

Reflections on Benazir Bhutto



Editor
Dr. Javaid Laghari

In the name of God, the most beneficent, the most merciful

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Dedicated to the
martyrs of Pakistan who
laid down their lives for democracy

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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.

[PPP Website](#)

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 coverup 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

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, personalised 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 organisation of the election campaign, and the details of election practice and observation that would be key to the result. There was in retrospect and even perhaps at the time an eerie 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 modernisation' 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 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 unardonable 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 should those who subvert the constitution 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 vaporuous, 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 kerf 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 neighbouring 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 organising 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, nobel 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 4:00pm. 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 she 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 speakers 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 Senator PPP

The News
January 19, 2008

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

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 Afghani-stan, 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 a 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 'Under19 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.

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."

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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.

The writer has worked as a journalist in the US, the Middle East and Pakistan. She is a candidate for the National Assembly and the Sindh Provincial Assembly on a PPP ticket

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 naïve 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 criticised 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 modelled 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 death that she refused to be frightened of. She was equally fearless of failure. In 1986, at

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

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 sceptical 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 who 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 realise 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 recognise 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 mobilising 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 pummelled 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 globalisation 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

DAWN

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 Zulifikar 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 caste 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 its 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

The News

January 6, 2008

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 naïve 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

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 you come in a jump suit? Do you want to check? If it's not too late when we finish we will drop by for coffee. Let me know if Harry's bar allows you 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

December 30, 2007

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 rivalling 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.

Gulf News

December 29, 2007

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 westernised 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.

Razeshta Sethna is a journalist/writer

The News
January 1, 2008

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 herself 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 chadharys 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 Zulifikar 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 bury 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.

'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 doublecheck." 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 Shahra-e-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.

Outlook India

January 14, 2008

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 mythified 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 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.

"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

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India Today

December 28, 2007

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.

DAWN

December 28, 2007

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

The Washington Post

December 28, 2007

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 days 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."

Hindustan Times
December 28, 2007

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

[PPP Website](#)

January 11, 2008

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

Daily Times
December 29, 2007

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 unfavourably 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 practise 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.

DAWN

December 29, 2007

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 immortalised 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 symbolised 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 realise that they have basically taken us to hell in a hand-basket?

DAWN

December 29, 2007

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

DAWN

December 29, 2007

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.

Gulf News

December 29, 2007

They are killing women!

Mohammed Almezal

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, polarised 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 agonises 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'etat." 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 recognise 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 civilised nation.

The Nation

December 29, 2007

Benazir's legacy!

Raof 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 vandalise 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 despatch 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 imperilled 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-centred 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 Nation

December 29, 2007

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, Sind, 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 Klashnikov 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, Klashnikov 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 anti-establishment. 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 destabilising 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.

The Nation

December 29, 2007

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.

*The writer is an Islamabad-based
freelance columnist*

The News
December 30, 2007

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.

The writer is head of the BBC's Urdu Service, is the author of the forthcoming novel A Case of Exploding Mangoes

The Nation

December 31, 2007

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 organisation 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 polarised 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.

The author is a professor of Political Science at the Lahore University of Management Sciences

Daily Times
January 1, 2008

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 analyse, 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 realise 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.

DAWN

January 1, 2008

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.

The Washington Times

January 2, 2008

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 photosynthesise 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 destabilise 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 janitors 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.

Mahmud Sipra is a best selling author and an independent columnist

Daily Times
January 3, 2008

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 had 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 apologised 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 personalised, endeavour. 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.

The Nation

January 3, 2008

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 Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in the wake of a military coup d'etat 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 signalled 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.

Tanvir Ahmad Khan is a former foreign secretary of Pakistan

Gulf News
January 4, 2007

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.

Indus Asia Online Journal

January 4, 2008

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 (pre-sunset 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-centred 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.

The News
January 12, 2008

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 realised 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.

Outlook India

January 14, 2008

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.

The writer is co-host of PostGlobal, an online discussion of international issues

The Washington Post

December 28, 2007

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 'favourable 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.

The writer is a marketing consultant based in Karachi. He is also a poet

Daily Times
January 12, 2008

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.

Husain Haqqani, a professor at Boston University, is Co-Chair of the Hudson Institute's Project on Islam and Democracy. He is the author of the Carnegie Endowment book "Pakistan Between Mosque and Military" and served as an adviser to Ms Bhutto. His wife, Farahnaz Ispahani, is a PPP candidate for parliamentary elections

CNN

January 8, 2008

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 writer is chairwoman of the Pakistan People's Party and served as prime minister of Pakistan from 1988 to 1990 and from 1993 to 1996. She lives in exile in Dubai

The Washington Post

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