd been in college together, and her brother, Mir Murtaza Bhutto, had been a good friend of mine there too. To be a Bhutto seemed -- to us outsiders -- the essence of glamorous progressivism. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, their father, was the democratically inclined president of Pakistan, and we thought of the Bhutto family as Pakistan's Kennedys. Benazir, in jeans and sweaters with her straight black hair, was a torrent of energy; she was garrulous and articulate, skinny as a rake, unfailingly present and engaged, intellectually curious and as ready as a teeny-bopper to chase after every little piece of life she could get.

"Those were fun days, nice days," she said to me this fall.

But these days: less fun, was the implication. Benazir was 54. At the time of our interview, her mother was dying of Alzheimer's disease. Her beloved father had been hanged in 1979. She herself had been prime minister of her country twice, deposed twice. Her younger brother, Shah Nawaz, had died under mysterious circumstances on the French Riviera in 1985. My friend Mir had been killed in 1996 after a confrontation with police in front of the family house in Karachi -- rumors persist that Benazir and her husband ordered his death. "In Pakistan," Mir had told a friend years earlier, "everything is possible, even the impossible."

The Bhutto family was shattered. Benazir, who nearly 20 years earlier was the first female leader of a Muslim nation, young, charismatic and newlywed, was now a mother of three, estranged from various sisters-in-law and nieces, living in exile and apart from her husband, who had been disgraced by corruption charges in Pakistan and elsewhere, as had she. Inside Pakistan, she who had been perceived as the greatest hope for the future was now perceived as damaged goods, corrupt and power-hungry. It was a lot of history for one person, a veritable telenovela of a life, but apparently not enough for Benazir. She was still ravenous for Pakistan and politics.

"I don't have time to think about what I'll pack to go back," she said during our interview. "I am too busy planning all the stops I will make on my campaign." One of those stops was to be Rawalpindi.

It was nighttime as we spoke in her enormous fortress of a house in a gated community in Dubai. Outside, in the side yard behind walls and barriers, the guard dog barked. In the front receiving room was a little library stuffed with paperbacks, titles such as "Facial Workout," "The Little Book of Stress," "Eat to Beat Your Age" and Deepak Chopra's "How to Know God." Half a dozen young assistants from the Pakistan People's Party were stuffed into a back office. They were in constant e-mail touch with Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad and Rawalpindi; taking the pulse, writing speeches in preparation for The Return of the party leader.

I hope none of them were too near Benazir on Thursday.

On walls everywhere in her Dubai house were enlarged photographs of Zulfikar Bhutto. As prime minister, Benazir had been notoriously high-handed, but she had an unpretentious manner in private. For an Oxford and Harvard graduate, she was unembarrassed by her addiction to bestsellers, blockbusters and psychobabble books. When I asked if she was frightened of going back to Pakistan, she was matter-of-fact: "For all the lows in my life, those self-help books helped me survive, I can tell you. There's a focus on the present; don't worry about tomorrow. ... When the time comes that I have to die, I'll die." When I left her late that night, she seemed lonely, standing on the doorstep in a pool of light, waving goodbye. She had lost so much in her struggle to become great, to take on what she thought of as her father's mantle.

But still, the desire for political redemption pulled her back. Certainly she knew the mess she was stepping into: a nuclear-armed country governed -- or not governed -- by an unstable military-affiliated regime in the neighborhood of two U.S. wars. It was clear that her return might make the mess messier. In fact, it did cloud the political scene: Who would emerge victorious in elections? Was Benazir still profoundly popular? Could President Pervez Musharraf control the situation? Did he want to? Who is really running Pakistan?

Benazir's hideous murder has made the situation even more obscure, but as events play out, perhaps we will see more plainly who the real players are in Pakistan. Her death, and the definitive end of the Bhutto dynasty, means a new era for Pakistan. But a new era is not always a better one.

Bhutto's killing decried around the world

*By Maggie Farley, Los Angeles Times
December 28, 2007*

Leaders praise Bhutto's contributions to democracy in Pakistan as they denounce terrorism and call for stability.

UNITED NATIONS - World leaders expressed outrage Thursday over the assassination of Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto and concern about the stability of the nuclear-armed nation.

Leaders of countries that share borders with Pakistan also shared worries about whether the attack might spark regional unrest.

In India, Pakistan's neighbor and longtime rival, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said he was "shocked and horrified to hear of the heinous assassination." He termed Bhutto, who had tried to improve relations between the countries, "irreplaceable," and said that "in her death, the subcontinent has lost an outstanding leader who worked for democracy and reconciliation in her country."

"The manner of her going is a reminder of the common dangers that our region faces from cowardly acts of terrorism, and of the need to eradicate this dangerous threat," he said.

President Hamid Karzai of neighboring Afghanistan had met with Bhutto in Islamabad, the Pakistani capital, shortly before she was killed. Both countries are struggling with Islamic extremists who would like to return the region to fundamentalist rule with limited roles for women -- opposite the direction sought by Bhutto.

Karzai said he was "deeply pained" by the murder of "this brave sister of ours, a brave daughter of the Muslim world."

"She sacrificed her life for the sake of Pakistan and for the sake of this region," he said.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammed Ali Hosseini expressed sympathy to Pakistan's government and Bhutto's family, and called for the perpetrators to be punished.

"Continued uproar and unrest in the country is not to the benefit of the Pakistani people and would [have a] negative impact on stability and security of the regional countries," he said.

Western leaders who had supported Bhutto's return to Pakistan and her challenge to the military-led government urged Pakistan not to let the assassination derail democracy. National parliamentary elections are planned for Jan. 8; Bhutto was killed as she left an election rally.

In Britain, where Bhutto attended Oxford University and spent time in self-imposed exile, Prime Minister Gordon Brown said she "risked everything in her attempt to win democracy in Pakistan, and she has been assassinated by cowards who are afraid of democracy."

President Bush, speaking at his Texas ranch, urged Pakistanis to proceed with elections to honor Bhutto's desire for democracy.

“The United States strongly condemns this cowardly act by murderous extremists who are trying to undermine Pakistan’s democracy,” Bush told reporters at his ranch near Crawford, Texas.

In New York, the United Nations Security Council held an emergency session to condemn the assassination and to underscore the need to crack down on terrorism. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called the attack “an assault on stability in Pakistan and its democratic processes.”

He urged calm and unity in Pakistan.

Before going into the Security Council meeting, U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad said he mourned the loss of a friend.

“Her death is a loss for the cause of moderation, democracy and rule of law for Pakistan. She was clearheaded about the problems of her country, the challenges that she faced -- even the security challenges she faced,” said Khalilzad, who was born in Afghanistan.

“A tribute to her memory would be lasting democracy in Pakistan -- a worthy goal for that country and all the world.”

The stakes are too high for Pakistan to veer off the road to democracy

The Independent
December 29, 2007

Whether al-Qa'ida was responsible for the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the intentions of those behind this murder are hardly difficult to discern: to destabilise further the Pakistani state; to push Pakistan out of the American orbit; to force the political parties and the Musharraf government to turn inwards and against one another; and, as a result of all that, to see the parliamentary elections planned for 8 January deferred indefinitely.

The violence has already begun, and figures such as Imran Khan are openly asking why President Musharraf hadn't ensured Ms Bhutto's safety. He might have done more it is always possible to do so but the frequency and determination of the attacks on her meant her life was always going to be in peril. She was, as has been noted many times now, a brave woman. General Musharraf and the military have made little secret of their partiality for the Pakistan Muslim League; they ought not have done so, and it was a manoeuvre that has backfired rather badly.

Longer term, the prize for Ms Bhutto's murderers must be to see Pakistan slowly turn into a backward, fundamentalist regime modelled on the Taliban's insane, cruel rule in Afghanistan only this time a nuclear state occupying a still more vital strategic position. Perennial tensions with India and proximity to yet another nuclear power, China, are no doubt also viewed by the terrorists as full of potential for troublemaking.

Were Pakistan, long an American ally, and her weaponry to fall into the wrong hands, it would be the ultimate mark of failure of George Bush's foreign policy, and without question one of the greatest foreign policy reverses for the United States since the end of the Second World War. It is difficult, for example, to see the "loss" of Cuba, Vietnam or even Iraq in the same league as the collapse of Pakistan into a hostile, fractured, failed state. The stakes, for the West almost as much as Pakistan, could scarcely be higher.

Of all those grim possibilities, the most pressing to deal with is the timing of the general election. Given the trauma that has befallen Pakistan and the grievous blow to Ms Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP), it would be understandable if the elections were called off, allowing the nation's wounds to begin to heal and the PPP to select a new leadership.

A postponement of a few weeks would not offer the terrorists a huge victory in real terms. It is perfectly possible, for example, that the PPP would be even more likely to win power and begin the difficult task of rebuilding the integrity of Pakistan. The heirs of Bhutto, while lacking her charisma and appeal, would pursue the same policies, and an approach that offers the best hope for Pakistan's future, no matter when the election happens.

However, the case for going ahead on 8 January is a powerful one. It lies, in truth, mostly in its symbolism, but against the evil symbolism of this murder, such things matter. It is obviously not the ideal backdrop, but the test of democracy is how resilient it proves when events threaten it most.

To postpone the election would make the democrats in Pakistan look as though they were running scared, and offer the terrorists an additional incentive to step up their campaign of violence to see

successive elections disrupted and postponed. Pakistan has waited long enough to go to the polls; when the mourning is over, she must face the future.

Pakistan on the brink

Ottawa Citizen
December 28, 2007

There exist many regions of the world plagued by civil chaos and a pre-modern political culture, and we in the insulated West have the luxury of ignoring some of them. Pakistan, however, is not one.

There exist many regions of the world plagued by civil chaos and a pre-modern political culture, and we in the insulated West have the luxury of ignoring some of them. Pakistan, however, is not one.

This is no Congo or Haiti. Pakistan is a Muslim country that possesses nuclear weapons and has a history of exporting radical Islam. It has a hostile relationship with its neighbour India, a country that is also armed with nuclear weapons. Warring inside Pakistan are agents of modernity against those of medievalism; those of democracy against autocracy; those of secularization against fanaticism. The whole world has a huge stake in the outcome of these struggles.

The assassination yesterday of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto is potentially catastrophic, because it represents a victory for those who favour instability and who reject reform.

This is not to say that Ms. Bhutto was a shining exemplar of democratic government in the Jeffersonian tradition. True, she had a western mindset, having been educated at Harvard and Oxford universities, but her tenure as Pakistan's prime minister in the 1980s and 1990s was dogged with allegations of corruption. It was under her watch that the forces of religious radicalism thrived and multiplied.

Many critics felt that Ms. Bhutto cared more about enhancing her own power and position than she did about ushering in meaningful change. When finally she was chased out of Pakistan in 1999, few people, inside and outside the country, considered it much of a loss.

But in the intervening years it became clear that Ms. Bhutto very much loved her native land. She returned from self-imposed exile in October, at great personal risk. As a westernized woman who promised to take on both the religious zealots in the mosques and the autocrats in the office of dictator President Pervez Musharraf, Ms. Bhutto knew that many Pakistanis would wish her dead.

Indeed, almost immediately upon her return, a suicide bomber attacked her entourage and, though Ms. Bhutto survived, dozens of bystanders died. Yet she refused to curtail her public appearances. As leader of the People's Party, she would not stay hidden. She could have lived out her life in some comfortable and glamorous capital, giving lectures and writing books. It is testimony to her commitment to Pakistan that she chose otherwise.

Her assassination represents an enormous test for Mr. Musharraf. What's frightening is that Mr. Musharraf might mistakenly conclude that he benefits from the increased instability, because it allows him to justify his police state and to delay indefinitely democratization. World leaders need to tell him otherwise -- to make clear that he must not exploit, for personal political gain, the death of his rival.

Mr. Musharraf has long played a dangerous game. He gives the Islamists just enough room to operate so that he can turn to the international community and say, “You need me to fight the Islamists.” But this could be one creature that even Mr. Musharraf can’t keep leashed. The next assassination could well be his own, and he knows it.

Pakistan is teetering, and if it falls the pieces will come flying in our direction.

Pakistan's Predicament

*December 29, 2007
New York Post editorial*

Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf yesterday ordered his country into virtual lockdown in a bid to restore calm, as rioting by supporters of his slain rival, Benazir Bhutto, spread rapidly following her burial.

On government orders, train and airline services were shut down, gas stations and roads closed and Internet service curtailed. But the unrest continued, killing dozens around the country.

Though officials insisted that the Taliban and al Qaeda - which had vowed to kill the former prime minister - were behind the attack, her supporters blamed Musharraf, prompting the unrest and threatening to destabilize the country.

If left unchecked, that would plunge the world's only nuclear-armed Muslim state - where Islamist fundamentalists are becoming increasingly influential - into a state of chaos.

Which is precisely why Musharraf swiftly moved to curb the violence - and why he may yet impose a return to martial law, which he lifted only recently under pressure from Washington.

That's hardly a desirable course of action - especially given the Bush administration's hopes that Pakistan would embrace full Western-style democracy.

But the alternative - unrestrained anarchy on the streets, which al Qaeda already is fomenting - is far worse. It's a legitimate threat not only to US interests, but also to the stability of the entire Middle East.

Again, Pakistan is a nuclear-armed nation. And Islamic fundamentalists, particularly al Qaeda and the Taliban, have re-established themselves, thanks to their penetration of the nation's military and security services.

Yes, Musharraf has been a disappointment to Washington; his commitment to fighting the War on Terror has been half-hearted, at best. But no one else in Pakistan's leadership will go even that far.

The first order of business for Pakistan now has to be a restoration of civil order.

And martial law, however unpleasant, may be the only way to bring that about.

The alternative, sad to say, is too frightening to contemplate.

Target: Pakistan

*Wall Street Journal editorial
Friday, December 28, 2007*

Losing in the West, the jihadis hit Pakistan, with its nuclear prize.

“In Pakistan there are two fault lines. One is dictatorship versus democracy. And one is moderation versus extremism.” Thus did Benazir Bhutto describe the politics of her country during an August visit to The Wall Street Journal’s offices in New York. She was assassinated yesterday for standing courageously, perhaps fatalistically, on the right side of both lines.

We will learn more in coming days about the circumstances of Bhutto’s death, apparently a combined shooting and suicide bombing at a political rally in Rawalpindi in which more than 20 others were also murdered. But there’s little question the attack, which had every hallmark of an al Qaeda or Taliban operation, is an event with ramifications for the broader war on terror. With the jihadists losing in Iraq and having a hard time hitting the West, their strategy seems to be to make vulnerable Pakistan their principal target, and its nuclear arsenal their principal prize.

In this effort, murdering Bhutto was an essential step. Hers is the highest profile scalp the jihadists can claim since their assassination of Egypt’s Anwar Sadat in 1981. She also uniquely combined broad public support with an anti-Islamist, pro-Western outlook and all the symbolism that came with being the most prominent female leader in the Muslim world. Her death throws into disarray the complex and fragile efforts to re-establish a functional, legitimate government following next month’s parliamentary elections, which seemed set to hand her a third term as prime minister.

This is exactly the kind of uncertainty in which jihadists would thrive. No doubt, too, there are some in the Pakistani military who will want to use Bhutto’s killing as an excuse to cancel the elections and reconsolidate their own diminished grip on power. In the immediate wake of the assassination, members of Bhutto’s Pakistan Peoples Party have accused President Pervez Musharraf of being complicit in it. But whatever Mr. Musharraf’s personal views of Bhutto—with whom he had an on-again, off-again political relationship—his own position has only been weakened by her death. It would be weakened beyond repair if he sought to capitalize on it by preventing the democratic process from taking its course.

That goes even if the immediate beneficiary of Bhutto’s death is her onetime archrival, former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Mr. Sharif, an Islamist politician with close ties to Saudi Arabia and a reputation for incompetence and corruption, said yesterday he would boycott next month’s election even as he is seeking to assert himself as the man around whom all opponents of Mr. Musharraf can rally. We have no brief for Mr. Sharif, except to say that his claim to that position would be strengthened if the military indefinitely postpones or usurps the election.

Beyond the elections, Mr. Musharraf needs to move aggressively to confront the jihadists, and not the lawyers and civil-rights activists he has been jailing in recent months. Hundreds of Pakistanis have been murdered in recent months in terrorist acts perpetrated by fellow Muslims, and many of these perpetrators have, in different ways and at different times, been connected to the Pakistani government itself: as beneficiaries of the terrorist war Pakistan has supported over the years in Kashmir, or as beneficiaries of the support Pakistan gave to the Taliban until 9/11, or as beneficiaries of the ill-

conceived “truce” Mr. Musharraf signed last year with Taliban- and al Qaeda-connected tribal chiefs in the Waziristan province. Worst of all has been the look-the-other-way approach successive Pakistani governments have taken to the radical, Saudi-funded madrassas throughout the country.

That will require a more radical reshaping of Pakistan’s politics than Mr. Musharraf has so far been able, or willing, to undertake. But if Bhutto’s assassination has any silver lining, it may be to show that there is no real alternative.

During her meeting with us last summer, Bhutto warned that while the jihadist movement would never have the popular support to win an election in its own right, they had sufficient means at their disposal to “unleash against the population, to rig an election, to kill the army and therefore to make it possible to take over the state.” Today those words seem grimly prophetic. And while she was in many ways a flawed figure, her answer to that challenge--a real fight against terrorism that would give jihadists no rest; and a real democracy that would give them no fake grievance--looks to be the only formula by which Pakistan may yet be saved.

Assassination in Pakistan

The Washington Post
Friday, December 28, 2007

The murder of Benazir Bhutto demands quick action to stabilize the country.

IT IS not known who murdered Benazir Bhutto yesterday, but al-Qaeda and its Islamic extremist allies had by far the most to gain from her death. A graduate of Harvard and Oxford who was twice elected Pakistan's prime minister, Ms. Bhutto was the most powerful advocate of secular democracy in her country; she had the courage to confront both Islamic militants and the autocratic government of President Pervez Musharraf. Though her political record was far from unblemished -- charges of corruption during her time in office appeared well founded -- her return to Pakistan in October and her decision to vigorously contest parliamentary elections scheduled for Jan. 8 offered the hope that Pakistan's moderate forces could shore up the faltering political system by democratic means and then take on the extremists.

Her tragic death may open the way to violence and political chaos that could be exploited by al-Qaeda and the Taliban, unless Mr. Musharraf and the country's surviving moderate forces act quickly and wisely. The odds that they will do so are not good. Mr. Musharraf, who only 12 days ago lifted a state of emergency he imposed to ensure his continuance in power, has been at war with the country's political parties, judiciary, media and human rights advocates. His instinct, as his advisers were already hinting yesterday, will be to call off the elections, which he scheduled only under pressure from the Bush administration. For his part, Nawaz Sharif, another former prime minister whose party was running second in pre-election polls to that of Ms. Bhutto, quickly announced yesterday that he would boycott the vote and called on Mr. Musharraf to resign -- in what looked like an irresponsible attempt to take advantage of the outburst of anti-government feeling sparked by the assassination.

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With a vital stake in preserving the stability of a country that harbors both a nuclear arsenal and the top leaders of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, the United States must urgently press Mr. Musharraf, Mr. Sharif, and other key Pakistani actors to take steps that will alleviate rather than further inflame the situation. Perhaps most urgent is the capture of those who committed the murder and a full and credible investigation. In the absence of such a clear accounting, conspiracy theories blaming Mr. Musharraf or the military for Ms. Bhutto's death will probably proliferate, to the further benefit of the Islamists. The FBI has worked successfully in Pakistan before, and Ms. Bhutto asked for its help following an earlier assassination attempt against her; the Bush administration should consider whether U.S. investigators could help provide clarity about yesterday's events.

Mr. Musharraf should be restrained from another imposition of martial law, which would again set him at odds with Pakistan's media and civil society but do little to stop al-Qaeda. At the same time, the Bush administration should follow up aggressively on the president's suggestion that Pakistan "honor Benazir Bhutto's memory by continuing with the democratic process for which she so bravely gave her life." Elections -- held on Jan. 8 or soon afterward -- and a restored democracy remain the best way for the centrist majority in Pakistan to rally against the forces of extremism that yesterday realized a great, though despicable, victory.

The Nightmare Scenario

The Times
December 28, 2007

“Assassination”, Benjamin Disraeli declared after the death of Abraham Lincoln, “has never changed the course of human history.” This is a noble sentiment but one that will be sorely tested after the murder of Benazir Bhutto yesterday.

For the past few years, diplomats and other observers have referred privately to the prospect of the killing of Pervez Musharraf as the “nightmare scenario” for international order. In a subtle recognition of the way in which power had already evolved in Pakistan, even before a vote had been cast, the demise of Ms Bhutto had become the possibility the outside world most dreaded. Now that she has been the victim of a suicide attack not only Pakistan but also the United States, Britain, and the EU will have to renew their commitment in the fight against terrorism.

The murder of Ms Bhutto is as shocking, sadly, as it is unsurprising. There has already been wild speculation as to who might be to blame, with accusations levelled at President Musharraf either directly or indirectly for his failure to provide her with enough protection. In other circles, it has been suggested that renegade elements of the notoriously independent intelligence services could have been complicit in this atrocity. In the next few days, the debate as to who bears responsibility will be heated.

It must not be allowed to get out of hand or become destructive. The notion that the Pakistani President might be at the heart of this affair is far-fetched. He is undoubtedly a loser as a result of her murder. Ms Bhutto had so many enemies that even in the so-called garrison city of Rawalpindi it would not have been feasible to keep all hostile elements away from her. Security had been increased but it could not be absolute. There are many extremist factions in Pakistan that would want to be rid of her, because of her gender, or out of a sense that she was a comparatively secular figure, or because of her links to the American Administration, or because she would probably have been prepared to reach an understanding with President Musharraf had she won the elections.

None of this will stop the rumours and the conspiracy theories from circulating. It is, therefore, in the interests of the President as well as the rest of Pakistan that her death is the subject of an investigation that is unambiguously independent in character. This will not convince everyone of the facts but a searching inquiry, which reasonable people would accept is beyond political manipulation, can secure a degree of stability.

Death has magnified Ms Bhutto’s undoubted virtues and will render her a martyr. She had charisma and courage on an extraordinary scale. There was absolutely no need for her to return from exile in London and Dubai when her life was plainly in danger. Victory at the polls would have meant that she inherited an unenviable series of challenges. Her previous periods as Prime Minister had not been without controversy or disputes and to have taken the office again in the circumstances that were certain to occur would have been yet more perilous. Her willingness to make that personal sacrifice was profoundly honourable. The fear must be that her loss will discourage others entering politics.

The overwhelming question now is what happens next. It was manifest from the moment that her death was announced that the original election timetable was imperilled. It would be hard to avoid

postponing a ballot in an established democracy in the light of a deed such as this, but the election would be an invitation to anarchy in the Pakistani context. Ms Bhutto's party is entitled to some time to select a new leader and determine how it should proceed from here while security arrangements for all sides will have to be re-examined as a matter of urgency. The grim reality is that those who plotted Ms Bhutto's death are likely to be emboldened by their success and not cowed by the reaction.

The full restoration of democracy sooner rather than later has to be Ms Bhutto's final legacy. Pakistan has endured a miserable history over the past six decades, swinging between uneasy civilian rule that has often had the stench of corruption alongside it and military dictatorship that has arguably been more clean but lacked legitimacy. Until this miserable pattern is ended, the country will never achieve its immense potential.

The coming time thus demands that President Musharraf does not weaken in his resolve and that the United States and Britain — the two countries that have long enjoyed the most constructive dialogue with him — reinforce such a strategy. He can no longer rely on Ms Bhutto, or those who will take the reins of her party soon, to forge an alliance with him. He has to reach out to sections of the democratic opposition that he has ignored so far.

Chaos and violence would be no tribute to Pakistan's lost leader. Ms Bhutto was a fine patriot and a pragmatist. She was also a woman who sought to recognise and balance the enduring nature of her own society with the requirement for Pakistan to embrace many aspects of the contemporary world. In the best meaning of the phrase she will be remembered as a moderniser. There can be no modern Pakistan without democracy. After a comparatively short delay, elections should occur.

The military should emerge from the barracks only to ensure sufficient order for the Pakistani people to return to the ballot box. Ms Bhutto's murder was designed to destroy Pakistan's right to choose. To honour her memory Pakistan must show that democracy will always triumph over murderous extremism.

Democracy assassinated

The Boston Globe
December 28, 2007

The Assassination of Benazir Bhutto yesterday was a tragedy for her family, a devastating blow for her Pakistan Peoples Party, and the latest warning that nuclear-armed Pakistan is under assault from violent anti-democratic forces. The way she was murdered - at an election campaign rally, with vicious disregard for the throngs around her - bespoke the barbarism of the forces behind the killing.

Bhutto, who served as prime minister from 1988 to 1990 and again from 1993 to 1996, had returned home to lead her party in parliamentary elections scheduled for Jan. 8. She did so knowing that Islamist extremists were vowing to kill her. She suspected that Pakistan's notorious intelligence services were complicit with the fanatics behind a suicide bombing that killed 134 people and wounded more than 400 who turned out for a daylong procession upon her return in October.

There was an operatic quality to her career, her return to Pakistan, and even her death. In public and private, she spoke of a deeply felt duty to help revive secular, civilian democracy in Pakistan. Toward that end, she explored a deal with General Pervez Musharraf, the president who seized power in a 1999 coup and recently imposed emergency rule, sacking supreme court judges so that he could have himself reelected by compliant legislators. The courage Bhutto showed in returning from the luxury and safety of exile in London and Dubai attested to her seriousness.

Her political mission was intertwined with personal motives. She never hid her sense of obligation to carry on for her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a landed aristocrat and prime minister who was hanged in 1979 by an earlier military ruler, General Zia ul-Haq. By returning, she also hoped to efface the stain on her reputation, and her husband's, from corruption charges they faced in Switzerland, Spain, and Britain as well as Pakistan.

Nonetheless, Bhutto's assassination counts as but one act in the tragedy of Pakistan. Pakistanis have not had the leadership they need either from elected politicians or from the generals who seized power by force. While Bhutto and her husband were accumulating hundreds of millions of dollars in office, Pakistanis were suffering from a lack of jobs, education, and healthcare.

Her civilian rival, Nawaz Sharif, served the country no better during his two terms as prime minister in the 1990s. He was the first to enable the ascension of Islamists, declaring sharia as the law of the land before the judiciary rebuffed him. He also presided over Pakistan's first testing of a nuclear device.

Bhutto's murder is a desolating reminder that the people of Pakistan have not had the government they deserve or the leaders they need. They need a legitimately elected, honest government, true rule of law, and schools that are able to overcome high rates of illiteracy and indoctrination by Islamist reactionaries.

Assassination steals key to U.S. strategy for Pakistan

USA Today
December 28, 2007

For the United States, Harvard-educated Benazir Bhutto was a combination of white knight and Trojan horse — the key piece in a belated-but-promising attempt to bring stability to the world's most dangerous nation.

The hope was that the popular former prime minister could recapture the job after parliamentary elections next month, then strengthen democratic institutions, helping to keep Pakistan's nuclear weapons away from its large radicalized Islamic population.

That strategy was left in ruins Thursday by Bhutto's tragic assassination.

Not only did the killing remove Bhutto from the picture without any obvious successor, it further weakened strongman President Pervez Musharraf, who for all his dictatorial ways is a foe of the extremists. Pakistan is now at risk of escalating street violence and stepped-up suicide bombings that would invite a new, harsh crackdown by Musharraf. Such a spiral would encourage more political instability. It would also complicate efforts to find Osama bin Laden, believed to be hiding in Pakistan, and to uproot al-Qaeda training camps there.

While the killing underscored the limits of U.S. influence, it doesn't mean giving up on the only strategy that can prevent the cauldron that is Pakistan from exploding. In the short term, the United States has no choice other than to support Musharraf. For the longer term, it must find new champions of democracy.

After the 9/11 attacks, Musharraf sided with the United States, and he has been rewarded with \$10 billion in aid. But U.S. officials have steadily — and appropriately — stepped up complaints that he has not done all he can to crack down on al-Qaeda and to hunt down bin Laden. His security forces have long, deep ties to some militants. Recently, he has taken disturbing steps to consolidate his power rather than move toward democracy, including dismissing top judges and jailing opponents. Even so, now is not the time to abandon him. But it is a time to prod him to ensure that elections go ahead, even if delayed. He should be encouraged not to impose emergency rule that would allow him to imprison people indefinitely.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration should do all it can to reach out to other political parties and senior members of the military. Particularly important is to encourage Bhutto's party to anoint a new leader and contest elections rather than take to the streets. That's not easy, as she pushed charismatic rivals out.

This is hardly a guaranteed blueprint for bringing Pakistan back from the brink. The assassination is a major boost for Islamist militants. But if Bhutto's death is to have any positive impact, Pakistanis will grasp the danger, and Musharraf and other political leaders will move toward strengthening democratic institutions. The only U.S. option is to push, despite limited levers, for that outcome.

Death in Rawalpindi

The Guardian
27 December 2007

Benazir Bhutto's legacy is mixed, but she was the nearest thing to a real leader that Pakistan had.

The assassination of Benazir Bhutto was an event as terrible as it was bleakly predictable. She was a brave and charismatic democrat for all her barely hidden flaws, and her death will be perilous not just for Pakistan but for the world. If anyone could have unified her country after decades of military misrule, it was her. No other Pakistani leader can hope to fill her place. Hopes that political chaos would end with elections on January 8 were dim before Ms Bhutto's death. They have all but been extinguished now.

There are two certainties in the immediate aftermath of the suicide bombing that took her life and those of many others at an election rally yesterday. The first is that her decision to return to Pakistan last October after eight years of exile was an act of great personal bravery. It was controversial at the time, because of the amnesty on corruption charges that she had obtained from Pervez Musharraf. This was both selective and legally dubious. But the furore over the amnesty obscured the physical risks she was taking by returning to the land where old enemies were lying in wait. She spoke often of the dangers of assassination. She said she put her life in danger by returning home because she felt her country was in danger. It was a good piece of election rhetoric, but it was also true.

Her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had been executed by General Zia-ul-Haq. Her two brothers Shahnawaz and Mir Murtaza both died in mysterious circumstances. Islamic militants had vowed to kill her, because of her close ties to Washington and the attention she had paid to the madrasas when she was in power. Twice prime minister, and a woman of substantial personal wealth, Ms Bhutto could have opted for a life of luxury and security in exile in London or Bahrain. It is to her credit that she chose not to remain on the cushioned sidelines of exile.

Within hours of her return, Ms Bhutto narrowly escaped injury when a suicide bomber struck her convoy in Karachi, killing 136 people and injuring more than 450. She blamed four of Mr Musharraf's close associates for allowing the attack in Karachi to take place, although she was careful not to point the finger at the president himself. Which brings us to the second certainty: there is no reason to believe that the suicide attack took place without the involvement of elements within Pakistan's security forces.

Ms Bhutto was not campaigning in Quetta or Swat, or other parts of the lawless tribal areas where militants roam. She was in Rawalpindi, a garrison town in the heart of the territory controlled by the Pakistan army. The threat her return represented to Islamic militants was as nothing to the one that it posed to dark elements within the military establishment who had waged a 30-year war against her family. Had Ms Bhutto succeeded in her ambition to drag Pakistan from military dictatorship to civilian rule she would have posed an intolerable threat to the security and personal wealth of some of Pakistan's most corrupt generals. What better way to dispose of her and turn off the light of publicity that she would have shone on their dark and lucrative affairs, than to direct the suicide bombers her way? One eventually would get through, and yesterday he did.

Within hours, President Musharraf addressed the nation, expressing his resolve to not rest until he had uprooted terrorism. This is by now a familiar speech. He made it when he first seized power as chief of the army eight years ago. He had made it when he launched a mini-coup by declaring a state of emergency on November 3. And he made it again last night. Each time he claims that the chaos in society justifies emergency powers, he fails to deliver that stability.

As the news of her assassination triggered angry demonstrations around the country, the claims of a conspiracy also spread their tentacles around the embattled president and his entourage. Ms Bhutto's supporters in the Pakistan People's party will not be bound by the tactical reticence their leader showed when she was alive. Mr Musharraf, on the other hand, will do anything to stay in power. He needs the elections scheduled for January 8 to manufacture his legitimacy as a civilian president. But he knows that no election can take place in these circumstances. The most likely outcome is that he will have to postpone them, but all options are bad ones for him. The assassination also deals a blow to Washington's plans to use Ms Bhutto as cover for the military president turned civilian leader. The nearer Ms Bhutto got to assuming real power as prime minister (and success in the elections would have demanded it), the greater the threat she would have posed to Mr Musharraf. Now even that fig leaf has disappeared and there is no one, least of all the former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, prepared to take her place. Washington is back to square one: how to shore up an ally who is desperately unpopular in his own land.

Ms Bhutto's legacy is mixed. She promised more than she could deliver. Her two terms as Pakistan's first woman prime minister failed to cement civilian rule, although she rightly claimed some success in modernising the madrasas and advancing the cause of women in her country. She left her country with a hefty foreign debt and would be pursued along with her husband around the world for the next eight years on corruption charges. To the end, her resistance to Mr Musharraf's attacks on civil society was equivocal. Her demands for the release from house arrest of Pakistan's former chief justice Iftikhar Chaudry were tempered by the knowledge that if the supreme court were restored to its pre-emergency rule state, the amnesty she had obtained from Mr Musharraf would be up for judicial review.

She boxed and weaved to stay in the running. But for all this, Ms Bhutto was the nearest thing to a real leader that Pakistan had got. Recalling a visit to her father before his execution in 1979, she said that she told him in his death cell that she would carry on his work. Yesterday she paid with her life for that promise, a life that ended, like her father's, in Rawalpindi.

Bhutto's legacy

*San Francisco Chronical
Friday, December 28, 2007*

She risked her life for democracy

Benazir Bhutto - two-time prime minister of Pakistan, firebrand for the causes of moderation and democracy, two-time defendant against corruption charges, self-proclaimed "daughter of destiny" for the Pakistani people - is dead. And with her may also go the world's hopes for stability in Pakistan.

Bhutto was not an ideal leader. During her two tenures as the Muslim world's first female prime minister, she lied to the world about the nature of Pakistan's nuclear program. She led, for the most part, like a strongman - doling out carrots and sticks instead of attending to the difficult business of infrastructure and economy building. And clearly, she associated with the wrong people. The vast corruption alleged against her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, was devastating, and it cost her her position - twice. But there was a reason why so many Pakistanis yearned for her return. There was a reason why she was a leading contender to be prime minister again - and why many Western powers looked upon her decision to return to Pakistan and stand for elections with a small sense of hope. Bhutto was extraordinarily courageous, and the causes that she served, however poorly - a secular government, an end to terrorism - remain in dire need of courageous voices. She was truly Pakistan's best hope in a time of overwhelming instability.

Now she is gone, and all eyes are on Pakistan's unpopular president, Pervez Musharraf. Will he declare "emergency rule" again? Will he postpone elections? Will he be a target of assassination? (Possibly - he has already survived multiple attempts, though he is far more cautious about making public appearances than Bhutto was.)

Bhutto's supporters have already turned on Musharraf, claiming that his government is responsible for her death. However, Musharraf had nothing to gain from her assassination and much to lose. More likely, his culpability is his failure to fight terrorism the way he promised to, and has clearly lost control over the country's many insidious and unstable factions.

Instead of making war against Musharraf, Bhutto's supporters must attempt to work with him against their country's real enemy: the extremists who wish to remake Pakistan in their own image. Bhutto recognized these forces as the real enemy, which is why she was committed to working with Musharraf, despite all of her misgivings about him.

"You've got to take (extremists) on," Bhutto said in August, shortly before she returned to Pakistan. "If you take them on, well, either you win and if you don't win, well, you've tried, and somebody is going to come in and try harder."

Let that "somebody" be those who followed Bhutto.

Pakistan's Best Chance

Washington Post
By Wendy Chamberlin and Marvin Weinbaum
Saturday, December 29, 2007

Rarely in situations of such volatility as Pakistan faces today is the objective so clear. Pakistan needs stability. The greatest threat to the country derives from internal terrorism, lawlessness and fractured regional politics.

Can national stability best be secured through a strongman government of the kind offered by President Pervez Musharraf? Or is stability best guaranteed through a democratic election that restores civilian rule committed to cracking down on extremist violence, building the rule of law and delivering services to the people? Benazir Bhutto promoted the second option. Tragically, she died doing so.

The former prime minister's assassination is being called a victory for the forces of extremism and a heavy setback for the cause of democracy. Her murder brought down an eloquent advocate for both a progressive state and society and more aggressive policies against al-Qaeda and domestic terrorists.

Many may argue for proceeding with the parliamentary elections scheduled for Jan. 8. The hope is that free and fair elections could calm the anger over the events of this week and prevent a return to military dictatorship.

The trouble with this thinking is that most Pakistanis believe the election process is already unfree and unfair. Changes Musharraf made to the courts and constitution during the six-week period of emergency rule this fall had tilted the process in his favor long before Bhutto's death. These elections are already too tainted to win public credibility.

We believe the path to a stable Pakistan does begin with elections, but not through the process that is unfolding. What Pakistan needs is a pause and then a bold regrouping. Elections are an opportunity, however challenging, to change the tenor and course of Pakistani politics -- of being a transforming event.

If Musharraf is to remain president, he should quickly reach out to all political parties in a spirit of national reconciliation. This represents the best hope of saving Pakistan from an extended period of instability. His first step should be to name a neutral caretaker government, one whose members are selected on the basis of consultation with the major political groups.

Musharraf would instantly win national approval if he reappointed the Supreme Court justices he deposed during emergency rule; this would be a magnanimous gesture of his commitment to building an independent judiciary. A new federal election commission, willing and capable of enforcing its own regulations, must be named, and the present campaigning restrictions must be lifted. The authorities should also update the gerry-built electoral rolls to better insure against disenfranchising some voters and allowing others to cast fraudulent ballots. Government limitations on media coverage of politics should be lifted. Most critical, the administration of elections must be taken out of the hands of local officials, many of whom are loyal to the governing party above all else.

Ideally, out of this new political chemistry, another breed of leaders will emerge -- one defined by a commitment to democratic principles and values rather than family or regional affiliation. From its current low point, Pakistan has a rare chance for renewal or, even more boldly, reinvention.

An election held without these changes would result in victors who lack credibility and would almost certainly provoke a violent backlash. Reforming the process and establishing ground rules among the parties in a new political compact will take months. But these changes can be conducted in a spirit of inclusion and transparency so that a longer process of change does not appear as just an excuse for extending Musharraf's dictatorial powers. Above all, the military must stand back from the political scene and exercise its legitimate role of defending the nation and constitution.

The U.S. role in Pakistan is delicate. Our relationship is with the Pakistani people, not one man or one institution. Our close embrace of Pervez Musharraf (and, to an extent, Benazir Bhutto) contributes to his unpopularity and to low U.S. approval ratings in Pakistan. We must support honest attempts to foster reconciliation across civil society. Above all, the U.S. administration must not be seen to be engineering a political outcome. This is the surest way to undermine what we are hopeful of achieving. The United States has a high stake in Pakistan's stability, but we must leave the selection of Pakistan's leaders to the Pakistani people.

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After the shock

*Greg Sheridan, foreign editor
The Australian
December 29, 2007*

The West is failing to keep alive its friends in the Muslim world. Foreign editor Greg Sheridan writes that Thursday's murder also underlines the failures of Pakistan's dictatorial President

The assassination of Benazir Bhutto is a catastrophe for Pakistani democracy and society. It is also a savage setback in the larger war on terror. To assassinate a two-time prime minister, a moderate and liberal woman leader in the world's only Islamic nuclear power, is a signal victory for the terrorists. Bhutto's assassination also has wide geo-strategic consequences. It leaves in shreds US strategy for Pakistan and the wider South Asian and Central Asian regions.

When historians look back on this period, they may well identify the inability of the West to keep its friends in the Muslim world alive as one of the key factors strengthening the extremists at every turn.

But more specifically, US strategy in Pakistan is now in a comprehensive mess. Washington wanted the forces of secularism in Pakistan to reunite. In that equation President Pervez Musharraf represented the broadly secular military and Bhutto represented the civil society: the judges and lawyers and academics, and also the ordinary poor people of Pakistan who throughout their history have been mostly religiously tolerant and politically moderate.

These two forces were expected to be reunited by the general election on January 8. Musharraf would remain President. His hand-picked successor, General Ashfaq Kayani, would head the army. And Bhutto would be prime minister, achieving her position through democratic election and adding a sheen of legitimacy to the Pakistani power structure.

No one else can play the Bhutto role now.

It is more than likely that the January 8 elections will be postponed. To have them cancelled would be an unadulterated victory for terror. But postponement may be inevitable. The other opposition leader, Nawaz Sharif, also a former prime minister, had previously decided to boycott these elections. Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party is in at least temporary disarray.

In the short term, the political beneficiary is Pakistan's military-backed President. Now this dictator's argument to the West is much more compelling: stick with me or unimaginable demons may take my place. It is me or the Islamist extremists. It is me or chaos. I am your only choice.

Yet Bhutto's assassination also represents the utter failure of Musharraf's presidency. He has been a disaster for Pakistan, even though there may well be no alternative to him in the short term.

Since 9/11, more than \$US25 billion in US aid has flown to Musharraf's Pakistan. And what has it achieved? What has Musharraf delivered?

Musharraf makes his appeal to his US backers, and to the West more generally, as the enemy of extremism. Yet never have extremists been more powerful in Pakistan than they are today.

If the measure of Musharraf's incumbency is the fight against extremism, then in this too he is a dismal failure.

Musharraf's initial justification for his coup was that it was a temporary measure to combat corruption and bring stability to Pakistan. But corruption has spread under Musharraf and now infects the military, whose leadership has grown fat and lazy and politicised. At the same time its lower ranks are being steadily Islamised. The streets are awash with blood and protest. If the measure of Musharraf's presidency is the stability of Pakistan, then his presidency is also a dismal failure.

Similarly, when Musharraf first announced his state of emergency, he attacked not al-Qa'ida extremists but judges and lawyers and the free media. Normal political life became impossible. Musharraf's position as head of the military and President of the state seemed to contradict Pakistan's constitution. If Musharraf's presidency is measured by the health of Pakistani democracy, it is also a dismal failure.

However, the Pakistan army has also become increasingly ineffective. It is highly politicised and its leaders are involved in no end of political and commercial business, but it is increasingly ineffective in the field. It not only cannot defeat Taliban-aligned tribal groups on the border with Afghanistan, it is increasingly incapable of tackling Islamist-aligned warlords in traditional mainstream Pakistani areas such as the Swat Valley. If Musharraf's presidency is measured by the effectiveness of the army, again it is a dismal failure.

On every significant measure, Musharraf's performance in Pakistan has been a disaster. Musharraf has now produced a society in which the nation's most popular politician is assassinated.

Even in the narrow terms of his alliance with the US, and with Australia, in the war on terror, Musharraf has been a failure. Al-Qa'ida now has bases in Pakistan proper. It is widely believed that Osama bin Laden and al-Qa'ida's top leadership are taking refuge in the border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

It is known that Pakistan's notorious intelligence agency the Inter-Services Intelligence continues to co-operate, spasmodically and below the radar, with the Taliban in Afghanistan, which Australian troops are fighting. It is one reason the Taliban are resurgent in Afghanistan. They can take refuge in Pakistan. They get tipped off by Pakistani sources about allied troop movements and the like.

The Taliban were created by the Pakistani military and Western intelligence is of the view that Pakistan has never given up its investment in the Taliban.

However, there are direct elements of this latest atrocity that raise the most troubling questions about Musharraf's rule.

When Bhutto went back to Pakistan last October, there was a bombing attempt to assassinate her in which more than 130 people were killed. Bhutto's husband blamed the Musharraf Government directly for the attack. Bhutto was more careful in what she said. But she asked why the street lights around her motorcade had been turned off just before the bombing, making detection of anything abnormal by her security people much more difficult.

She accused powerful forces associated with former dictator Zia-ul-Haq of being behind the bombing. Zia, like Musharraf, was a general before he became a dictator and the forces associated with him must be presumed to be connected to the military.

In recent weeks Bhutto had constantly complained about the inadequacy of the security protection she received. In a recent letter to a friend, which Bhutto authorised to be released if she were killed, she lays responsibility for her death at the feet of Musharraf.

This takes us into the realm of dangerous conspiracy theory. But in Pakistan, more than in any other society in the world, everything is black mystery. The machinations of the military are endlessly complex and murderous. Musharraf has been at the centre of many of these machinations. It was when Musharraf was army chief that the military infiltrated soldiers into Kashmir in a provocation that nearly led to war with India, and that succeeded in its design to undermine then Prime Minister Sharif's peace process with New Delhi.

It was when Musharraf was army chief, and responsible for Pakistan's arsenal of several dozen nuclear weapons, that A.Q. Khan, the father of the Pakistani bomb, was engaged in selling nuclear know-how and material throughout the world, in the greatest enterprise of nuclear proliferation in the history of the human race.

Musharraf was a key figure when the army created the Taliban to seize power in Afghanistan. Musharraf overthrew the democratic government of Sharif to install himself as dictator.

Is it inconceivable that Musharraf's Government, or some part of it, had a hand in Bhutto's assassination?

There are reports of al-Qa'ida claiming responsibility for the bombing. And certainly that is plausible. As early as 1993, when Bhutto became prime minister for the second time, bin Laden called for her death.

Just as al-Qa'ida identified democracy in Iraq as its deadly enemy, so it does not want democracy or stability in Pakistan. But it is impossible to know, in the grey, opaque continuum of Pakistani military intelligence, tribal war lords, urban criminals, Taliban activists, Islamist extremists and outright al-Qa'ida soldiers and sympathisers, who is complicit with whom.

Pakistan must now be set for a further period of instability. Musharraf says he is determined to fight the extremists in his society but his security forces have spent much of their time in recent months battling lawyers in dark suits, or judges in wigs and gowns.

They are preoccupied now with keeping Musharraf in power and keeping some semblance of order in Pakistan's big cities.

They will not be doing much fighting of extremists. In all, Bhutto's death is a huge victory for terrorism.

There is no need to idealise Bhutto to appreciate her courage or her importance. Her two short periods as prime minister were characterised by ineffective and corrupt government. But on both occasions she was removed from power before she had a chance to make meaningful reforms and, more important, the Pakistani military never allowed a civilian government to have control over military

policy, nuclear matters or key security questions such as Pakistan's relentless interventions in Afghanistan.

But there can be no doubt of Bhutto's immense personal courage. She certainly could have lived a comfortable life in exile, in the Gulf or in London.

She certainly knew the dangers she was facing. The military executed her father, her brother was shot dead by the police.

The alleged statement from al-Qa'ida said it had "terminated the most precious American asset".

The Pakistani army can be assumed to have reasonably secure possession of its nuclear arsenal.

But Pakistan is disgraced and humiliated by this assassination. Pakistan is indeed in danger of becoming a failed state. It is indeed still the most likely place for terrorists to get their hands on a nuclear weapon or nuclear material.

It will now take much longer to get a credible, coherent government in place in Pakistan and start once more down the long road to democracy and to continue the battle against the extremists. Meanwhile the Taliban will make free of Pakistan's borders and be ever more lethal a threat to the Australian and other coalition troops in Afghanistan.

The assassination could lead to completely new dynamics, and new alliances, in Pakistani politics in ways that are now unpredictable.

There is no point in sugar-coating it. This evil action, condemned by the civilised world, is a momentous victory for the evil men behind it.

Bloody reflections of the dynasties

The Times
December 29, 2007

Very few families in Europe can match the horrors that have engulfed the Bhuttos in Pakistan.

The Bhutto family are not the first political dynasty drawn to life on the front line despite knowing that it could well be a firing line. Power has proved an equally fatal attraction to two generations of India's Gandhi family and to America's Kennedys. Similarly, the modern history of Lebanon could not be told without the attempts of various Gemayels to show themselves above the parapets and be slain in the process.

After the execution of Benazir Bhutto's father, the mysterious demise of one brother and the death in a police shoot-out of her other estranged brother while she was Prime Minister, her own assassination in the midst of a comeback campaign is a tragic twist almost beyond Shakespearean drama.

Assassination has always been an occupational hazard of the influential. Nobody who has even nominally ruled Afghanistan during the past two centuries could have done a proper risk assessment and concluded the odds were favourable. Yet, one Barakzai relative after another stepped forward, imagining the cycle of murder and usurpation would end with the introduction of his own superior statecraft.

Admittedly, for the Barakzais, alternative career options were limited. But given that the surviving members of the Bhutto clan could easily take the money and run, the extent to which their sense of mission, or entitlement, propels them to persist with political controversy is remarkable.

Yet while the Romanovs, Bourbons and Habsburgs endured their share of family mishap, you must go back to 14th-century Italy to find a European equivalent to the dangers that have engulfed the Bhuttos.

In Verona, the ruling family was the Della Scalas. Cangrande "Raging Dog" Della Scala was killed in 1359 by his brother Cansignorio who, in turn, murdered his other brother. Thereafter, Antonio assassinated his brother Bartolommeo, only to find himself forced out by his subjects who, in desperation, turned for help to the Milanese Visconti family.

The Veronese should have noticed that the Visconti coat of arms featured a serpent swallowing a baby. Having defeated his nephew, Lucchino Visconti married Pope Adrian V's niece. Unfortunately she poisoned him in 1349. A decade later, Matteo II met a similar fate at the hands of his brothers, one of whom, Bernabo, subsequently died in prison having been deposed by his nephew, Gian Galeazzo, whose young son and successor, Giovanni, was assassinated in 1412. Unsurprisingly, the direct line had died out by 1447.

Great dynasties appear determined to seek out their apparent destiny, heedless of the risks involved. The tragedy is that, however noble their intentions, when the moderating institutions of civil society are enfeebled, they may find themselves in a family saga that more closely resembles The Godfather.

A tragedy born of military despotism and anarchy

*By Tariq Ali
The Guardian,
28 December 2007*

The assassination of Benazir Bhutto heaps despair upon Pakistan. Now her party must be democratically rebuilt.

Even those of us sharply critical of Benazir Bhutto's behaviour and policies - both while she was in office and more recently - are stunned and angered by her death. Indignation and fear stalk the country once again.

An odd coexistence of military despotism and anarchy created the conditions leading to her assassination in Rawalpindi yesterday. In the past, military rule was designed to preserve order - and did so for a few years. No longer. Today it creates disorder and promotes lawlessness. How else can one explain the sacking of the chief justice and eight other judges of the country's supreme court for attempting to hold the government's intelligence agencies and the police accountable to courts of law? Their replacements lack the backbone to do anything, let alone conduct a proper inquest into the misdeeds of the agencies to uncover the truth behind the carefully organised killing of a major political leader.

How can Pakistan today be anything but a conflagration of despair? It is assumed that the killers were jihadi fanatics. This may well be true, but were they acting on their own?

Benazir, according to those close to her, had been tempted to boycott the fake elections, but she lacked the political courage to defy Washington. She had plenty of physical courage, and refused to be cowed by threats from local opponents. She had been addressing an election rally in Liaquat Bagh. This is a popular space named after the country's first prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, who was killed by an assassin in 1951. The killer, Said Akbar, was immediately shot dead on the orders of a police officer involved in the plot. Not far from here, there once stood a colonial structure where nationalists were imprisoned. This was Rawalpindi jail. It was here that Benazir's father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was hanged in April 1979. The military tyrant responsible for his judicial murder made sure the site of the tragedy was destroyed as well.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's death poisoned relations between his Pakistan People's party and the army. Party activists, particularly in the province of Sind, were brutally tortured, humiliated and, sometimes, disappeared or killed.

Pakistan's turbulent history, a result of continuous military rule and unpopular global alliances, confronts the ruling elite now with serious choices. They appear to have no positive aims. The overwhelming majority of the country disapproves of the government's foreign policy. They are angered by its lack of a serious domestic policy except for further enriching a callous and greedy elite that includes a swollen, parasitic military. Now they watch helplessly as politicians are shot dead in front of them.

Benazir had survived the bomb blast yesterday but was felled by bullets fired at her car. The assassins, mindful of their failure in Karachi a month ago, had taken out a double insurance this time. They

wanted her dead. It is impossible for even a rigged election to take place now. It will have to be postponed, and the military high command is no doubt contemplating another dose of army rule if the situation gets worse, which could easily happen.

What has happened is a multilayered tragedy. It's a tragedy for a country on a road to more disasters. Torrents and foaming cataracts lie ahead. And it is a personal tragedy. The house of Bhutto has lost another member. Father, two sons and now a daughter have all died unnatural deaths.

I first met Benazir at her father's house in Karachi when she was a fun-loving teenager, and later at Oxford. She was not a natural politician and had always wanted to be a diplomat, but history and personal tragedy pushed in the other direction. Her father's death transformed her. She had become a new person, determined to take on the military dictator of that time. She had moved to a tiny flat in London, where we would endlessly discuss the future of the country. She would agree that land reforms, mass education programmes, a health service and an independent foreign policy were positive constructive aims and crucial if the country was to be saved from the vultures in and out of uniform. Her constituency was the poor, and she was proud of the fact.

She changed again after becoming prime minister. In the early days, we would argue and in response to my numerous complaints - all she would say was that the world had changed. She couldn't be on the "wrong side" of history. And so, like many others, she made her peace with Washington. It was this that finally led to the deal with Musharraf and her return home after more than a decade in exile. On a number of occasions she told me that she did not fear death. It was one of the dangers of playing politics in Pakistan.

It is difficult to imagine any good coming out of this tragedy, but there is one possibility. Pakistan desperately needs a political party that can speak for the social needs of a bulk of the people. The People's party founded by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was built by the activists of the only popular mass movement the country has known: students, peasants and workers who fought for three months in 1968-69 to topple the country's first military dictator. They saw it as their party, and that feeling persists in some parts of the country to this day, despite everything.

Benazir's horrific death should give her colleagues pause for reflection. To be dependent on a person or a family may be necessary at certain times, but it is a structural weakness, not a strength for a political organisation. The People's party needs to be refounded as a modern and democratic organisation, open to honest debate and discussion, defending social and human rights, uniting the many disparate groups and individuals in Pakistan desperate for any halfway decent alternative, and coming forward with concrete proposals to stabilise occupied and war-torn Afghanistan. This can and should be done. The Bhutto family should not be asked for any more sacrifices.

TERROR'S NEW THEATER

New York Post
By **STEPHEN SCHWARTZ**
December 29, 2007

In the brutal assassination of Benazir Bhutto, it appears that the shadow of Iraq has fallen over Pakistan.

It's not clear whether Western intelligence has gathered any real hard evidence of a formal shift in priorities by the terrorists from Iraq to Pakistan. But from the perspective of murderous jihad, such a shift certainly makes sense - because al Qaeda has failed in Iraq and faces too many obstacles in Afghanistan.

As retired Marine Gen. Anthony Zinni told Time magazine this week, al Qaeda is shopping for a new battlefield. "I really think they're trying to ignite Pakistan into the kind of chaos they need to survive," Zinni says, "and create a fundamentalist, even radical, Islamic government."

Meanwhile, Al Qaeda in Iraq is confronted with the US-led surge under Gen. David Petraeus, the consolidation of the Shia-majority administration in Baghdad and the widespread disillusionment of Iraqi Sunnis with al Qaeda's introduction of Taliban ideology in their country under the pretext of anti-American resistance.

Bottom line: Al Qaeda in Iraq is on the run. And the obvious place for Qaeda terrorists to seek sanctuary is Pakistan.

The Bhutto family is Shia Muslim by origin and, as Iraq has taught the world, Sunni radicals hate Shias even more than they hate Jews and Christians.

Pakistan has provided considerable financial and human assets to al Qaeda and effectively handed over much of its northwest frontier to the Taliban. Pakistan has also attracted the tattered remnants of defeated groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which once provided backup troops to the Taliban.

Pakistani jihadism is unique in its global reach. It's often forgotten that Pakistani armed combat groups have recruited local and foreign jihadists - including Americans who converted to Islam - to attack Indian forces in Kashmir. Islamists in the Pakistani communities abroad - especially in Britain - have been the main players in terrorism in Western Europe, the other region to which the terrorists have tried to move the jihad. Wahabi "lobby" organizations in the United States include many more prominent figures of Pakistani than Arab origin.

In shifting their focus from Iraq to Pakistan, the terrorist commanders must also have an eye on the most dangerous element in the global Islamic equation: Pakistani nuclear weapons, the existence of which cannot be denied. Pakistani nuclear engineer A.Q. Khan admitted providing atomic technology to North Korea, Iran and Libya.

The fatal attack on Bhutto was aimed not only at political reform in her country, but at her stated commitment to strengthen Pakistani action against the Taliban and local radicals and at Pakistan's support of the government of Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan.

Ultimately, US soldiers in the region are no less threatened by Bhutto's killers.

America faces the same enemy in Pakistan as it did in Iraq.

And the chief fight in the global War on Terror may be about to shift to a new theater.

Defying fate was pointless

The Times
December 29, 2007
Amir Taheri

Benazir Bhutto, the woman I knew for four decades, understood that if the people speak, they will not support terror.

Who killed Benazir Bhutto? Despite formal admission of responsibility by al-Qaeda, we may never know for sure. In one recent conversation she told me that she had “solemn warnings” from a dozen groups who saw her as the main obstacle to their dream of transforming Pakistan into an “Islamic state”, whatever that means.

I first met Benazir in 1971 when I was a house guest of her father, the Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in their home town of Larkana, Sind. From the deference Bhutto showed his daughter, it was clear that Benazir, then barely 16, was meant to carry the mantle of the political dynasty that he hoped to start. Only half-jokingly, he referred to her as “my first son”.

In the four decades that followed, which included six years as Prime Minister of Pakistan, five years in solitary confinement, and more than a decade in exile, Benazir proved that she was more than equal to the role that her father, and maybe fate, had scripted for her.

Whoever killed Benazir belonged to one of the nebulae of organisations that have vowed to kill not only those who stand for election but also those who vote. Their slogan is: “From box to box!” This means that, by slipping one’s vote into a ballot box, one risks ending up in a coffin.

To people in the West voting in an election might appear banal. In the Muslim world, where the fight today is between democracy and terror, it could be a matter of life and death. Over the past decade, thousands of people, from top politicians to ordinary voters, have been murdered by Islamists in Muslim countries that have held reasonably free elections (Morocco, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia). Islamist opposition to democracy is based on the claim that allowing men to legislate would be a form of shirk, that is to say associating Man with God, who is the “sole and ultimate legislator”. Man-made law cannot rival God-made Shariah.

Referring to Islam’s history, in which the murder of leaders, including three of the first four caliphs, was the surest way of coming to power, the Islamists hope that by assassinating senior politicians they would kill hopes of democracy in the Muslim world.

Since her return home last October after years of exile, Bhutto had been the target of at least three assassination plots. The authorities had warned her to take extra care at mass rallies. She had not listened. She had asked the authorities to provide her with better security equipment, including devices to jam mobile phones. They hadn’t listened.

Were the security forces ordered not to protect her? Although the answer is almost certainly no, the question is posed by some Bhutto supporters. How it is answered could affect the way events unfold in the coming months.

Bhutto knew she was risking her life, but reminded everyone that her father, too, “gave his life for democracy in Pakistan”. Despite her education at Oxford and Harvard, she shared the Muslim belief that one’s fate is written in advance. If it was her kismet to die this year, there was no point in defying fate. In that sense, the al-Qaeda leaders who take extra care not to risk their lives seem less typically Islamic than Benazir.

“One cannot take part in democratic life from behind walls,” she told me when discussing her hopes for returning as Prime Minister after the general election. “I am not like bin Laden or [Mullah] Omar to hide in a cave. I have to be with my people.”

In our conversations, including e-mail messages, over the past few months, Bhutto had insisted that the elections should go ahead regardless of partisan considerations. She believed that the only way to save Pakistan from a Taliban-style regime was to mobilise the masses through democratic means. For her, dictatorship and terror were political twins that kept each other alive.

“Only the fresh air of democracy can kill the monster [of Islamism],” she liked to say. “When the people are allowed to speak, they will not speak in support of terror.” In that spirit she rejected a call by the former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to boycott the elections. What is important now is to fulfil Benazir’s wish and make sure that the elections take place.

Although built as an expression of nationhood for Muslims in the Indian subcontinent, Pakistan’s legitimacy as a state included other factors. One was an understanding that the new state would be based on the rule of law, and that governments would be chosen and dismissed through elections. Despite several spells of military rule, most Pakistanis remain attached to pluralist politics and multiparty elections.

Since the late 1970s, Islam, the initial source of Pakistan’s unity, not to say *raison d’être*, has become a divisive element. Bhutto’s murder took place on the Day of Ghadir, the most important annual festival of Shia Muslims, marking the election of Imam Ali as the Prophet Muhammad’s successor 14 centuries ago. Was Bhutto, whose Iranian mother was born Shia, also paying for Pakistan’s slide into sectarianism? Islam has become an instrument of oppression in the hands of groups peddling perverted versions of the faith. Pakistanis fight and kill one another over rival interpretations.

By contrast, attachment to pluralist politics represents the principal factor of unity in Pakistan today. Undermine that and you threaten the very legitimacy of the state. The terrorist who killed Benazir believed that Islam is worth killing for. Benazir proved that democracy is worth dying for.

A setback for the war on terror

The Star
December 28, 2007

For most of its 60-year history, Pakistan has been in turmoil – military coups, assassinations, tribal warfare, urban unrest or political upheaval. But the assassination of Benazir Bhutto clearly marks one of its worst crises.

The crisis has two faces – one as seen by most Pakistanis and the other as seen by the United States and, by extension, the rest of the West, including Canada.

Seen either way, the crisis poses a serious challenge to the post-9/11 alliance between the United States and Pakistan, a fulcrum of the war on terrorism, especially in Afghanistan.

That, in turn, has implications for Canada's Afghan mission.

President Pervez Musharraf obviously does not have full control of the country – not just the tribal areas along Afghanistan, but also the capital of Islamabad and its twin city, Rawalpindi, the headquarters of the 500,000-strong army and the country's nuclear high command.

That's where Bhutto was killed. That's where the army stormed the Red Mosque in July to flush out armed militants, a siege that triggered retaliatory suicide bombings. That's where Musharraf himself survived two assassination attempts in 2003.

Bhutto was not universally popular. But her killing has horrified enough Pakistanis that it might trigger civil unrest.

Several key segments of Pakistan's civil society have been up in arms for months over Musharraf's arbitrary moves to consolidate power – firing Supreme Court judges, arresting thousands of lawyers and suspending key parts of the constitution to place himself above the law.

If unrest spreads, it is not inconceivable that Musharraf, who recently gave up his military position at the behest of the West, may be deemed dispensable by his erstwhile colleagues in the army – with the blessings of Washington.

The army, which has ruled the country for a total of 32 years since 1947 and has an uncanny sense of self-survival, could declare martial law and take charge.

That's one scenario.

The other is that the U.S. will continue to stand by Musharraf, and further erode its credibility in a nation that's central to the success or failure of Afghanistan.

Most Pakistanis view the U.S.-Pakistan relationship as an unholy alliance, with Musharraf doing America's bidding, which is partly why he is unpopular. And Pakistan's democrats deeply resent Washington's choice of a military man as its instrument.

Bhutto's recent return from exile was also widely seen as an American-engineered plan to give a democratic façade to Musharraf's authoritarian rule.

She was portrayed in the West as "Pakistan's last great hope," in the headline of one magazine. But most Pakistanis did not share that perception.

They remember her as a prime minister who had been dismissed twice, by two different civilian presidents, amid charges of widespread corruption and incompetence. Still, Bhutto did have a popular base. An election without her will have that much less credibility.

She, like her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, tended to be autocratic, tolerating little or no dissent within her Peoples Party. She was "chairperson for life."

It's not surprising that she has left no heir apparent, either in the dynastic Bhutto clan or in the party. Unless the party can quickly tap into the next generation of leaders, there's no telling if it would recover from Bhutto's untimely death.

The other most prominent politician, Nawaz Sharif, is an equally discredited former prime minister.

He has already been disbarred from the Jan. 8 election because of pending corruption charges. Musharraf refused to pardon him, despite granting amnesty to Bhutto, under the arrangement with Washington to allow her return to the electoral arena.

Amid such cynical manipulations, Sharif, leader of the Muslim League, had been calling for a boycott of the election. He had wanted to rob Musharraf of the fig leaf that the vote would provide. But Bhutto had chosen to participate.

Sharif may still persuade others to his view. If he does, the election would have no legitimacy, leaving Musharraf, and the U.S., in limbo.

George W. Bush needs to move from a Musharraf policy to a Pakistan policy. That would entail a serious commitment to democracy and an end to long-distance manipulation of Pakistan's domestic politics.

Sharif should be allowed to contest the election. All those still in jail should be released, including some Peoples Party stalwarts. Among them is Aitzaz Ahsan, the barrister who led the lawyers' movement against Musharraf.

Restrictions on the media must be lifted. International election monitors must be given the freedom to do their job. For all that to happen, security needs to be enhanced. If this means postponing the election – by weeks, not months – the delay would be justified.

There is also a need to re-evaluate the war on terror. Pakistan's mountainous and porous border with Afghanistan cannot be sealed.

Just as there is no pure military solution in Afghanistan, there isn't one along the Pakistan border. If there was, America's \$10 billion mostly military aid to Musharraf would have done it by now. A political solution, however, would need the legitimacy of a democratic government in Pakistan.

BHUTTO'S BRAVERY

A FRANK VOICE VS. TERROR

New York Post
December 29, 2007

The roll call of US allies in the Middle East and its neighborhood has always read like a target list: Maliki, Karzai, Sistani, Musharraf. One bullet or one suicide blast could wipe out all our work and rip apart a strategically important country.

Assassinations have steadily picked off pro-Western politicians in Lebanon and one of our key tribal allies in Western Iraq, Sheik Satter, was murdered shortly after meeting with President Bush. But since 9/11, we have been lucky. There have been no assassinations of true geo-strategic significance, except perhaps that of anti-Syria former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, whose killing prompted a popular backlash that ended the Syrian occupation of his country.

Until now. Until Benazir Bhutto was killed in a shooting and suicide bombing at the end of a political rally in the city of Rawalpindi. Until her return to Pakistan from exile a few months ago, met immediately with threats to kill her from Islamic extremists, ended in a tragedy that is still shocking even if it seemed inevitable.

It's always been the assassin's conceit that he can move history with a single blow. Sometimes, as most infamously with Gavrilo Princip's shot that precipitated World War I, he succeeds. But it's much harder to do in stable, institutionally mature democracies where established parties can be as important as a single man or woman. Pakistan, alternately ruled by civilian kleptocrats and generals, is not such a country. Bhutto will be hard to replace.

In keeping with the clannishness of Pakistani politics, her Pakistan Peoples Party was entirely dependent on her (authoritarian-style) leadership. Her civilian rival, Nawaz Sharif, who also recently returned from exile, is soft on Islamic militants and has even been accused of having taken bribes from Osama bin Laden. That leaves President Pervez Musharraf, increasingly isolated politically, without a decent civilian ally with whom to try to broaden his support as his country totters from this latest blow.

Musharraf had seemed on the verge of escaping from the political fix his state of emergency of November had placed him. He had removed judges implacably opposed to his rule, then stepped down as head of the army, lifted the state of emergency and said parliamentary elections would go ahead on Jan. 8. The killing of Bhutto throws the elections into doubt and will politically weaken Musharraf further as rumors circulate that his extremist-infiltrated security services may have played a role.

If Bhutto's murder were to create a spiral of violence in nuclear-armed Pakistan that Musharraf couldn't control, it would be the most successful post-9/11 terrorist act since the bombing of the Golden Mosque in Iraq, which stoked a civil war that nearly brought us to our knees there. Chaos is militancy's friend, and it is much easier to bring about than lawfully constituted order.

For the terrorists, murder rather than persuasion is the very stuff of politics. It's no accident that the thunderclap that heralded the horrors of 9/11 was the assassination in Afghanistan of the anti-Taliban

guerrilla fighter Ahmad Massoud. Where it has no majority support and no democratic inspirational leaders of its own, al Qaeda can always kill and hope to gain in the resulting whirlwind.

As Iraq during the past year shows, chaos needn't prevail. But we have more leverage over Iraq than Pakistan, where we have no troops and not necessarily even a dependable ally in power, and Afghanistan, where we are operating in a cumbersome arrangement with NATO forces that have been struggling to take the fight to the Taliban. As our Iraq policy spiraled downward in 2006, it benefited from the sort of thorough rethinking that we now need to bring to bear to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Because what we always feared has happened - an assassin has killed a strategically significant target. Bhutto's martyrdom will understandably obscure her misrule the first two times she was prime minister. But on her return, she was a frank voice against Islamism, and no one can deny her this: She was very brave.

Terrorism strikes at heart of Pakistan's democracy

*New Zealand Herald
Irfan Yusuf
December 29, 2007*

Muslims are frequently challenged with tough questions. Why aren't they speaking out enough against terrorism? Why are moderate Muslims so silent in the face of mindless violence? Why do they only protest about cartoons and papal speeches? Why aren't they taking to the streets to protest against terrorist attacks?

In the case of Iraq and now Pakistan, the answer is now clear. Muslims aren't taking to the streets protesting because they are either too afraid or too busy burying their dead.

Almost every week, Iraqis suffer a terrorist attack claiming at least as many lives as the July 7 bombings in London in 2005. The Coalition forces were supposed to restore order to Iraq after removing Saddam Hussein from power. Instead, Iraq has descended into virtual civil war.

Now terrorists seem to be striking in Pakistan. Once again, it is ordinary civilians being targeted. But some 48 hours ago, terrorists struck a far more influential target.

To understand why Benazir Bhutto's assassination is so significant, one must keep in mind Pakistan's troubled history.

Back in August, Pakistanis of all religious and political persuasions were celebrating the 60th anniversary of their nation's foundation.

After years of lobbying both the British Raj and India's large Muslim community, supporters of the Pakistan movement successfully carved out what was supposed to be a separate nation for Indian Muslims.

In 1947, they were handed a nation of two land masses divided by thousands of kilometres of Indian territory.

Then in 1971, the eastern half broke away after a fiercely fought civil war and Indian intervention. Unlike its Western wing, Pakistan's eastern province of Bengal was linguistically and culturally homogenous.

Bengali-speaking Muslims, ironically the biggest supporters of the Pakistan movement during the 1940s, no longer wished to be part of a Pakistan in which they felt exploited and discriminated against.

Benazir's father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, played a key role in those events. As leader of the leftist Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Bhutto refused to accept a plan by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, leader of East Pakistan's leftist Awami League, enabling greater autonomy for Bengali-speaking Muslims of Pakistan's eastern wing. Some observers argue that Bhutto placed his wish for power before national unity.

After the establishment of Bangladesh, Bhutto became President of what remained of Pakistan. During his term, a new constitution was approved declaring Pakistan an Islamic republic. He later served as Prime Minister. Perhaps his most controversial decision was to appoint a relatively junior Army officer, Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, as chief of Pakistan's Army.

Eventually, it was General Zia who took control of Pakistan, declaring martial law and executing Bhutto in 1978.

In 1979, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, so beginning the Cold War triangular love affair between Pakistan's Army, Western conservative governments and jihadist volunteers. Conservative US governments and Western intelligence agencies pumped billions into the recruitment, training and arming of volunteers from across the Muslim world to fight a proxy war against the Soviets.

To her credit, Benazir (Pakistanis generally refer to her by first name) warned Western powers and Pakistanis of the dangers posed by having large bands of jihadist volunteers based in Pakistan. She warned Western governments that the radical ideologies which conservative Western politicians were bankrolling would one day come back to haunt them.

Sadly, Benazir herself played some role in furthering Pakistan's flirtation with Muslim extremism. She became Prime Minister in 1988, after the mysterious death of the military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq, the man who executed her father. At age 35, she was the first woman to govern a Muslim country.

Bhutto was elected twice as Pakistan's Prime Minister. On both occasions, she was driven from office after allegations of corruption. Her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, became known as Mr 10 per cent for his alleged practice of extorting 10 per cent off all government-run business enterprises.

Benazir's second term was also characterised by a mixed record on improving the status of Pakistani women. On the one hand, she established Pakistan's first all-female police stations where victims of sexual assault and domestic violence would feel more comfortable to report perpetrators. On the other hand, she refused to repeal the allegedly Islamic Hudood ordinances which were used as a tool against victims of sexual assault.

In doing so, she encouraged the rise of Pakistan's religious right.

Benazir was removed from power again in a democratic election. Both she and her successor, Nawaz Sharif, were charged with corruption in early 2000 by an incoming military regime led by General Pervez Musharraf.

Now, on the eve of national elections, Benazir has fallen victim to a suicide bombing attack. Although members of her party and other opposition figures are blaming the Musharraf Government for failing to provide adequate security, it's clear that direct responsibility is with the forces of religious extremism that now want to hold democracy in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to ransom.

Terrorists have again struck. As usual, their targets are mainly innocent civilians. As usual, Muslims play a bigger role as victims than as perpetrators. Perhaps now, with their nation on the precipice of political disaster, Pakistan's majority should take control of both their religion and politics out of the hands of extremists.

Tragedy recasts the race

The Australian
David Nason,
December 29, 2007

In a city few Americans have heard of, in a country on the other side of the world, a moment of bloody madness has suddenly become everything in the US presidential election.

As the assassination of an archduke redrew the political map of Europe nearly a century ago, so has the murder of Benazir Bhutto in Rawalpindi recast the most wide-open race for the White House in memory, if not as profoundly.

Out in the frozen cornfields of Iowa, where most of the Melbourne Cup field of candidates find themselves, it produced a mad and often unedifying scramble for political advantage.

From it one thing at least is clear: as fear and chaos rise in nuclear-armed Pakistan, the unfolding crisis couldn't have arrived at a more critical stage in the US election process.

Over the next 18 days, the early voting states of Iowa (January 3), New Hampshire (January 8) and Michigan (January 15) will not only prune the number of candidates running for US president but also define the issues that count in the run-up to all-important Super Tuesday on February 5. That's when more than 20 states will conduct their formal primary elections or local caucuses of voters, the electoral mechanisms that decide who goes to the party conventions in August and September respectively to choose the Democratic and Republican presidential nominees.

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Up until now, the issues have been elusive. The Republican candidates have been united in their avoidance of all things George W. Bush, and while they have nastily sniped at one another over tax, immigration, crime and health care, the policy differences have been minor.

On the Democrat side, Barack Obama and to a lesser extent John Edwards have made change the dominant issue, though what that means practically, beyond idealised notions of a Washington no longer run by lobbyists and the restoration of US moral authority across the world, is anyone's guess.

But Bhutto's murder has simplified everything, refocusing the campaigns of Democrats and Republicans on the hard issues of national security and the war on terror.

The answers may be hard but the questions are easy. How can poverty-stricken Pakistan be saved from Muslim extremists with links to al-Qa'ida? Where now for Pakistani democracy? Will Pakistan remain a US ally in the war on terror? Are those nukes secure?

Although it is early days, the most likely beneficiaries of this new reality seem to be Democrat frontrunner Hillary Clinton and the Republicans presently running third, fourth and fifth in Iowa: Rudy Giuliani, John McCain and Fred Thompson.

Clinton, who is in a close three-way tussle with Obama and Edwards in Iowa but trailing Obama in New Hampshire, has campaigned heavily on her political experience and what it offers the US in a troubled world.

For Clinton, then, Bhutto's murder is like winning the lottery, as was evident from her first comments on the assassination. In a world of violence and threats, Clinton said, Bhutto's death "certainly raises the stakes high for what we expect from our next president". For good measure, she added: "I know from a lifetime of working to make change."

Later, in an Associated Press interview, Clinton said: "I know from my lifetime of experience you have to be prepared for whatever might happen, and that's particularly true today."

The former first lady can expect further good mileage from the fact she knew Bhutto personally and could identify with her struggles as a woman in politics.

The other likely Democrat winner is Joe Biden, who has campaigned almost exclusively on his strong foreign policy credentials. The veteran Delaware senator and chairman of the senate foreign relations committee has reason to hope for a bounce that will allow him to survive beyond the early voting states.

Biden wasted no time yesterday in letting people know that he had twice spoken with Bhutto following an attempt on her life in October and that he had urged Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to offer Pakistan the forensic services of the FBI and other US security agencies.

The Democrat with the most to lose seems to be Edwards. His strategy of appealing directly to the anti-war Democrat Left and apologising for voting in favour of the Iraq mission when a senator for North Carolina is seriously undermined by Rawalpindi's message that terrorists do exist and fighting them is necessary.

The conventional campaign wisdom is that Edwards must win Iowa or run a close second to remain viable, given that his numbers are low in New Hampshire. He could be the first of the big names to exit.

The impact on Obama is harder to measure. On one hand Rawalpindi highlights Obama's inexperience in foreign policy and recalls Bill Clinton's cruel barb that making Obama president would be "rolling the dice" with America's future.

But on the other hand Obama's much-criticised suggestion in August that US forces should strike at al-Qa'ida bases in Pakistan without worrying about getting permission from President Pervez Musharraf may now be judged as prophetically wise.

Obama responded yesterday with sensible caution, saying he had asked for briefings on the situation in Pakistan.

He also claimed that the war in Iraq had diverted troops and resources from the more important task of hunting al-Qa'ida terrorists operating between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In the Republican ranks, the Bhutto assassination makes an already tight contest even more congested by raising the stocks of those immediately below Iowa frontrunners Mike Huckabee and Mitt Romney.

The Giuliani response has been the most striking. Leading in national polls but trailing in Iowa and New Hampshire, he had abandoned the early-voting states to concentrate on winning Florida's late January primary, an important stepping stone to Super Tuesday.

But now, in the wake of the Bhutto assassination, Giuliani is running a new television advertisement called Freedom in New Hampshire, the state where his numbers are worse than anywhere else in the country.

The ad ends with a trademark Giuliani appeal to American patriotism: "The Islamic terrorists make a terrible mistake if they confuse our democracy for weakness. Our democracy means we disagree with each other. But when you come and try to take away from us our freedom, when you try to kill our people, we are one, we're going to stand up to you and we're going to prevail."

Giuliani can't win New Hampshire or Iowa, but a strong showing would cut deep into the support base of Huckabee and Romney, candidates who need a strong start to build momentum and money for Super Tuesday.

The immediate Republican winner is likely to be McCain, the candidate most closely linked to the White House agenda in Iraq and whose resurgence over the past three months has tracked the reduced death toll from Bush's surge strategy.

McCain is looking to win in New Hampshire, as he did in 2000, and he didn't waste any time hawking his foreign policy credentials. After branding the assassination a great tragedy and expressing concern about Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, McCain declared himself "the one with the experience, the knowledge and the judgment" to be president in dangerous times.

"It may serve to enhance those credentials to make people understand that I've been to Pakistan," McCain said. "I know Musharraf, I can pick up the phone and call him. I knew Benazir Bhutto."

A New York Times blogger captured the essence of the McCain appeal when he wrote about watching the Arizona senator's performance on TV. "There he was, the naval officer, POW, fully trained for any emergency, foreign or domestic. Knew the options and the reactions, knew exactly what to say. He may have just gotten my vote."

Nor was McCain reluctant in pointing out the deficiencies of frontrunner Huckabee, saying he didn't have "the same experience and background" on national security issues.

The feeblest response came from Romney, who said if foreign policy experience was the only credential needed to run America, there were tens of thousands of potential candidates waiting for a call in the State Department.

What was needed, he said, was someone able to assemble a team and guide them in the right direction. Romney was speaking the truth, but his timing was dreadful.

How all this plays out in the coming weeks is going to be fascinating to watch. Can Obama's promise to rise above the partisan issues and offer a clean slate to America survive the fear that is so easily stoked from events such as Rawalpindi? Has Hillary Clinton got the break, if based on a tragic event of global proportions, that her supporters say she deserves? And will other candidates now consider entering the race or scrap plans to do so.

The speculation that New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg would run must now be in some doubt, even if the US economy turns bad next year, as expected.

But what about Newt Gingrich, Al Gore and even Jeb Bush, the President's brother. Dangerous times can evoke strong emotions in people and an even stronger sense of duty. As the man said, anything could still happen.

Bhutto's death is victory for Islamic hardliners

The Telegraph, UK
By Con Coughlin
27 December 2007

The murder of former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in a suicide bomb attack in Rawalpindi not only strikes a hammer blow against Pakistan's painful attempts to restore democratic rule. It also marks a significant victory for Islamic hardliners who want to destroy Islamabad's uneasy, but crucial, alliance with the West.

From the moment the fifty-four-year-old, Oxford-educated Miss Bhutto returned to her homeland last October, she was well aware that she was taking her life in her hands.

The Bhutto family had already paid a heavy price for its devotion to the Pakistani cause. Her father was hanged on the orders of General Zia ul-Haq in 1979 following a military coup, and her two brothers were murdered.

Miss Bhutto's own political involvement in her country's affairs had not been without incident. In the course of a turbulent career she was twice unceremoniously dumped out of office, jailed on corruption charges and forced to live in exile and bring up her three children single-handedly while her husband served an eight-year jail term.

When she did finally return last October she narrowly escaped death when Islamic extremists launched two suicide bomb attacks against her homecoming procession in Karachi, the Bhutto clan's traditional stronghold. More than one hundred people were killed including some of the supporters who were travelling on Bhutto's bus. But Miss Bhutto refused to be deterred from her self-appointed mission to return Pakistan to democratic government after more than eight years of military dictatorship, even though she was well aware of the risks to herself and her family.

"I know there will be security risks, people who want to kill me and to scuttle the restoration of democracy," she told her biographer Christina Lamb shortly before she left London. "But with my faith in God and trust in the people of Pakistan, I'm sure the party workers will be there and will protect me."

In fact officials from her Pakistan People's Party were less than complimentary about the security arrangements that had been put in place by General Pervez Musharraf, the country's current military dictator, whom they suspected of not being overly vigilant in preventing the attacks because he was less than enthusiastic about entering into a power-sharing arrangement with Miss Bhutto.

But it was not just Miss Bhutto's commitment to democracy that attracted strong support from her Western backers, which more recently included the Foreign Office and the White House. Miss Bhutto, whose commitment to Pakistan's Islamic legacy was as strong as her support for the democratic process, was seen as a reconciler, the one mainstream political figure who could transcend the awkwardness inherent in an Islamic state forging a close strategic alliance with the West following the September 11 attacks.

Writing shortly before she left London for Pakistan, Miss Bhutto declared her commitment to “the reconciliation of the values of Islam and the West and prescription for a moderate, modern Islam that marginalises extremists, returns the military from politics to their barracks, treats all citizens and especially women equally and selects its leaders by free and fair elections.”

Her tract was so on message that it could have been written by any one of the seemingly endless procession of Foreign Office diplomats who visited her Edgware Road headquarters in the months that preceded her departure for Islamabad. Miss Bhutto’s ardent solicitation by both the British and Americans governments has been prompted by mounting frustration in both London and Washington at the performance of Mr Musharraf who, despite receiving billions of dollars worth of financial support, is deemed to be making insufficient progress in tackling Islamic extremists holed up in the lawless tribal areas that border Afghanistan.

In the long-running coalition campaign to eradicate the threat posed to Western security by Osama bin Laden’s al-Qa’eda terrorist organisation, no country is deemed more important an ally than Pakistan. Nearly all the major terrorist threats against Britain - both those that have succeeded, such as the July 7 attacks, and those that haven’t, such as the thwarted attacks on Heathrow - originated from al-Qa’eda’s stronghold in north-western Pakistan.

The area also acts as the main command and training centre for the Taliban in its violent campaign against British troops based in the southern Afghan province of Helmand. Consequently the overwhelming priority of both the American and British governments since September 11 has been to forge a strong alliance with Mr. Musharraf.

Had the Pakistani dictator made more progress in eradicating the terrorist infrastructure that enables bin Laden and his associates to continue to threaten Western interests, then his allies might have been more prepared to tolerate his disregard for Pakistan’s democratic institutions, most of which have been crammed with his military cronies over the past eight years and whose rapaciousness is equal to anything perpetrated by their political predecessors.

But not only was Mr. Musharraf failing to deal with the coalition’s demands for tangible progress in prosecuting the war on terror against Islamic extremists; his continued disinclination to return the country to democracy made him an embarrassment for an alliance that openly extols the virtues of democratic government.

Unlike Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan’s other mainstream political figure, who has openly campaigned against Islamabad’s close alliance with the West, Miss Bhutto was seen as a politician who could facilitate the country’s return to democracy while remaining a staunch supporter of the West.

The dramatic death of Benazir Bhutto brings both those long-term goals into question. In the current political climate it now seems highly unlikely that the country can proceed with the elections scheduled for next month. And if, as seems likely, Islamic extremists were responsible for Miss Bhutto’s murder, then Islamic hardliners will have successfully demonstrated that they pose as much threat to the future stability of Pakistan as they do to the West.

The excuse often given by Mr. Musharraf’s supporters to explain his caution both in returning the country to democracy and tackling al-Qa’eda and the Taliban was that he feared alienating further the powerful constituency of Islamic fundamentalists who dominate many of Pakistan’s mosques and madrassas.

But Mr. Musharraf has demonstrated that, when pushed to the limit, he is prepared to take extreme measures to deal with extreme threats, especially when they challenge the country's survival as a functioning entity.

When, last summer, Islamic radicals seized control of Islamabad's Red Mosque, and openly challenged the government's writ, Mr. Musharraf had no hesitation in ordering his special forces to storm the mosque and restore order.

If Pakistan is to survive this latest challenge to its existence, then the Pakistani dictator must summon the determination to destroy the enemies of his state once and for all.

U.S. Brokered Bhutto's Return to Pakistan

The Washington Post
By Robin Wright and Glenn Kessler
December 28, 2007

For Benazir Bhutto, the decision to return to Pakistan was sealed during a telephone call from Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice just a week before Bhutto flew home in October. The call culminated more than a year of secret diplomacy -- and came only when it became clear that the heir to Pakistan's most powerful political dynasty was the only one who could bail out Washington's key ally in the battle against terrorism.

It was a stunning turnaround for Bhutto, a former prime minister who was forced from power in 1996 amid corruption charges. She was suddenly visiting with top State Department officials, dining with U.N. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad and conferring with members of the National Security Council. As President Pervez Musharraf's political future began to unravel this year, Bhutto became the only politician who might help keep him in power.

"The U.S. came to understand that Bhutto was not a threat to stability, but was instead the only possible way that we could guarantee stability and keep the presidency of Musharraf intact," said Mark Siegel, who lobbied for Bhutto in Washington and witnessed much of the behind-the-scenes diplomacy.

But the diplomacy that ended abruptly with Bhutto's assassination yesterday was always an enormous gamble, according to current and former U.S. policymakers, intelligence officials and outside analysts. By entering into the legendary "Great Game" of South Asia, the United States also made its goals and allies more vulnerable -- in a country in which more than 70 percent of the population already looked unfavorably upon Washington.

Bhutto's assassination leaves Pakistan's future -- and Musharraf's -- in doubt, some experts said. "U.S. policy is in tatters. The administration was relying on Benazir Bhutto's participation in elections to legitimate Musharraf's continued power as president," said Barnett R. Rubin of New York University. "Now Musharraf is finished."

Bhutto's assassination also demonstrates the growing power and reach of militant anti-government forces in Pakistan, which pose an existential threat to the country, said J. Alexander Thier, a former U.N. official now at the U.S. Institute for Peace. "The dangerous cocktail of forces of instability exist in Pakistan -- Talibanism, sectarianism, ethnic nationalism -- could react in dangerous and unexpected ways if things unravel further," he said.

But others insist the U.S.-orchestrated deal fundamentally altered Pakistani politics in ways that will be difficult to undo, even though Bhutto is gone. "Her return has helped crack open this political situation. It's now very fluid, which makes it uncomfortable and dangerous," said Isobel Coleman of the Council on Foreign Relations. "But the status quo before she returned was also dangerous from a U.S. perspective. Forcing some movement in the long run was in the U.S. interests."

Bhutto's assassination during a campaign stop in Rawalpindi might even work in favor of her Pakistan People's Party, with parliamentary elections due in less than two weeks, Coleman said. "From the U.S. perspective, the PPP is the best ally the U.S. has in terms of an institution in Pakistan."

Bhutto's political comeback was a long time in the works -- and uncertain for much of the past 18 months. In mid-2006, Bhutto and Musharraf started communicating through intermediaries about how they might cooperate. Assistant Secretary of State Richard A. Boucher was often an intermediary, traveling to Islamabad to speak with Musharraf and to Bhutto's homes in London and Dubai to meet with her.

Under U.S. urging, Bhutto and Musharraf met face to face in January and July in Dubai, according to U.S. officials. It was not a warm exchange, with Musharraf resisting a deal to drop corruption charges so she could return to Pakistan. He made no secret of his feelings.

In his 2006 autobiography "In the Line of Fire," Musharraf wrote that Bhutto had "twice been tried, been tested and failed, [and] had to be denied a third chance." She had not allowed her own party to become democratic, he alleged. "Benazir became her party's 'chairperson for life,' in the tradition of the old African dictators!"

A turning point was Bhutto's three-week U.S. visit in August, when she talked again to Boucher and to Khalilzad, an old friend. A former U.S. ambassador in neighboring Afghanistan, Khalilzad had long been skeptical about Musharraf, and while in Kabul he had disagreed with then-Secretary of State Colin L. Powell over whether the Pakistani leader was being helpful in the fight against the Taliban. He also warned that Pakistani intelligence was allowing the Taliban to regroup in the border areas, U.S. officials said.

When Bhutto returned to the United States in September, Khalilzad asked for a lift on her plane from New York to Aspen, Colo., where both were giving speeches. They spent much of the five-hour plane ride strategizing, said sources familiar with the diplomacy.

Friends say Bhutto asked for U.S. help. "She pitched the idea to the Bush administration," said Peter W. Galbraith, a former U.S. ambassador and friend of Bhutto from their days at Harvard. "She had been prime minister twice, and had not been able to accomplish very much because she did not have power over the most important institutions in Pakistan -- the ISI [intelligence agency], the military and the nuclear establishment," he said.

"Without controlling those, she couldn't pursue peace with India, go after extremists or transfer funds from the military to social programs," Galbraith said. "Cohabitation with Musharraf made sense because he had control over the three institutions that she never did. This was the one way to accomplish something and create a moderate center."

The turning point to get Musharraf on board was a September trip by Deputy Secretary of State John D. Negroponte to Islamabad. "He basically delivered a message to Musharraf that we would stand by him, but he needed a democratic facade on the government, and we thought Benazir was the right choice for that face," said Bruce Riedel, a former CIA officer and National Security Council staff member now at the Brookings Institution's Saban Center for Middle East Policy.

"Musharraf still detested her, and he came around reluctantly as he began to recognize this fall that his position was untenable," Riedel said. The Pakistani leader had two choices: Bhutto or former Prime

Minister Nawaz Sharif, whom Musharraf had overthrown in a 1999 military coup. “Musharraf took what he thought was the lesser of two evils,” Riedel said.

Many career foreign policy officials were skeptical of the U.S. plan. “There were many inside the administration, at the State and Defense Departments and in intelligence, who thought this was a bad idea from the beginning because the prospects that the two could work together to run the country effectively were nil,” said Riedel.

As part of the deal, Bhutto’s party agreed not to protest against Musharraf’s reelection in September to his third term. In return, Musharraf agreed to lift the corruption charges against Bhutto. But Bhutto sought one particular guarantee -- that Washington would ensure Musharraf followed through on free and fair elections producing a civilian government.

Rice, who became engaged in the final stages of brokering a deal, called Bhutto in Dubai and pledged that Washington would see the process through, according to Siegel. A week later, on Oct. 18, Bhutto returned.

Ten weeks later, she was dead.

Xenia Dormandy, former National Security Council expert on South Asia now at Harvard University’s Belfer Center, said U.S. meddling is not to blame for Bhutto’s death. “It is very clear the United States encouraged” an agreement, she said, “but U.S. policy is in no way responsible for what happened. I don’t think we could have played it differently.”

U.S. policy -- and the commitment to Musharraf -- remains unchanged. In a statement yesterday, Rice appealed to Pakistanis to remain calm and to continue seeking to build a “moderate” democracy.

“I don’t think it would do any justice to her memory to have an election postponed or canceled simply as a result of this tragic incident,” State Department spokesman Tom Casey told reporters. “The only people that win through such a course of action are the people who perpetrated this attack.”

Making a Martyr of Bhutto

*Aryn Baker,
By Aryn Baker, Time
December 27, 2007*

Just days before parliamentary polls in Pakistan, leading prime ministerial contender and anti-terrorism crusader Benazir Bhutto was shot dead during an election rally in the garrison city of Rawalpindi, near Islamabad. “She has been martyred,” said party official Rehman Malik. The Associated Press, citing Malik, reported that Bhutto was shot in the neck and the chest before the gunman blew himself up. At least 20 bystanders were killed in the blast. Bhutto was rushed to a hospital. But, at 6:16 p.m. Pakistan time, she was declared dead.

“How can somebody who can shoot her get so close to her with all the so-called security?” said a distraught Husain Haqqani, a former top aide to Bhutto, shortly after news of her death flashed around the world. Haqqani, who served as a spokesman and top aide to Bhutto for more than a decade, blamed Pakistani security, either through neglect or complicity, in her assassination. “This is the security establishment, which has always wanted her out,” he said through tears.

For the past several months Pakistan has been plagued by a wave of violence that has seen hundreds of civilians killed in similar bombing attacks; and hundreds more military personnel, prompting President Pervez Musharraf to declare a state of emergency. On December 16th, Musharraf lifted the state of emergency, stating that the threat had been contained. The bombings, however, continued. Just hours before her assassination, Bhutto, 54, met with visiting Afghan President Hamid Karzai to discuss the threat of terrorism against both countries.

The U.S. has long supported a return to power by Bhutto, who was perceived to be a moderate willing to work with Washington on the war on terror. She was also seen as a democratic leader who would serve as a counter to the plummeting popularity of Musharraf, who took power in a 1999 military coup. It was thought that a power-sharing deal between the two, in which Musharraf stayed on as President while Bhutto lead as Prime Minister, would promote stability in this nuclear armed nation of 165 million. But from the day of her arrival in Pakistan after eight years in exile, Bhutto’s return has been marred by violence.

On October 18th, a pair of bombs detonated in the midst a welcome-home rally in Karachi for the former two-time Prime Minister, killing some 145 in a deliberate attempt on her life. The organization responsible for the carnage has not yet been identified, but Bhutto said she suspected al-Qaeda and some unspecified members of Musharraf’s government who did not want to see her return to power. Despite the clear threat to her life, Bhutto continued to campaign publicly with the kind of mass rallies that are the cornerstone of politicking in Pakistan. “I am not afraid,” she told TIME last month. “I am ready to die for my country.”

Haqqani, now a professor at Boston University, isn’t sure what the latest bloodshed means for his country. “Will the Pakistani military realize that this is going to tear the fabric of the nation apart, and so really get serious about securing the country and about getting serious in dealing with the extremist jihadis?” he wondered. But he made clear he feels the best chance for such a policy has just evaporated. “She did show courage, and she was the only person who spoke out against terrorism,” he

said. “She was let down by those in Washington who think that sucking up to bad governments around the world is their best policy option.”

Within hours of the assassination, protests and riots broke out in Pakistan’s main cities. In Rawalpindi, vegetable vendor Naeem, 25, said Bhutto’s murder would hurt Pakistan’s poorest, who were among Bhutto’s most loyal supporters. “People were hoping her government would help the lower classes and now she is gone,” he said. Syeda Asmat Begum, 73, who lives in Pakistan’s capital Islamabad, told TIME that “everywhere sadness prevails. We are in fear that even our leaders are not safe from the bombardment of suicide bombers and bullets.”

That was a view felt around the country. In Lahore, where shops and restaurants closed and the streets emptied of people except for the center of town where Bhutto supporters gathered to vent their anger, Majid Iqbal, 26, an engineering student was trying to hitch a ride home because bus services had stopped. “People are very worried,” says Iqbal, who called his family in his home village outside the city as soon as he heard the news. “If a leader of a great party is not secure, then how can the Pakistani people be secure? At this time Pakistan’s future is fragile.”

Speaking on television outside the hospital where Bhutto died, the opposition leader Nawaz Sharif said, “I myself feel threatened... Are things in control now? Had things been in control, would this have happened?” Bhutto’s rival said, “We both were struggling for the same cause, and we had signed the charter of democracy.” On camera, he addressed Bhutto’s supporters, “I assure you that I will fight your war from now.” He said, “It is tragic not only for [her party] but also for my party.”

Pakistan can ill afford to sacrifice the few moderate leaders it has left. Bhutto’s death will plunge the upcoming elections into uncertainty and the country further into instability. At the news of her assassination, many of her loyalists rioted in the streets of Pakistan. There will be many tense days ahead for the Musharraf government as it deals with this political crisis. And that’s good news for terrorism.

Can democracy survive, and who will take Bhutto's place?

*Bronwen Maddox
The Times
December 28, 2007*

The assassination of Benazir Bhutto does not mean the death of democracy in Pakistan — provided that elections are held soon.

The instinct of President Pervez Musharraf may well be to postpone the vote, due on January 8, and to reimpose the state of emergency that he has only just lifted, arguing that otherwise violence will sweep Pakistan. The immediate condemnation from Moscow, expressing fears that Ms Bhutto's death would trigger a wave of terrorism — gave implicit support for any crackdown.

But the Pakistan People's Party, which under Bhutto had remained the premier force in national politics, will very likely want the polls to go ahead. The party, providing that it can produce a plausible leader, could hope to sweep to a powerful lead on the back of the "martyr effect". Britain and the US are also likely to argue that elections are the best way to retrieve stability.

Bhutto's death will be a terrible shock to Pakistan, but it is hard to say that it is a surprise. As a woman, and from the poorer province of the Sindh rather than the Punjab heartland of Pakistan's establishment, she seemed to hold out the hope of turning Pakistan into a more modern country, although corruption charges from her two spells as Prime Minister were still simmering in Swiss courts. When she returned after eight years abroad, in flight from corruption charges, many reckoned that her life expectancy could be measured in weeks if not hours.

She was lucky to survive the suicide blast at her homecoming parade in Karachi, where her party workers had drummed up hundreds of thousands of supporters for a rally. But the casualness and fatalism of those workers in providing her security made a successful attempt on her life seem only a matter of time. Even the day after the Karachi blast they allowed hundreds of foreign media workers bearing heavy electronic equipment to crowd into her family compound. Many of them were not scanned for explosives, a gesture at security which bore no resemblance to a modern, determined attempt to protect the life of an irreplaceable leader.

Rallies such as today's — announced only a day in advance for security reasons — posed an obvious risk. Bhutto was much criticised for the vanity of the Karachi rally, where the blast killed about 140. But after Musharraf imposed a state of emergency in November, which shut down private television stations, the option of "virtual campaigning" was closed to her. Even though channels were back on air in recent weeks, their political content was excised — the condition that General Musharraf had imposed for their return. Rallies in key towns such as Rawalpindi became irresistible, if still reckless.

It is a fair bet that Ms Bhutto's fervent supporters will blame Musharraf. Even though the Karachi bomb followed explicit threats on her life by Islamic militants — and to many, they are still the most plausible perpetrators — many PPP supporters assumed that it was the work of the intelligence agencies. Even those standing by the bodies of injured relatives in the Jinnah Post-graduate Medical Centre, the city's main hospital, firmly asserted that Musharraf and intelligence agents should bear responsibility, not Bhutto.

They will be even more inclined to see the hand of Musharraf in the assassination because it happened in Rawalpindi, the garrison town which is the head of Pakistan's military, and the site of Army House, where Musharraf lives (and where he has refused to leave, even though he has stepped down as head of the Army).

The threat of violent protest across the country, but particularly in Bhutto's home province of Sindh, is no exaggeration by the Musharraf camp. Judging by his recent reflexes, Musharraf may well invoke that threat of violence as justification for a new security crackdown.

In that, he is likely to be backed by General Ashfaq Kiyani, a loyalist whom he recently inserted as his replacement as Army chief. But this will be the first test of whether Kiyani's loyalty holds, and of whether he shares Musharraf's tactics for confronting the terrorist threat.

The most contentious question confronting Musharraf is whether to press ahead with the elections due in less than two weeks. His instinct — again, judging by his imposition of house arrest on Bhutto and her supporters after her return, and his wavering commitment at that point to the polls — may well be for a postponement.

But he will come under enormous pressure from those who want to see Pakistan move back towards democracy. Britain and the US have made these elections a central plank of their policy — even while acknowledging that these polls might not be quite free and fair. They encouraged an alliance between Bhutto and Musharraf, hoping that this compromise, democratically unsatisfactory in so many ways, would still deliver the security and political maturity that Pakistan needs.

What happens to the PPP now? Many in the party believe that that martyr effect will propel them to victory if the elections do go ahead. But the PPP will need a plausible leader; even though Bhutto spent eight years in exile, the feudal power of her family name made it inconceivable that anyone else would take over.

But now that she is gone (and her children are thought to be too young), other names will emerge. The most plausible immediate candidate is that of Ameen Fahim, party vice-president, who ran the party during her years of exile. From a powerful feudal family in Sindh province, just like her, he is thought to have the political reach to pull together the party's factions and take it towards victory.

Others are less likely. Aitzaz Ahsan, perhaps the most famous lawyer after Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry, has led the fight against military rule. But his relations with Bhutto had become tense; she had asked him to clarify whether he put his alliance with the judiciary above that of the party. In any case, he has no geographical base of support.

There is, too, her husband, Asif Zardari. But he is not a creditable figure. He lacks her charisma and, during her time in office, was widely known as "Mr. 10 per cent". He also stayed in exile to avoid corruption charges (which the Bhuttos said were politically motivated) but, suffering heart trouble, did not return with her in October. In an interview on her return, I asked her whether he would join her. "No", she said emphatically. "He will look after the children, and in any case, he is ill."

Pakistan's bloody curse

*Saeed Shah
The Glove and Mail
December 28, 2007*

Benazir Bhutto's voice was hoarse with the rigours of the campaign trail as she addressed the rally in Rawalpindi. The crowd was sparse, perhaps 4,000 supporters, who filled less than half the venue, a park in the city centre.

Perhaps it was the fear of terrorism that kept people away. Perhaps it was having to listen to a dozen other speakers first, mostly local officials of her Pakistan People's Party. When she spoke, it was some three hours later than scheduled. The crowd tried to rouse itself as she came to the podium, on a stage perched several metres up. Her speech was standard stump fare. There was no roar from her supporters but they cheered as she finished.

By the time Ms. Bhutto left the stage, security agents around the park, which had earlier in the day patrolled all entrances, had melted away. She climbed down the stairs and into a waiting white armour-plated SUV.

The vehicle had only just made it out of the park where, seeing fans lined up outside, she could not resist waving to them one more time. The sunroof opened and she stood up, her upper body emerging from the top of the vehicle. The assassin saw his chance.

Shots rang out. She slumped back in the vehicle. She fell to one side, just as there was a huge explosion. Blood poured from her head. She never regained consciousness.

Her death sent the unruly country deeper into chaos, sparking waves of violence and jeopardizing the January election aimed at restoring a civilian, democratic government after more than eight years of military dictatorship.

Eyewitnesses said Ms. Bhutto's bodyguards jumped the shooter, who then detonated explosives, shredding those around him. There were other reports that a sniper shot her from a nearby building shortly before the suicide bomber struck. Ambulance crews collected pieces of flesh from the scene. The road was turned red with pools of blood.

Between three and five shots were fired. Ms. Bhutto was hit in the neck.

"I am 70, but today I feel like an orphan," Saqib Hussain said as he shed tears in the emergency ward of Rawalpindi General Hospital, where Ms. Bhutto was pronounced dead after surgeons tried to save her.

Liaquat Bagh park, the venue for the Rawalpindi rally, has a grim history. It was the site where Liaquat Ali Khan, Pakistan's first prime minister, was assassinated in 1951.

Just a couple of kilometers away in Rawalpindi, which houses the headquarters of the Pakistan army, Ms. Bhutto's father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Pakistan's first democratically elected prime minister, was executed in 1979 by a previous military regime when she was 26.

Ms. Bhutto's party has repeatedly complained that the government of President Pervez Musharraf was providing inadequate security.

On Oct. 18 she had narrowly escaped another assassination attempt, at her homecoming parade in Karachi, which left 140 dead.

The death toll from the attack yesterday stood at 20.

"They killed her father. They killed her two brothers. It is a national tragedy," Safraz Khan said at the hospital. "She was the force to unite Pakistan."

Her supporters pushed their way into the ward as hundreds of angry people wept and shouted in the corridors, fighting for space.

They chanted "Musharraf is a dog" and "Musharraf murderer."

Outside in the streets of Rawalpindi, youths lit fires at intersections. Traffic was stopped, cars vandalized. Electricity was cut, plunging the city into darkness. No police were visible in the hospital or the streets.

The scenes were repeated in major cities across Pakistan. In Karachi, young supporters went on the rampage, shooting randomly at passing cars.

The crowd at the hospital seemed sure that the army, Mr. Musharraf, and the "establishment" were behind the attack.

Ms. Bhutto herself made similar allegations after the October attack. Security experts believe that al-Qaeda and Taliban militants were the most likely perpetrators of both strikes.

"GHQ [general headquarters of the army] killed her," Sardar Saleem, a former member of parliament, said at the hospital.

Makhdoom Amin Fahim, deputy leader of the PPP, announced 40 days of mourning, saying simply: "We are shattered."

Ms. Bhutto was head of the party, and without her there aren't any other popular figures to lead it.

It was also the only major liberal political force in the country, stridently opposed to religious extremism. Washington had backed her strongly as the next prime minister, a post she had already held twice before and looked likely to win again if the election was fair.

"She is my leader. She's my sister. She is the voice of the oppressed people of Pakistan," party activist Iktidar Ali said.

Ms. Bhutto knew the risks she was taking by openly campaigning.

But she said she believed most Pakistanis opposed extremism.

In a recent speech, she said: “This great land of ours is not a land of terrorists. It is not a land of militants. It is a land of labourers, who work hard to earn a living.”

Yesterday in her speech she said she would be the “leading light to tackle terrorism.”

Ms. Bhutto’s body was on a special flight last night, bound for her hometown of Larkana in the south, where her father is buried in a giant mausoleum.

Her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, and their three children flew to Rawalpindi from Dubai, where the family had lived in exile. They planned to bury her today.

Suicide bomb attacks in Pakistan have sharply escalated this year since the bloody storming of the Red Mosque in Islamabad, which had been taken over by extremists.

Taliban and al-Qaeda militants have amassed in Pakistan’s tribal area, which borders Afghanistan. U.S. Defence Secretary Robert Gates warned last week that al-Qaeda had now turned its focus on Pakistan, which has been a key ally in the U.S.-led war on terror.

Benazir Bhutto, 54, Lived in Eye of Pakistan Storm

*By Jane Perlez and Victoria Burnett
New York Times
December 28, 2007*

Charismatic, striking and a canny political operator, Benazir Bhutto, 54, was reared amid the privileges of Pakistan's aristocracy and the ordeals of its turbulent politics. Smart, ambitious and resilient, she endured her father's execution and her own imprisonment at the hands of a military dictator to become the country's — and the Muslim world's — first female leader.

A deeply polarizing figure, Ms. Bhutto, the “daughter of Pakistan,” was twice elected prime minister and twice expelled from office in a swirl of corruption charges that propelled her into self-imposed exile in London for much of the past decade. She returned home this fall, billing herself as a bulwark against Islamic extremism and a tribune of democracy.

She was killed on Thursday in a combined shooting and bombing attack at a rally in Rawalpindi, one of a series of open events she attended in spite of a failed assassination attempt against her the day she returned to Pakistan in October.

A woman of grand aspirations with a taste for complex political maneuvering, Ms. Bhutto was first elected prime minister in 1988 at the age of 35. The daughter of one of Pakistan's most charismatic and democratically inclined prime ministers, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, she inherited the mantle of the populist Peoples Party that he founded, and which she came to personify.

Despite numerous accusations of corruption and an evident predilection for luxury, Ms. Bhutto, the pale-skinned scion of a wealthy landowning family, successfully cast herself as a savior of Pakistan's millions of poor and disenfranchised. She inspired devotion among her followers, even in exile, and the image of her floating through a frenzied crowd in her gauzy white head scarf became iconic.

In October, she staged a high-profile return to her home city of Karachi, drawing hundreds of thousands of supporters to an 11-hour rally and leading a series of political demonstrations in opposition to the country's military leader, President Pervez Musharraf.

But in a foreshadowing of the attack that killed her, the triumphal return parade was bombed, killing at least 134 of her supporters and wounding more than 400. Ms. Bhutto herself narrowly escaped harm and shouted at later rallies, “Bhutto is alive!”

Despite her courageous, or rash, defiance of danger, her political plans were sidetracked from the moment she set foot in Pakistan: She had been negotiating for months with Mr. Musharraf over a power-sharing arrangement, only to see the general declare emergency rule instead.

The political dance she has deftly performed since her return — one moment standing up to President Musharraf, the next seeming to accommodate him — stirred hope and distrust among Pakistanis. A graduate of Harvard and Oxford, she brought the backing of the governments in Washington and

London, where she impressed with her political lineage and considerable charm and was viewed as a palatable alternative to the increasingly unpopular Mr. Musharraf.

But her record in power left ample room for skepticism. During her two stints in that job — first from 1988 to 1990 and again from 1993 to 1996 — she developed a reputation for acting imperiously and impulsively. She faced deep questions about her personal probity in office, which led to corruption cases against her in Switzerland, Spain and Britain, as well as in Pakistan. Her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, was jailed for eight years in Pakistan on corruption charges before his release on bail in 2004.

During her years in office, as during those of her rival, the former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan ran up enormous and unserviceable foreign debts and billions of dollars in foreign aid went unaccounted for. Ms. Bhutto, though progressive in her approach to Islam, was not above bending to the will of religious conservatives for when politically expedient.

Ms. Bhutto grew up in the most rarefied atmosphere the poor, turbulent country had to offer. One longtime friend and adviser, Peter W. Galbraith, a former American ambassador to Croatia, recalled meeting Ms. Bhutto 1962 when they were children: he the son of John Kenneth Galbraith, the economist and American ambassador to India; she the daughter of the future Pakistani prime minister. Mr. Galbraith's father was accompanying Jacqueline Kennedy to a horse show in Lahore.

The two met again at Harvard, where Mr. Galbraith remembered Ms. Bhutto arriving as a prim, cake-baking 16-year-old fresh from a Karachi convent.

Ms. Bhutto often spoke of how her father encouraged her to study the lives of legendary female leaders, including Indira Gandhi and Joan of Arc, and as a young woman, she observed his political maneuvering up close.

After her father's death — he was hanged by another general who seized power, Zia ul-Haq — Ms. Bhutto stepped into the spotlight as his successor. She called herself chairperson for life of the opposition Pakistan Peoples Party, a seemingly odd title in an organization based on democratic ideals and one she has acknowledged quarreling over with her mother, Nusrat Bhutto, in the early 1990s.

Until her death, Ms. Bhutto ruled the party with an iron hand, jealously guarding her position, even while leading the party in absentia for nearly a decade.

Members of her party saluted her return to Pakistan, saying she was the best choice against President Musharraf. Chief among her attributes, they said, was her sheer determination.

But her egotism and her proclivity for back-room deals provoked distrust among detractors and some supporters.

“She believes she is the chosen one, that she is the daughter of Bhutto and everything else is secondary,” said Feisal Naqvi, a corporate lawyer in Lahore who knew Ms. Bhutto.

Ms. Bhutto's marriage to Mr. Zardari was arranged by her mother, a fact that Ms. Bhutto has often said was easily explained, even for a modern, highly educated Pakistani woman. To be acceptable to the Pakistani public as a politician she could not be a single woman, and what was the difference, she would ask, between such a marriage and computer dating?

Mr. Zardari, 51, is known for his love of polo and other perquisites of the good life like fine clothes, expensive restaurants, homes in Dubai and London, and an apartment in New York. He was minister of investment in Ms. Bhutto's second government. And it was from that perch that he made many of the deals that haunted Ms. Bhutto, and him, in the courts.

There were accusations that the couple had illegally taken \$1.5 billion from the state. It is a figure Ms. Bhutto vigorously contested.

Indeed, one of Ms. Bhutto's main objectives in seeking to return to power was to restore the reputation of her husband, especially after his prison term, said Abdullah Riar, a former senator in the Pakistani Parliament and a former colleague of Ms. Bhutto's.

"She told me, 'Time will prove he is the Nelson Mandela of Pakistan,'" Mr. Riar said.

The queen is dead. Long live the cause

*Ben Macintyre
The Times
December 28, 2007*

Assassins may change history but they rarely achieve their goal as they are blinded by anger and revenge.

Assassination may be the most extreme form of censorship, but it is not necessarily the most effective. Political murder changes history, but it seldom changes minds.

America would not be the same place today if John F. Kennedy had lived. The murders of Anwar Sadat and Yitzhak Rabin are central to any understanding of the course of modern Middle Eastern history. The world would be quite different if Reagan had been shot and killed, or Lincoln had not.

Yet it is undoubtedly true that political assassination rarely achieves the goal the assassin hopes for, and sometimes produces effects that are the reverse of those intended. Quite often, an assassination provokes outcomes that are entirely unpredictable: Gavrilo Princip certainly wanted to kill Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914; he did not intend to start a world war.

Whether the repulsive murder of Benazir Bhutto has the effect her killers intended depends on many factors that are now entirely beyond their control. Assassins seek to revise future history, to shape it in specific directions; they act from motives that are partly political, sometimes personal, and not infrequently deranged. Some assassins are seeking immortality; more often they confer immortality, in the form of martyrdom, on their victims.

Most assassins are swiftly forgotten. Who now remembers the names of the killers of Indira or Rajiv Gandhi? As an individual John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of Abraham Lincoln, is little more than a footnote. The name of the Hindu extremist who killed Mahatma Gandhi is not even mentioned in most Indian biographies. Lee Harvey Oswald won celebrity, but only because he, too, achieved a sort of perverse martyrdom among conspiracy theorists by being killed.

The word assassin has its origins in the Nizaris, a violent Islamic sect that emerged at the end of the 11th century in what is now northern Iran; they served as contract killers for political masters, usually after taking large amounts of drugs. Assassin derives from hashashin, Arabic for hashish.

Many assassins are simply anachronisms, seeking to reverse history when events have already moved on. Wilkes Booth hoped that killing Lincoln would reopen the wounds of the American Civil War (it didn't, and may have helped to salve them); Yigal Amir, who killed Rabin in 1995, was attempting to derail the peace process (he didn't, and Rabin's successor, Shimon Peres, accelerated it); Sirhan Sirhan, a Palestinian Arab, killed Bobby Kennedy in apparent retaliation for his support for Israel (but the Democratic Party's policy towards Israel was not merely unchanged, but reinforced); John Hinckley tried to kill Ronald Reagan because he thought it might make the actress Jodie Foster fall in love with him (needless to say, she did not).

The killers of Benazir Bhutto may find that instead of destroying the movement she headed, they have draped her in a martyr's mantle. Lincoln's murder ensured that, for successive generations, he was

above historical criticism. The killing of Martin Luther King lent the civil rights movement an unstoppable moral momentum.

It takes a subtle mind, far beyond the reach of the fanatic, to realise that political murder seldom works. When the opportunity to assassinate Hitler presented itself in 1944, Churchill sensibly demurred. In part his reasons were personal, and partly moral, since the killing of Reinhard Heydrich, the Nazi ruler of Czechoslovakia, had unleashed reprisals on a terrifying scale. But mostly, his thinking was pragmatic: Hitler was already losing his grip, and Himmler, potentially an even worse enemy, was waiting in the wings to take over.

Terrorists, by definition, are concerned only with brute revenge and instant fear, with destroying a hated enemy, not the subtleties of cause and effect. If, say, the IRA had managed to kill Margaret Thatcher in the Brighton bombing of 1984, the Tory Government would never have contemplated talks involving the IRA by 1995; Republicans would have been shut out from negotiation indefinitely, and perhaps for ever.

But terrorists do not think so far ahead; like the original Nizaris, high on their own self-righteousness, the killing is all that matters.

Bhutto's mourning supporters may reflect that the brutes of history are seldom assassinated. Stalin, Mao, Hitler, Pol Pot and Saddam had the tyrannical apparatus to ensure that the assassins did not get close. It is the brave and prominent public individuals, in an open society, who are most vulnerable to assassination: the Kennedys, the Gandhis, Lincoln, King and now Benazir Bhutto.

Whether yesterday's killing derails Bhutto's cause depends on the reaction of the Pakistani authorities, how swiftly and reliably her killers can be identified and, perhaps above all, who now steps up to take her place. The subcontinent has a horrific history of assassination, but also of recovering with extraordinary resilience: Sonia Gandhi followed Rajiv Gandhi followed Indira Gandhi. Solomon Bandaranaike, the murdered Prime Minister of what was then Ceylon, was soon succeeded by his wife; Benazir Bhutto followed her father, executed in 1979, and someone will follow her.

"Anyone can kill anyone," said Lynnette "Squeaky" Fromme, the acolyte of Charles Manson, who came close to assassinating Gerald Ford. In troubled Pakistan, assassination still seems horribly easy. The course of history has been changed by it, once again. But killing someone is easier than killing what they stood for, as those who plotted Bhutto's murder yesterday, and applaud it today, may soon discover.

Many Had the Desire, Means to Kill Bhutto

*By Joby Warrick and Thomas E. Ricks
Washington Post
Friday, December 28, 2007*

Even before the official search got underway in Pakistan, U.S. intelligence agencies yesterday were drawing up their own list of possible suspects in the assassination of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto -- a list that includes al-Qaeda as well as elements of Pakistan's own intelligence service.

In the initial hours after the slaying, intelligence officials had no firm indication of who was behind the attack and no independent means of verifying any early claims of responsibility. But it was quickly clear that numerous groups possessed both the means of carrying out the assassination and a deep antagonism toward Bhutto and the moderating influences she embodied, according to several current and former officials closely tracking the situation.

At the top of the list, the officials said, is the al-Qaeda terrorist network and its legion of allies, including loosely affiliated groups that espouse similar views and, in some cases, share training facilities and other resources. But several officials said it is equally plausible that the assassination was carried out with the support -- or at least the tacit approval -- of Pakistani government employees. Most of the officials expressed doubt, however, that President Pervez Musharraf himself would have approved the killing.

"There are many Pakistani intelligence types who don't like Benazir Bhutto," said one U.S. official familiar with the country's internal politics. "She had more than her share of detractors throughout the government." At the same time, the official said, the rioting and unrest triggered by the slaying threaten the country's stability in a way that directly undermines the government of Musharraf, who had been her chief political rival.

Some former U.S. intelligence and defense experts said they believe that the assassination marks the beginning of a new and significant Islamic extremist offensive against the government of Pakistan.

"I think they see an opportunity to make Pakistan a new battleground," retired Marine Gen. Anthony C. Zinni said of al-Qaeda and its allies. Zinni -- who dealt often with Musharraf when he was chief of Central Command, the U.S. military headquarters for the Middle East -- said there is "no doubt in my mind" that the culprits are linked to al-Qaeda, which has long-established havens along Pakistan's border with Afghanistan. He said the group was being pressured by recent agreements between the United States, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and "felt they had to do something."

Al-Qaeda possessed the clearest motive for the attack: the destabilization of Pakistan's government, which Osama bin Laden personally called for in a statement addressed to Pakistan's citizens this past fall. "They had means, plenty of martyr wannabes. And they probably had inside information on her route and security," said Bruce Reidel, a former CIA official and onetime member of the National Security Council.

U.S. officials also mentioned as a possible suspect the Sunni group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which has been linked to previous attempts to assassinate Pakistani political figures.

Although Zinni is skeptical of the notion that Pakistani intelligence backed the assassination, other experts saw the hand of Pakistan's military intelligence arm, the Inter-Services Intelligence agency, which supported the Taliban inside Afghanistan until the U.S. invasion in 2001, and is believed to maintain links to Islamic extremist groups.

Andrew Exum, who fought in Afghanistan as a U.S. Army officer and now studies Islamic militant groups at King's College London, said he has "a hard time believing no one in ISI knew about this attack."

In the end, however, the facts may not matter as much as perception, said Barnett R. Rubin, a New York University expert on South Asian affairs. "I know what many people in Pakistan and Afghanistan believe: They think that the Pakistani military killed her," he said. "I am not endorsing this belief -- or denying it -- but it is a political reality."

Main suspects are warlords and security forces

*Jeremy Page
The Times
December 28, 2007*

The main suspects in the assassination are the foreign and Pakistani Islamist militants who saw Ms Bhutto as a Westernised heretic and an American stooge, and had repeatedly threatened to kill her.

But fingers will also be pointed at the Inter-Services Intelligence agency, (ISI) which has had close ties to the Islamists since the 1970s and has been used by successive Pakistani leaders to suppress political opposition. Ms Bhutto narrowly escaped an assassination attempt in October, when a suicide bomber struck at a rally in Karachi to welcome her back from exile.

Earlier that month two Pakistani militant warlords based in the country's northwestern areas had threatened to kill her.

One was Baitullah Mehsud, a top militant commander fighting the Pakistani Army in South Waziristan, who has ties to al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taleban. The other was Haji Omar, the leader of the Pakistani Taleban, who is also from South Waziristan and fought with the Afghan Mujahidin against the Soviets in Afghanistan.

Ms Bhutto said after the attack that she had received a letter, signed by someone claiming to be a friend of al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, threatening to slaughter her like a goat. But she also accused Pakistani authorities of not providing her with sufficient security, and hinted that they may have been complicit in the Karachi attack.

She indicated that she had more to fear from unidentified members of a power structure that she described as allies of the "forces of militancy".

Analysts say that President Musharraf is unlikely to have ordered her assassination, but that elements of the Army and intelligence service stood to lose money and power if she became prime minister. The ISI includes some Islamists who became radicalised while running the American-funded campaign against the Soviets in Afghanistan and were opposed to her on principle. Saudi Arabia is also thought to have frowned on Ms Bhutto as being too secular and Westernised and to have favoured Nawaz Sharif, another former Prime Minister.