

## 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 Islamic 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 yesterday will almost certainly lead to the cancellation of the Jan. 8 parliamentary elections (already, the nation's second-largest opposition party has called for a boycott if the vote is held) and the possible imposition of extraordinary measures by the military -- another state of emergency or even martial law. President Pervez

**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.**

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.

Benazir 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 Islamic 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 Bush since the attacks of Sept. 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.

Yesterday, 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 last night the government itself was in despair. The attack -- a gunman cut her

down before a suicide-bomb explosion blew up her vehicle, early reports suggest -- bore the hallmarks of training by the al-Qaeda 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 canceled, 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 specter of extremism that is haunting this benighted land. But Musharraf may not survive the fallout of Bhutto's death. His actions have not been honorable, 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.

Courtesy: The Washington Post

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



## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Impact on US diplomacy amid division

HELENE COOPER AND STEVEN LEE MYERS

THE assassination of Benazir Bhutto on Thursday left in ruins the delicate diplomatic effort the Bush administration had pursued in the past year to reconcile Pakistan's deeply divided political factions. Now it is scrambling to sort through ever more limited options, as American influence on Pakistan's internal affairs continues to decline.

On Thursday, officials at the American Embassy in Islamabad reached out to members of the political party of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, according to a senior administration official. The very fact that officials are even talking to backers of Mr. Sharif, who they believe has too many ties to Islamists, suggests how hard it will be to find a partner the United States fully trusts.

The assassination highlighted, in spectacular fashion, the failure of two of President Bush's main objectives in the region: his quest to bring democracy to the Muslim world, and his drive to force out the Islamist militants who have hung on tenaciously in Pakistan, the nuclear-armed state considered ground zero in President Bush's fight against terrorism, despite the administration's long-running effort to root out al-Qaeda from the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

Administration officials say the United States still wants the Pakistani elections to proceed, either as scheduled on Jan. 8 or soon after. But several senior administration officials acknowl-

**Bush administration officials on Thursday had still not given up hope that Mr. Musharraf may be able to strike a ruling coalition with whoever becomes Ms. Bhutto's successor in her Pakistan Peoples Party. Mr. Bush's continued strong support for Mr. Musharraf could further erode his already declining popular support, even if the administration still sees his leadership as the best guarantor of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.**

edged that President Pervez Musharraf may decide to put off the elections if the already unstable political climate in Pakistan deteriorates further.

The administration official said American Embassy officials were trying to reach out to Pakistani political players across the board in the aftermath of the Bhutto assassination.

"Look, most of the people in Musharraf's party came out of Nawaz's party, the official said, referring to Mr. Sharif and speaking on condition of anonymity because of diplomatic sensitivities. While he acknowledged that an alliance between Mr. Sharif and Mr. Musharraf was unlikely given the long enmity between the men, he added, I wouldn't predict anything in politics."

Foreign policy analysts and diplomats said that if there were one thing that Ms. Bhutto's assassination has made clear, it was the inability of the United States to manipulate the internal political affairs of Pakistan. Even before the assassination, the United States had limited influence and did not back Ms. Bhutto to the hilt.

"We are a player in the Pakistani political system, said Wendy Chamberlin, a former United

States ambassador to Pakistan, adding that as such, the United States was partly to blame for Mr. Musharraf's dip in popularity. But, she added: This is Pakistan. And Pakistan is a very dangerous and violent place."

That said, Pakistan has never been more important for the United States than it is right now as it teeters on the edge of internal chaos. Bush administration officials have been trying mightily to balance the American insistence that Pakistan remain on the path to democracy and Mr. Musharraf's unwillingness to risk unrest that would allow al-Qaeda and the Taliban to operate more freely, particularly with American and NATO troops next door in Afghanistan.

That is why the administration had been fighting so hard, amid skepticism from many of its allies, to broker an agreement in which the increasingly unpopular Mr. Musharraf would share power with Ms. Bhutto after presidential and parliamentary elections. American officials viewed the power-sharing proposal partly as a way to force Mr. Musharraf onto a democratic path, and partly to relieve the growing pressure for his ouster.

On the basis of that plan, Ms.

Bhutto returned to Pakistan in October after eight years of self-imposed exile.

But the power-sharing deal never came to fruition, as the increasingly besieged Mr. Musharraf imposed a series of autocratic measures that left him politically weakened.

Administration officials continued to prod Ms. Bhutto toward an arranged marriage with Mr. Musharraf even during the emergency rule. Deputy Secretary of State John D. Negroponte traveled to Pakistan in November, and spoke by telephone to Ms. Bhutto while Mr. Musharraf had her under house arrest. With both sides balking at the power-sharing deal -- an agreement one Bush official acknowledged was "like putting two pythons in the same cage" -- Mr. Negroponte continued to push Ms. Bhutto to agree to the plan according to members of Ms. Bhutto's political party.

"I think it was insane," said Teresa Schaffer, a Pakistan expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, of the proposed alliance. "I don't think Musharraf ever wanted to share power."

Until this week, Bush administration officials were still hoping that Mr. Musharraf and Ms. Bhutto

would form an alliance between their political parties after Pakistan's Jan. 8 elections, which would bring about as close to a pro-American governing coalition in Pakistan as the United States was likely to get.

The Bhutto assassination upends that plan, but Bush administration officials on Thursday had still not given up hope that Mr. Musharraf may be able to strike a ruling coalition with whoever becomes Ms. Bhutto's successor in her Pakistan Peoples Party.

The problem with that scenario, though, is that Pakistani political parties are much more about strong, powerful individuals -- like Mr. Musharraf, Ms. Bhutto, or Mr. Sharif -- than about the parties themselves. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice telephoned Ms. Bhutto's second-in-command, Makhdoom Amin Fahim, to offer sympathy, and she pledged to continue to support elections in Pakistan, administration officials said.

Mr. Bush's continued strong support for Mr. Musharraf could further erode his already declining popular support, even if the administration still sees his leadership as the best guarantor of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.

"The danger is the centrism

elements of Pakistan will be so demoralised," said Stephen P. Cohen, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. He criticized the administration for not nurturing Pakistan's opposition for so long after Mr. Musharraf's coup in 1999. He expressed hope that the United States could still urge moderate parties to ally themselves with Mr. Musharraf, forming a governing coalition, assuming that the elections go ahead.

"It should wake up anybody who thinks that Pakistan is a stable country and that we can deal only with Musharraf," Mr. Cohen said of the assassination.

Ms. Schaffer and other Pakistan experts say the administration was making a mistake by viewing Mr. Sharif with suspicion. They said that he was a moderate who will work with the United States in fight against terrorism, citing his cooperation with Clinton administration. Senator Arlen Specter, Republican of Pennsylvania, was in Islamabad with Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy, Democrat of Rhode Island, on a scheduled trip and preparing to meet Ms. Bhutto at 9pm Thursday when the news of the bombing broke. They watched the news in their hotel, with initial reports that she had escaped injury giving way to confirmation of her death.

"I think our foreign policy relied on her personality as a stabilizing force," Mr. Specter told reporters by telephone. "Now, without her, we have to regroup."

This article is taken from *The New York Times*, December 28, 2007.

## MEMORIES OF BENAZIR BHUTTO

### The chirpy teenager, the old e-mails.

**Benazir Bhutto was the modern, liberal face of her otherwise poor, feudal and ill-governed country. She was Pakistan's light at the end of the tunnel. Now, with her death, the tunnel can only get longer and darker.**

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

THE assassination of Benazir Bhutto sends waves of sadness all the way from the heart down to the soul. She was a woman of true grit and determination who could have made a difference to Pakistan. That she had the chance twice to do that and failed is part of history. That her enemies were always baying for her blood and would not rest until she was thrown out of power, twice, is part of history as well. And yet there was always the future that beckoned Benazir Bhutto. Somehow there was always the feeling among people, including her detractors, that she had a way with the masses of Pakistan, that for all the sins she may have committed in office she was always the politician they could rely on to give them intimations of a new rainbow on the horizon.

It was just such a rainbow that lighted up Pakistan's lives when in 1986 she returned from exile, to marry Asif Zardari but more specifically to tell Ziaul Haq that his days were numbered. Millions saw in her the dreams that her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had once crafted, through the pretty incongruous and yet idealistic slogan of Islamic Socialism in the far headier days of the 1970s. It was now the daughter come to translate those dreams into reality, to take her place as heir to the Bhutto legacy so roughly cast into the mud through the hanging of the father. When Benazir Bhutto ascended to power in 1988, the first woman in a Muslim country to do so, possibilities of all the wonderful things that could happen to Pakistan expanded in quantum leaps of expectation. But then, those possibilities came to a quick end. It was the Bhutto family that suffered on, through the deaths in quick succession of the two sons of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Nusrat Bhutto, the long suffering wife of the man many Pakistanis call Shaheed Bhutto, lapsed into cancer. For Benazir Bhutto, what could have been an opportunity to redeem the old pledge made to Pakistan by her father turned into a nightmare of new exile. For eight years she battled charges of corruption even as she kept the flame of hope going among her supporters back home in Pakistan. And then she returned home, in October this year. Two months on, she is dead.

My recollections of Benazir Bhutto remain as verdant as the day I met her, on a hot June day in 1970. As one among a group of schoolboys gathered in Quetta to collect autographs from Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, we noticed a terribly chirpy girl, of our age, rush into the room. We guessed it was Benazir. Our feelings were confirmed when ZAB introduced her to us. And then she skipped away, into the next room. Benazir Bhutto became an individual of interest for my generation when she accompanied her father to the Simla conference in 1972. I still recall her telling Indian journalists, in all her late teenage shyness, that her ambition was to be part of Pakistan's diplomatic servicesomeday. I never met her after that, but when in 2000 I got in touch with her by e-mail, thanks to her party followers in London, she did the very decent thing by responding quickly to my message. I wished

to interview her for the newspaper I worked for at the time. Would she agree? To my intense surprise and happiness, she did not say no and asked me to e-mail my questions to her in Dubai. Within a few days she came back with the answers. We carried the interview.

And then for close to three years Benazir Bhutto and I kept in touch by e-mail. At one point I thought it necessary to let her in on the information that we had met in 1970. She was pleased. In her messages to me, she always addressed me as 'Syed Saab', which I found rather amusing. As I got increasingly involved in my work in Dhaka, my wife Zakia, living in London, developed links with Benazir Bhutto, who had begun spending a great length of time in that city. They met often, and stayed in contact by telephone. The last time they met, Zakia and Benazir went out for lunch in London, a few paces away from where her sister Sanam lived. Pakistan's former prime minister gave my wife a copy of a rather gushing biography of her penned by a loyalist. It is still there, autographed by Benazir, on the shelf right behind me as I write this paean to the assassinated Pakistani politician. And I write not because Benazir Bhutto fascinated me with her intellect or her politics (I could never agree with her assessment of the Bangladesh war of 1971 and was disappointed when she refused to acknowledge the stranded Biharis as citizens of Pakistan). I write because of the power woman she was in all the years she stayed busy with the calling of politics. It is her resilience that I pay tribute to, as I remember the heart-breaking meeting she had with her father only hours before he was led to the gallows by a crude military regime in 1979.

Benazir Bhutto was a cosmopolitan in every sense of the term and certainly lighted up any room she stepped into. In the late 1980s, as her motorcade rode by in London, a future president of the United States named Bill Clinton wished loudly that he could meet her. He did, when she came calling at the White House; and like so many others who met her, he was left deeply impressed. Her modernity was often disturbing for some of her countrymen. And then, in very traditional manner, she gave birth to babies even as she practised the profession of politics. She was a beautiful woman and as she moved from her forties into her fifties, the beauty seemed to blaze even more in her. She was one of those rare Third World politicians who most charmingly enhanced the appeal of politics through an infusion of the glamorous into it. She was at ease in the company of individuals more powerful than she in politics. Media men everywhere were only too willing to fall for her charisma, for she was smart and she spoke well.

Benazir Bhutto was the modern, liberal face of her otherwise poor, feudal and ill-governed country. She was Pakistan's light at the end of the tunnel. Now, with her death, the tunnel can only get longer and darker. And I will remember all the old words from her, in all those old e-mails. The world is a poorer place today without Benazir Bhutto to give it a heave-ho.

Syed Badrul Ahsan is Editor, Current Affairs, The Daily Star.

## Lending artefacts to foreign museums

PROF. SELINA MOHSIN

EACH country possesses its own history and culture. Arts and artefacts are evidence of a country's history which is unique. Some countries are homes of ancient civilizations and their historical objects enable us to understand their past history, culture and way of life. There are other countries where history and culture reached a glorious period during the middle ages or even later.

The heritage that survives from the past provides glimpses of what life was like centuries earlier. The preservation and display of such art and objects demonstrates an appreciation of the intrinsic value of tradition, culture, changing times, way of thinking and styles of the past.

Museums in most countries preserve, exhibit and lend their historical arts and artefacts to foreign museums so that numerous people of different cultures can appreciate the heritage of other countries. In addition to displaying work of historical significance on

loan to the public, contemporary museums count among its many responsibilities scholarship and education.

This opportunity to view arts and artefacts of different cultures and their provenance broadens our outlook and provides new insight to the contributions made by mankind before us. This is an innate part of education.

Nowadays it is possible to see historical artefacts of countries one has not visited through loans to foreign museums. In London, it was possible for me to see the splendours of Persepolis -- its metal work, stone reliefs, bronzes and jewellery evoking the delicate craftsmanship and luxury and grandeur of the Persian Empire.

Fine calligraphy, exquisite miniatures, vibrant colours of delicate carpets, ancient manuscripts, statues and objects display an excellence in craftsmanship and mastery that is not possible to replicate today. In Paris, France, an exhibition on "Suleiman the Magnificent" displayed valuable items of that particular Islamic era and were on loan from Turkey. Such

displays stimulate interest of a fascinating period and of forgotten cultures, kingdoms and empires. It even adds value and understanding of our own heritage.

The Palaces of St. Petersburg, the four imperial palaces of the Czar of Imperial Russia with many priceless treasures and masterpieces, were on loan at the Mississippi Arts Pavilion, USA, in 1996. It was one of the largest Russian Exhibition outside the country showcasing over 600 priceless objects. No endeavour of this magnitude could have been mounted without dedication, commitment and integrity of the Russian and American staff.

The "Princely Splendour", an exhibition of the Dresden Court between 1580-1620 mounted at the Metropolitan Museum of Art was loaned by the Museum of Dresden in Germany. It showed through art that the character of Dresden was profoundly shaped by its history from the late Renaissance to the late Baroque period.

Most countries and museums that lend historical objects, including items of natural history, assist

us, the viewers, to learn and understand through works of historical significance the contributions of specific periods, often complex but always interesting. To cite a few examples, one of the roles of the Portland Art Museum in USA is to loan historical objects to foreign museums and to receive such objects for its own display.

The Harvard Museum of Natural History has an international travel programme. The Leo Baeck Institute (LBI) for the study of history & culture of German speaking Jews is frequently requested to make its works available on loan to museums, galleries and exhibitions around the world.

The famous Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London is the world's greatest museum of applied and decorative arts. Its collection is available through loans to numerous other museums.

In recent years, there rose a need to understand and appreciate Islamic art and culture. The V&A recently mounted the most significant collection of Islamic ceramics,

silks, carpets, metal work, glass, manuscripts, paintings and other media with the generosity of Harwell plc. part of Abdul Jameel Group. The Jameel Gallery of Islamic Art is the finest in the world.

The Royal Academy in London mounts a continuous programme of internationally renowned loan exhibitions.

Often loaning a country's historical works can be a blessing regarding preservation. In developing countries, with rich historical background, some of the artefacts and manuscripts are quite often not preserved in controlled environment. As such, a decision to send arts and objects on loan attracts attention on the poor condition in which they were stored. Then, the question of adequate preservation becomes predominant and while sending such objects abroad it prompts the government of the concerned country to improve the conditions in which historical objects were earlier stored.

Certainly, there is always an ethical dimension in lending and borrowing historical works of art.

Honesty, integrity and respect for historical museum pieces are imperative for the country sending such pieces as well as for the country receiving them. Ethical code of conduct is intrinsic to such loans. This is the prime responsibility of persons handling such pieces.

Finally, it must be remembered that a country lending its arts and artefacts is enabling millions of viewers to learn about its civilizations which, more often than not, influenced the way the world is today. Religion often inspired great works of art and architecture. Glory in war had the same inspiring effect and peace helped to consolidate the cultural heritage of a country and helped in the development of dance, music, poetry paintings, learning and other art forms.

Cultural loans and exchanges are a testament to the positive relations between countries and museums. It is mutually enriching and enlightening for all.

Prof. Selina Mohsin is Education Adviser, Program Support Unit of Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

## NRBs in nation building

ABDUL HANNAN

THE first-ever non-resident Bangladeshi (NRB) conference is now being held (27-29 Dec) in Dhaka and attended by nearly one thousand distinguished expatriate Bangladeshi scholars and professionals from all over the world. The organisers of the conference, 'Scholars Bangladesh' who reportedly have compiled after extensive research a list of 21 thousand NRB professionals and scholars engaged in specialised important jobs abroad in science and technology, IT and telecommunication, business and finance, health education and medicine etc. certainly deserve our unstinted support and appreciation for doing

an excellent patriotic job.

It is understood the participating scholars are attending 20 seminars to present papers and discuss and debate various subjects including governance, local government, economic development, agriculture, investment, information technology, health education, use of submarine cable, renewable energy etc.

The nation expects concrete, substantive and implementable proposals and results out of the conference and follow-up action by joint effort of the organisers, NRB professionals, the government and private organisations, lest the conference should end into a meaningless euphoria over a galaxy of our NRB scholars and professionals.

The ostensible purpose of hold-

ing the conference supposedly is to honour our brilliant sons and daughters who have earned great eminence and distinction in their respective specialised area of work abroad. It is not understood why the local eminent artists and scholars have been included in the list of award winners in recognition of their talent and scholarship. The focus of the conference is also how best to harness NRBs' resources, talent, skill and expertise for purposes of our national development. For obvious reasons of lack of job opportunity and facility for research, we could not contain the brain drain from our country. It is not sensible to expect of the NRB scholars and professionals to leave their lucrative jobs and return home. However, it is needless

to say that the expatriates owe a debt of deep gratitude to their motherland for getting their early academic training in schools, universities and medical colleges almost for free in terms of dollars, at the expense of public exchequer. It is their moral responsibility to return the debt by their involvement in national development in one way or another by way of investment of money in business, investment of their talent and skill in human resource development in the field of education, health, information technology, water, sanitation and environment, agriculture etc.

May be, many of the NRB scholars and professionals are keen and willing to make their contribution in their respective fields provided

there is available favourable condition and facilities and a permanent institutional arrangement by the government. The government may take appropriate action in the matter by instituting an 'expatriate talent pool project', in every concerned ministry and department to attend to offers of investment and training and research assistance by expatriate Bangladeshi scholars and professionals. There has been a tremendous economic growth in China and India by their expatriate experts through establishment of special economic zones for investment with active support and patronage of the government.

The government has an important role to play in making a success of the initiative taken by the organisers of the

conference. The third NRB conference in India was held in Bombay in 2005 and inaugurated by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Unlike the previous political governments, the present caretaker government comprises of scholars and technocrats and it is expected of them to be forthcoming in offering every support and encouragement by follow-up actions as a measure of continuing participation by the NRB scholars and professionals in national development efforts. The conference, undoubtedly, would have received added significance, grace and elegance if it was inaugurated by Dr Fakhrudin Ahmed, the chief adviser of the caretaker government.

Abdul Hannan is a former press counselor, Bangladesh UN mission in New York.