

Benazir assassinated

We condemn the ghastly act

ULLETS and bombs of maniacs finally found their target in Pakistan. They succeeded in stopping the bold strides of Benazir Bhutto, who, knowing fully well the risks, remained iron-willed against forces set to spread undemocratic and extremist ideology throughout Pakistan. It is deplorable that she could not finish the battle against those elements. In a poignant twist of fate, she was stopped when common people were beginning to rally behind her to demilitarise country's politics and pave the way for democracy.

It is indeed a tragic finale of an illustrious political career that rose and fell and rose again from its own ashes, like the Biblical phoenix bird. Twice elected prime minister of Pakistan, between 1988 and 1996, Benazir was forced to resign on both occasions on charges that ranged from incompetence to corruption. Recently, Benazir Bhutto managed to attract world attention with her fiery speeches in which she was unequivocal in denouncing the rise of various extremist groups in Pakistan under the patronage of local and foreign vested powers. She in fact emerged as the clearest and loudest voice against the proliferation of the extremist elements under the rule of Musharraf. Hence the question is, what has Musharraf been doing all this time when he claimed to have contained them effectively? The spate of violence that took place in Islamabad and Rawalpindi indicates massive security failure on the part of the Pakistan government. Benazir Bhutto and other leaders of PPP are known to have repeatedly asked for better security for her. It is only evident now that it did not come when she needed it most.

We strongly feel the proliferation of terrorism and the frequency and ruthlessness of terrorist attacks in Pakistan should once again be taken with due seriousness by the leaders of the SAARC countries for terrorism seems to have spread its tentacles in the region including Bangladesh. We therefore believe this is time for taking collective action to contain the growing threat. Let Benazir's assassination galvanise all the leaders of SAARC to stand united against these obscurantist elements.

We express our deepest condolence at the untimely demise of Benazir Bhutto and join the people of Pakistan in praying for the salvation of her soul.

A step in the right direction

Anti-graft issue in curriculum

THE all pervasive nature of corruption and the impunity culture growing around it have had a telling effect on the national economy, the traditional value system and the way politics and governance operated in the country. The society was taken over by an upstart money elite with their insatiable acquisitive lifestyle as the saner and cultural elements beat a retreat.

In this context, it's heartening to note that primary and secondary level textbooks would incorporate chapters on the vice of corruption and how to combat it from 2009 academic year. Already, the subject has been included in the textbooks of class IX and XI. But the ACC chairman Hasan Mashud Chowdhury who pioneered the move favours teaching the subject from the ground up so that a revulsion against corruption is instilled in the minds of the children. That's why the broad sweep from class I to XII.

In not too distant a past, corrupt people would be looked down upon in the society, even ostracised, but down the line acquisition of money and wealth, regardless of the manner of it, came to be secretly adored as it could even buy legal impunity.

There were definitive ethical and moral content to the school curricula in the past but this has long since been missing. From this point of view, inculcation of moral values in impressionable minds through the medium of tales with a moral or proverbs is highly recommended. In fact, it is of utmost importance for the National Curriculum & Textbook Board (NCTB) to carefully decide on the contents and presentation of the points at issue in addressing corruption and malpractice.

The anti-corruption drive by its startling revelations have sensitised the people about the malaise. Those who give bribe and those who take it are equally to blame. This message should be dinned into the ears of all segments of society. Social awareness is very important there.

A tragedy born of military despotism and anarchy

The assassination of Benazir Bhutto heaps despair upon Pakistan. Now her party must be democratically rebuilt

TARIQ ALI

IT IS difficult to imagine any good coming out of this tragedy, but there is one possibility. Pakistan desperately needs a political party that can speak for the social needs of a bulk of the people. The People's Party founded by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was built by the activists of the only popular mass movement the country has known: students, peasants and workers who fought for three months in 1968-69 to topple the country's first military dictator.

an assassin in 1953. The killer, Said Akbar, was immediately shot dead on the orders of a police officer involved in the plot. Not far from here, there once stood a colonial structure where nationalists were imprisoned. This was Rawalpindi jail. It was here that Benazir's father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was hanged in April 1979. The military tyrant responsible for his judicial murder made sure the site of the tragedy was destroyed as well.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's death poisoned relations between his Pakistan People's party and the army. Party activists, particularly in the province of Sind, were brutally tortured, humiliated and, sometimes, disappeared or killed.

Pakistan's turbulent history, a result of continuous military rule and unpopular global alliances, confronts the ruling elite now with serious choices. They appear to have no positive aims. The overwhelming majority of the country disapproves of the government's foreign policy. They are angered by its lack of a serious domestic policy except for further enriching a callous and greedy elite that includes a swollen, parasitic military. Now they watch helplessly as politicians are shot dead in front of them.

Benazir had survived the bomb blast but was felled by bullets fired at her car. The assassins, mindful of

their failure in Karachi a month ago, had taken out a double insurance this time. They wanted her dead. It is impossible for even a rigged election to take place now. It will have to be postponed, and the military high

command is no doubt contemplating another dose of army rule if the situation gets worse, which could easily happen.

What has happened is a multi-layered tragedy. It's a tragedy for a

country on a road to more disasters. Torrents and foaming cataracts lie ahead. And it is a personal tragedy. The house of Bhutto has lost another member. Father, two sons and now a daughter have all died unnatural deaths.

I first met Benazir at her father's house in Karachi when she was a fun-loving teenager, and later at Oxford. She was not a natural politician and had always wanted to be a diplomat, but history and personal tragedy pushed in the other direction. Her father's death transformed her. She had become a new person, determined to take on the military dictator of that time. She had moved to a tiny flat in London, where we would endlessly discuss the future of the country. She would agree that land reforms, mass education programmes, a health service and an independent foreign policy were positive constructive aims and crucial if the country was to be saved from the vultures in and out of uniform. Her constituency was the poor, and she was proud of the fact.

She changed again after becoming prime minister. In the early days, we would argue and in response to my numerous complaints - all she would say was that the world had changed. She couldn't be on the "wrong side" of history. And so, like many others, she made her peace with Washington. It was this that

finally led to the deal with Musharraf and her return home after more than a decade in exile. On a number of occasions she told me that she did not fear death. It was one of the dangers of playing politics in Pakistan.

It is difficult to imagine any good coming out of this tragedy, but there is one possibility. Pakistan desperately needs a political party that can speak for the social needs of a bulk of the people. The People's Party founded by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was built by the activists of the only popular mass movement the country has known: students, peasants and workers who fought for three months in 1968-69 to topple the country's first military dictator.

Benazir's horrific death should give her colleagues pause for reflection. To be dependent on a person or a family may be necessary at certain times, but it is a structural weakness, not a strength for a political organisation. The People's Party needs to be reformed as a modern and democratic organisation, open to honest debate and discussion, defending social and human rights, uniting the many disparate groups and individuals in Pakistan desperate for any halfway decent alternative, and coming forward with concrete proposals to stabilise occupied and war-torn Afghanistan. This can and should be done. The Bhutto family should not be asked for any more sacrifices.

The author is a well known writer and political analyst. This article was published in The Guardian on December 28, 2007.



Life reflecting her country's contradictions

PAMELA CONSTABLE

WITH her luminous eyes and strong features framed by a flowing white head scarf, Benazir Bhutto was the face of Pakistan's democratic hopes - a face that had been thrust into the limelight with the execution of her father in 1979 and that remained there, aging gracefully, until her assassination in 2007.

Bhutto, 54, was a charismatic but controversial political leader whose highly magnified life was marked by vertiginous twists of fate -- family tragedies, political triumphs and defeats, accusations of corruption and autocracy -- that often led to comparisons with the Kennedy clan in the United States and the Gandhi-Nehru dynasty of India.

Following in the footsteps of her father, Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, she was twice chosen as Pakistan's prime minister in the late 1980s and the 1990s, but was also twice driven from office amid charges of corruption and incompetence. This winter, after years of self-imposed exile, Bhutto was attempting to stage a high-risk political comeback that could have led to a third term as premier in elections next month.

Instead, Bhutto's slaying, which occurred at the site where Pakistan's first prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, was gunned down in 1951, seemed destined to plunge her fragile homeland into political free fall, vulnerable both to the predations of increasingly violent Islamic extremist forces and to the resulting temptations of military control.

Benazir Bhutto was a woman of many contradictions. Her complex personality and tumultuous career reflected the deep social schisms and paralyzing political power

struggles of the vast, impoverished country she briefly governed and long represented as a flawed but passionate advocate for change.

She was born June 21, 1953, into a life of feudal privilege and wealth in a highly stratified society, then sent to boarding schools and on European vacations in sports cars while millions of her illiterate countrymen toiled in brick kilns and wheat fields for pennies a day. Yet she went on to become a champion of popular democracy who headed her country's closest equivalent to a secular Western movement, the Pakistan People's Party.

Bhutto, nicknamed "Pinkle" for her rosy complexion, was a graduate of Radcliffe College and Oxford University who spoke cultured English and moved easily through the drawing rooms of London and Georgetown. Yet she also submitted to a traditional arranged marriage and, while speaking up for the rights of women in Muslim societies, was always careful to publicly observe the stylistic dictates of her religion.

Bhutto broke with family tradition by not covering her face with a veil in public. Instead, her white head scarf, known as a dupatta, became her political trademark -- a symbolic bridge between tradition and modernity. She was often shown in photographs adjusting the scarf modestly over her hair as she delivered ringing, impassioned speeches on foreign policy or economic reform.

She was a highly disciplined and

wily politician who kept a grip on her party, remaining its lifelong president and making all its decisions, even during her long exile in London and Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Despite her cult status as a democratic leader, she flirted opportunistically with military power-sharing and attempted rapprochement with Afghanistan's Islamic Taliban rulers when it seemed expedient.

Above all, she was her father's daughter, inspired by his stories of Napoleon, Abraham Lincoln and Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and raised with foreign democratic leaders at the dinner table. Then in 1977, a military coup plucked Pinkle from carefree college life. Her father was thrown into prison, tried on dubious charges of corruption and murder conspiracy and finally hanged in 1979 on orders from Pakistan's dictator, Gen. Mohammad Zia ul-Haq.

In an autobiography, "Daughter of Destiny," Bhutto described in revealing detail her youthful visits to her father in prison, especially her memories of his dignity and determination under squalid, humiliating conditions and in the face of death. His own autobiography, written from prison, was titled "If I Am Assassinated."

Later, Bhutto faced her own ordeal of house arrest, prison and exile, but she emerged toughened and determined to carry on her father's legacy as a secular reformer. It was a goal she pursued,

with deviations into unsavory political intrigues and the temptations of personal power, for the rest of her life.

"There was a kind of fatalism about Benazir. She saw herself as being on a mission, to carry forward the message of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and she was determined to carry that mission out, come what may," said Shuja Nawaz, a Pakistani American scholar in Washington who knew her well.

"People accused her of being an opportunistic politician, but she was also very religious. She was resigned to doing what she had to do, and it must have taken a great deal of inner strength."

The high point of Bhutto's career came after her return to Pakistan in 1986, following nearly a decade of military rule, when she was welcomed by tumultuous mobs as the leader who could deliver the country from the darkness of the Zia years. "It is almost impossible to exaggerate the weight of expectation which her return aroused," author Ian Talbot wrote of her election as prime minister in 1988.

Even though she was an inspiration to Pakistan's poor voters, Bhutto proved a disappointing ruler. She traveled widely abroad and was extremely popular in Washington, and she enacted economic policies aimed at attracting foreign investment and reducing Pakistan's appalling poverty.

But she failed to control a series

of domestic conflicts, especially a spiral of ethnic and sectarian violence in Karachi, her native city. She was accused of trying to manipulate the courts and the press and of stooping to multiple acts of petty self-enrichment while in power. She was forced from office after two years, then reelected in 1993 and forced out a second time after three more years.

Many of the corruption charges involved her husband, businessman Asif Ali Zardari, who was snidely referred to as "Mr. 10 Percent." The pair were accused of taking kickbacks for government contracts, on items from imported tractors to steel mill improvements, and of hiding their gains in international bank accounts and real estate.

Zardari was also accused of drug trafficking and of involvement in the 1996 murder of Bhutto's brother Murtaza, who was widely described as creating political problems for her. In 1999, husband and wife were sentenced to five years in prison; Zardari ended up spending eight years behind bars, but Bhutto, who was abroad at the time, did not return.

Bhutto consistently denied the charges and said they were politically motivated, but the scandals disillusioned many of her followers. Meanwhile, her lofty ideals gradually sank to the level of a petty rivalry with her political nemesis, Nawaz Sharif of the Pakistan Muslim League, who was elected

prime minister twice, partly because of her failures in office.

Bhutto spent much of the last decade living abroad with her three children, largely to avoid prosecution. But early this year, she began quietly negotiating to return to her troubled homeland, where she still harbored dreams of returning to power and where some Western officials viewed a co-government headed by Bhutto and Pakistan's military president, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, as the best option for short-term stability.

Bhutto had been warned by friends and advisers not to return to Pakistan. Islamic terrorism was on the rise there, and the country's increasingly emboldened Islamic militants viewed her as a dangerously secular figure who was essentially the Western candidate for prime minister.

The degree of danger became starkly clear just hours after Bhutto's triumphant homecoming Oct. 18. As her caravan crawled through welcoming crowds in the port city of Karachi, two massive bombs exploded, sparing her life but killing more than 140 people. On Nov. 3, Musharraf declared emergency rule and Bhutto was placed under house arrest twice in the days that followed. But despite the restrictions and the risks, she continued speaking out against both military dictatorship and Islamic extremism.

Once elections were announced for January, she toyed briefly with the idea of a boycott but soon began campaigning in earnest, seeking out the crowds that idolized her and attempting to stage events that would echo her past political triumphs. It was in such a place, Liaquat Garden in the garrison city of Rawalpindi, that Bhutto met her fate.

Courtesy: Washington Post Foreign Service

Bali climate conference and the future

POST BREAKFAST

It is important to understand that global warming affects directly or indirectly the whole humanity living on planet earth. It is for this reason that we must have coordinated and concerted efforts to address this issue. The Bali roadmap as agreed, has been just the first step. Now begins the hard work of all nations working towards a deal in Copenhagen in 2009 to address the defining challenge of our time.



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

A drama-filled 190-nation conference ended mid-December after setting a 2009 deadline for a landmark pact to fight global warming. This was possible only after the United States backed down from its last-ditch objections. We in Bangladesh have followed the steps leading up to this conference with great care. It became that much more important for us after the recent devastating cyclone Sidr which followed the earlier twin floods.

It may be recalled that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) had underlined the connotation of global warming before the Bali Climate Conference. It was mentioned that human emissions of greenhouse gases rather than natural variations were warming the planet's surface. It also commented that temperatures were probably going to increase by 1.8-4°C (3.2-7.2°F) by the end of the

century, that sea levels were most likely to rise by 28-43cm, and that global warming was likely to influence the intensity of tropical storms. These findings were based on an unequivocal series of evidence which indicated that fossil fuel burning and land use change were affecting the climate on our planet. Consequently, negotiators during this latest round of UN climate talks in Bali were able to pause and contemplate the earlier treaty, which their forerunners had compiled in the 1997 Kyoto winter. However, discussion in Bali was harsher than anticipated.

Participants wanted the conference to endorse the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) conclusion that global greenhouse gas emissions should peak and begin to fall within 10-15 years. They wanted industrialised countries to commit to emissions cuts of 25-40% from 1990 levels by 2020 (the EU has already committed to 20% unilaterally), and the major developing countries to agree in principle to firm targets in the future. For

Europe, already committed to unilateral emissions cuts of 20% by 2020 and prepared to go further if others joined in, the grail was to leave Bali with the US, Japan, Russia and the rest of the industrial world signed up to big cuts. Drought-ridden African countries, and those likely to be erased from the geographical and political maps by rising sea levels also wanted the rich West, which has built its wealth largely on the back of coal and oil, to pay for the effects of the pollution they have caused and from which they have benefited.

The US and Canada however, on ideological grounds, and Japan because it is already struggling to meet its Kyoto Protocol targets, were determined to avoid anything firm now. Their arguments were supported by claims of "common but differentiated responsibilities" that other major emitters of the developing world like -- China, India, Brazil, South Korea -- should also accept the principle that at some point, they would have to come on board with numerically

defined emissions curbs. The talks overran their scheduled close by more than a day and delegates from the EU, US, G-77/China embarked on UN officials on a series of behind-the-scenes consultations aiming to break the remaining deadlock. Discussions on carbon caps went to the wire. Fortunately however, despite existing differences, the participants were able to agree on some least common denominators. This included the contentious issue of agreeing on the management of the Adaptation Fund, designed to provide money to help poorer countries protect themselves against climate change impacts. This deal saw the establishment of an independent board with representation from developed and developing countries, and from all regions.

It would be pertinent here to also note that another encouraging aspect emerged from the Bali meeting. Consensus was reached on the principle of rewarding poorer countries to protect their forests. It was widely acknowledged as the cheapest single way of curbing climate change, and ushering in benefits in other environmental areas such as biodiversity and fresh water conservation. Delegates agreed on a framework that could allow richer nations and companies to earn "carbon credits" by paying for forest protection in developing countries. This would require the valuing of standing forests but would also assist in

reducing deforestation. Environmentalists are hoping that by 2009 a mechanism will be found for leveraging funds from carbon trading to fund adaptation projects. It is being hoped that international carbon trading will subsequently pay for sea walls, fresh water infrastructure, new crop varieties, mosquito nets and what ever else that may be needed as the world warms and rainfall patterns change.

This aspect has assumed critical importance given the fact that there is still scarcity of available money globally for adaptation. The fund is still being measured in tens of millions of dollars, whereas estimate of the amounts needed run into tens of billions. Kyoto provided small sums of money into the Adaptation Fund but a successor treaty ought logically to leverage far more from the international carbon market. In this context it would also be pertinent to note that this would be impossible unless stakeholders take steps to ensure that the carbon market is big enough to generate significant adaptation funding. This is turn will not be possible without a wider and deeper set of emissions targets that produce a meaningful carbon price. Otherwise, the market is likely to remain too small to produce adequate funds.

The "Bali roadmap" has initiated a two-year process of negotiations designed to agree on a new set of emissions targets to replace those in the Kyoto Protocol. Now the map leads to Poznan in Poland

in a year's time, and to Copenhagen late in 2009 -- the scheduled final destination on the Bali roadmap. The next important staging-point on the path to Poznan will however be the Honolulu meeting in January 2008 of the "major economies" or "big