

Benazir: Daughter of the West

Sunday 16 December 2007, by [ALI Tariq](#) (Date first published: 29 November 2007).

Arranged marriages can be a messy business. Designed principally as a means of accumulating wealth, circumventing undesirable flirtations or transcending clandestine love affairs, they often don't work. Where both parties are known to loathe each other, only a rash parent, desensitised by the thought of short-term gain, will continue with the process knowing full well that it will end in misery and possibly violence. That this is equally true in political life became clear in the recent attempt by Washington to tie Benazir Bhutto to Pervez Musharraf.

The single, strong parent in this case was a desperate State Department – with John Negroponte as the ghoulish go-between and Gordon Brown as the blushing bridesmaid – fearful that if it did not push this through both parties might soon be too old for recycling. The bride was certainly in a hurry, the groom less so. Brokers from both sides engaged in lengthy negotiations on the size of the dowry. Her broker was and remains Rehman Malik, a former boss of Pakistan's FIA, who has been investigated for corruption by the National Accountability Bureau and who served nearly a year in prison after Benazir's fall, then became one of her business partners and is currently under investigation (with her) by a Spanish court looking into a company called Petrolina FZC, which made questionable payments to Iraq under Saddam Hussein. Documents, if genuine, show that she chaired the company. She may have been in a hurry but she did not wish to be seen taking the arm of a uniformed president. He was not prepared to forgive her past. The couple's distaste for each other yielded to a mutual dependence on the United States. Neither party could say 'no', though Musharraf hoped the union could be effected inconspicuously. Fat chance.

Both parties made concessions. She agreed that he could take off his uniform after his 're-election' by Parliament, but it had to be before the next general election. (He has now done this, leaving himself dependent on the goodwill of his successor as army chief of staff.) He pushed through a legal ruling – yet another sordid first in the country's history – known as the National Reconciliation Ordinance, which withdrew all cases of corruption pending against politicians accused of looting the national treasury. The ruling was crucial for her since she hoped that the money-laundering and corruption cases pending in three European courts – in Valencia, Geneva and London – would now be dismissed. This doesn't seem to have happened.

Many Pakistanis – not just the mutinous and mischievous types who have to be locked up at regular intervals – were repelled, and coverage of 'the deal' in the Pakistan media was universally hostile, except on state television. The 'breakthrough' was loudly trumpeted in the West, however, and a whitewashed Benazir Bhutto was presented on US networks and BBC TV news as the champion of Pakistani democracy – reporters loyally referred to her as 'the former prime minister' rather than the fugitive politician facing corruption charges in several countries.

She had returned the favour in advance by expressing sympathy for the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, lunching with the Israeli ambassador to the UN (a litmus test) and pledging to 'wipe out terrorism' in her own country. In 1979 a previous military dictator had bumped off her father with Washington's approval, and perhaps she thought it would be safer to seek permanent shelter underneath the imperial umbrella. HarperCollins had paid her half a million dollars to write a new book. The working title she chose was 'Reconciliation'.

As for the general, he had begun his period in office in 1999 by bowing to the spirit of the age and

titling himself 'chief executive' rather than 'chief martial law administrator', which had been the norm. Like his predecessors, he promised he would stay in power only for a limited period, pledging in 2003 to resign as army chief of staff in 2004. Like his predecessors, he ignored his pledge. Martial law always begins with the promise of a new order that will sweep away the filth and corruption that marked the old one: in this case it toppled the civilian administrations of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. But 'new orders' are not forward movements, more military detours that further weaken the shaky foundations of a country and its institutions. Within a decade the uniformed ruler will be overtaken by a new upheaval.

Dreaming of her glory days in the last century, Benazir wanted a large reception on her return. The general was unhappy. The intelligence agencies (as well as her own security advisers) warned her of the dangers. She had declared war on the terrorists and they had threatened to kill her. But she was adamant. She wanted to demonstrate her popularity to the world and to her political rivals, including those inside her own fiefdom, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). For a whole month before she boarded the Dubai-Karachi flight, the PPP were busy recruiting volunteers from all over the country to welcome her. Up to 200,000 people lined the streets, but it was a far cry from the million who turned up in Lahore in 1986 when a very different Benazir returned to challenge General Zia ul-Haq. The plan had been to move slowly in the Bhuttomobile from Karachi airport to the tomb of the country's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, where she would make a speech. It was not to be. As darkness fell, the bombers struck. Who they were and who sent them remains a mystery. She was unhurt, but 130 people died, including some of the policemen guarding her. The wedding reception had led to mayhem.

The general, while promising to collaborate with Benazir, was coolly making arrangements to prolong his own stay at President's House. Even before her arrival he had considered taking drastic action to dodge the obstacles that stood in his way, but his generals (and the US Embassy) seemed unconvinced. The bombing of Benazir's cavalcade reopened the debate. Pakistan, if not exactly the erupting volcano portrayed in the Western media, was being shaken by all sorts of explosions. The legal profession, up in arms at Musharraf's recent dismissal of the chief justice, had won a temporary victory, resulting in a fiercely independent Supreme Court. The independent TV networks continued to broadcast reports that challenged official propaganda. Investigative journalism is never popular with governments and the general often contrasted the deference with which he was treated by the US networks and BBC television with the 'unruly' questioning inflicted on him by local journalists: it 'misled the people'. He had become obsessed with the media coverage of the lawyers' revolt. A decline in his popularity increased the paranoia. His advisers were people he had promoted. Generals who had expressed divergent opinions in 'frank and informal get-togethers' had been retired. His political allies were worried that their opportunities to enrich themselves even further would be curtailed if they had to share power with Benazir.

What if the Supreme Court were now to declare his re-election by a dying and unrepresentative assembly illegal? To ward off disaster, the ISI had been preparing blackmail flicks: agents secretly filmed some of the Supreme Court judges in flagrante. But so unpopular had Musharraf become that even the sight of judicial venerables in bed might not have done the trick. It might even have increased their support. (In 1968, when a right-wing, pro-military rag in Lahore published an attack on me, it revealed that I 'had attended sex orgies in a French country house organised by [my] friend, the Jew Cohn-Bendit. All the fifty women in the swimming-pool were Jewish.' Alas, this was totally false, but my parents were amazed at the number of people who congratulated them on my virility.) Musharraf decided that blackmail wasn't worth the risk. Only firm action could 'restore order' - i.e. save his skin. The usual treatment in these cases is a declaration of martial law. But what if the country is already being governed by the army chief of staff? The solution is simple. Treble the dose. Organise a coup within a coup. That is what Musharraf decided to do. Washington

was informed a few weeks in advance, Downing Street somewhat later. Benazir's patrons in the West told her what was about to happen and she, foolishly for a political leader who has just returned to her country, evacuated to Dubai.

On 3 November Musharraf, as chief of the army, suspended the 1973 constitution and imposed a state of emergency: all non-government TV channels were taken off the air, the mobile phone networks were jammed, paramilitary units surrounded the Supreme Court. The chief justice convened an emergency bench of judges, who – heroically – declared the new dispensation ‘illegal and unconstitutional’. They were unceremoniously removed and put under house arrest. Pakistan's judges have usually been acquiescent. Those who in the past resisted military leaders were soon bullied out of it, so the decision of this chief justice took the country by surprise and won him great admiration. Global media coverage of Pakistan suggests a country of generals, corrupt politicians and bearded lunatics: the struggle to reinstate the chief justice had presented a different picture.

Aitzaz Ahsan, a prominent member of the PPP, minister of the interior in Benazir's first government and currently president of the Bar Association, was arrested and placed in solitary confinement. Several thousand political and civil rights activists were picked up. Imran Khan, a fierce and incorruptible opponent of the regime, was arrested, charged with ‘state terrorism’ – for which the penalty is death or life imprisonment – and taken in handcuffs to a remote high-security prison. Musharraf, Khan argued, had begun yet another shabby chapter in Pakistan's history.

Lawyers were arrested all over the country; many were physically attacked by policemen. Humiliate them was the order, and the police obliged. A lawyer, ‘Omar’, circulated an account of what happened:

While I was standing talking to my colleagues, we saw the police go wild on the orders of a superior officer. In riot gear . . . brandishing weapons and sticks, about a hundred policemen attacked us . . . and seemed intensely happy at doing so. We all ran.

Some of us who were not as nimble on their feet as others were caught by the police and beaten mercilessly. We were then locked in police vans used to transport convicted prisoners. Everyone was stunned at this show of brute force but it did not end. The police went on mayhem inside the court premises and court buildings . . . Those of us who were arrested were taken to various police stations and put in lockups. At midnight, we were told that we were being shifted to jail. We could not get bail as our fundamental rights were suspended. Sixty lawyers were put into a police van ten feet by four feet wide and five feet in height. We were squashed like sardines. When the van reached the jail, we were told that we could not get [out] until orders of our detention were received by the jail authorities. Our older colleagues started to suffocate, some fainted, others started to panic because of claustrophobia. The police ignored our screams and refused to open the van doors. Finally, after three hours . . . we were let out and taken to mosquito-infected barracks where the food given to us smelled like sewage water.

Geo, the largest TV network, had long since located its broadcasting facilities in Dubai. It was a strange sensation watching the network in London when the screens were blank in Pakistan. On the very first day of the emergency I saw Hamid Mir, a journalist loathed by the general, reporting from Islamabad and asserting that the US Embassy had given the green light to the coup because it regarded the chief justice as a nuisance and wrongly believed him to be ‘a Taliban sympathiser’. Certainly no US spokesperson or State Department adjunct in the Foreign Office criticised the dismissal of the eight Supreme Court judges or their arrest: that was the quid pro quo for Washington's insistence that Musharraf take off his uniform. If he was going to turn civilian he wanted all the other rules twisted in his favour. A newly appointed stooge Supreme Court would soon help him with the rule-bending. As would the authorities in Dubai, who suspended Geo's

facilities.

In the evening of that first day, and after several delays, a flustered General Musharraf, his hair badly dyed, appeared on TV, trying to look like the sort of leader who wants it understood that the political crisis is to be discussed with gravity and sangfroid. Instead, he came across as a dumbed down dictator fearful for his own political future. His performance as he broadcast to the nation, first in Urdu and then in English, was incoherent. The gist was simple: he had to act because the Supreme Court had 'so demoralised our state agencies that we can't fight the "war on terror"' and the TV networks had become 'totally irresponsible'. 'I have imposed emergency,' he said halfway through his diatribe, adding, with a contemptuous gesture: 'You must have seen it on TV.' Was he being sarcastic, given that most channels had been shut down? Who knows? Mohammed Hanif, the sharp-witted head of the BBC's Urdu Service, which monitored the broadcast, confessed himself flummoxed when he wrote up what he heard. He had no doubt that the Urdu version of the speech was the general's own work. Hanif's deconstruction – he quoted the general in Urdu and in English – deserved a broadcast all of its own:

Here are some random things he said. And trust me, these things were said quite randomly. Yes, he did say: 'Extremism bahut extreme ho gaya hai [extremism has become too extreme] . . . Nobody is scared of us anymore . . . Islamabad is full of extremists . . . There is a government within government . . . Officials are being asked to the courts . . . Officials are being insulted by the judiciary.'

At one point he appeared wistful when reminiscing about his first three years in power: 'I had total control.' You were almost tempted to ask: 'What happened then, uncle?' But obviously, uncle didn't need any prompting. He launched into his routine about three stages of democracy. He claimed he was about to launch the third and final phase of democracy (the way he said it, he managed to make it sound like the Final Solution). And just when you thought he was about to make his point, he took an abrupt turn and plunged into a deep pool of self-pity. This involved a long-winded anecdote about how the Supreme Court judges would rather attend a colleague's daughter's wedding than just get it over with and decide that he is a constitutional president . . . I have heard some dictators' speeches in my life, but nobody has gone so far as to mention someone's daughter's wedding as a reason for imposing martial law on the country.

When for the last few minutes of his speech he addressed his audience in the West in English, I suddenly felt a deep sense of humiliation. This part of his speech was scripted. Sentences began and ended. I felt humiliated that my president not only thinks that we are not evolved enough for things like democracy and human rights, but that we can't even handle proper syntax and grammar.

The English-language version put the emphasis on the 'war on terror': Napoleon and Abraham Lincoln, he said, would have done what he did to preserve the 'integrity of their country' – the mention of Lincoln was obviously intended for the US market. In Pakistan's military academies the usual soldier-heroes are Napoleon, De Gaulle and Atatürk.

What did Benazir, now outmanoeuvred, make of the speech as she watched it on TV in her Dubai sanctuary? Her first response was to say she was shocked, which was slightly disingenuous. Even if she had not been told in advance that an emergency would be declared, it was hardly a secret – for one thing, Condoleezza Rice had made a token public appeal to Musharraf not to take this course. Yet for more than 24 hours she was unable to give a clear response. At one point she even criticised the chief justice for being too provocative.

Agitated phone calls from Pakistan persuaded her to return to Karachi. To put her in her place, the authorities kept her plane waiting on the tarmac. When she finally reached the VIP lounge, her PPP

colleagues told her that unless she denounced the emergency there would be a split in the party. Outsmarted and abandoned by Musharraf, she couldn't take the risk of losing key figures in her party. She denounced the emergency and its perpetrator, established contact with the beleaguered opposition, and, as if putting on a new lipstick, declared that she would lead the struggle to get rid of the dictator. She now tried to call on the chief justice to express her sympathy but wasn't allowed near his residence.

She could have followed the example of her imprisoned colleague Aitzaz Ahsan, but she was envious of him: he had become far too popular in Pakistan. He'd even had the nerve to go to Washington, where he was politely received by society and inspected as a possible substitute should things go badly wrong. Not a single message had flowed from her Blackberry to congratulate him on his victories in the struggle to reinstate the chief justice. Ahsan had advised her against any deal with Musharraf. When generals are against the wall, he is reported to have told her, they resort to desperate and irrational measures. Others who offered similar advice in gentler language were also batted away. She was the PPP's 'chairperson-for-life' and brooked no dissent. The fact that Ahsan was proved right irritated her even more. Any notion of political morality had long ago been dumped. The very idea of a party with a consistent set of beliefs was regarded as ridiculous and outdated. Ahsan was now safe in prison, far from the madding hordes of Western journalists whom she received in style during the few days she spent under house arrest and afterwards. She made a few polite noises about his imprisonment, but nothing more.

The go-between from Washington arrived at very short notice. Negroponte spent some time with Musharraf and spoke to Benazir, still insisting that they make up and go through with the deal. She immediately toned down her criticisms, but the general was scathing and said in public that there was no way she could win the elections scheduled for January. No doubt the ISI are going to rig them in style. Had she remained loyal to him she might have lost public support, but he would have made sure she had a substantial presence in the new parliament. Now everything is up for grabs again. The opinion polls show that her old rival, Nawaz Sharif, is well ahead of her. Musharraf's hasty pilgrimage to Mecca was probably an attempt to secure Saudi mediation in case he has to cut a deal with the Sharif brothers - who have been living in exile in Saudi Arabia - and sideline her completely. Both sides deny that a deal was done, but Sharif returned to Pakistan with Saudi blessings and an armour-plated Cadillac as a special gift from the king. Little doubt that Riyadh would rather him than Benazir.

With the country still under a state of emergency and the largest media network refusing to sign the oath of allegiance that would allow them back on air, the polls scheduled for January can only be a general's election. It's hardly a secret that the ISI and the civilian bureaucracy will decide who wins and where, and some of the opposition parties are, wisely, considering a boycott. Nawaz Sharif told the press that in the course of a long telephone call he had failed to persuade Benazir to join it and thereby render the process null and void from the start. But now that he is back in the country it's unclear whether he will still go ahead with the boycott or try and negotiate a certain number of seats with the Chaudhrys of Gujrat, who had betrayed him by setting up a faction of the Pakistan Muslim League, the PML-Q, to support Musharraf. Perhaps a shared bout of amnesia will bring them together again.

What will Benazir do now? Washington's leverage in Islamabad is limited, which is why they wanted her to be involved in the first place. 'It's always better,' the US ambassador half-joked at a reception, 'to have two phone numbers in a capital.' That may be so, but they cannot guarantee her the prime ministership or even a fair election. In his death-cell, her father mulled over similar problems and came to slightly different conclusions. If I Am Assassinated, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's last will and testament, was written in semi-Gramsci mode, but the meaning wasn't lost on his colleagues:

I entirely agree that the people of Pakistan will not tolerate foreign hegemony. On the basis of the self-same logic, the people of Pakistan would never agree to an internal hegemony. The two hegemonies complement each other. If our people meekly submit to internal hegemony, a priori, they will have to submit to external hegemony. This is so because the strength and power of external hegemony is far greater than that of internal hegemony. If the people are too terrified to resist the weaker force, it is not possible for them to resist the stronger force. The acceptance of or acquiescence in internal hegemony means submission to external hegemony.

After he was hanged in April 1979, the text acquired a semi-sacred status among his supporters. But, when in power, Bhutto père had failed to develop any counter-hegemonic strategy or institutions, other than the 1973 constitution drafted by the veteran civil rights lawyer Mahmud Ali Kasuri (whose son Khurshid was until recently the foreign minister). A personality-driven, autocratic style of governance had neutered the spirit of the party, encouraged careerists and finally paved the way for his enemies. He was the victim of a grave injustice; his death removed all the warts and transformed him into a martyr. More than half the country, mainly the poor, mourned his passing.

The tragedy led to the PPP being treated as a family heirloom, which was unhealthy for both party and country. It provided the Bhuttos with a vote-bank and large reserves. But the experience of her father's trial and death radicalised and politicised his daughter. She would have preferred, she told me at the time, to be a diplomat. Her two brothers, Murtaza and Shahnawaz, were in London, having been forbidden to return home by their imprisoned father. The burden of trying to save her father's life fell on Benazir and her mother, Nusrat, and the courage they exhibited won them the silent respect of a frightened majority. They refused to cave in to General Zia's military dictatorship, which apart from anything else was invoking Islam to claw back rights won by women in previous decades. Benazir and Nusrat Bhutto were arrested and released several times. Their health began to suffer. Nusrat was allowed to leave the country to seek medical advice in 1982. Benazir was released a little more than a year later thanks, in part, to US pressure orchestrated by her old Harvard friend Peter Galbraith. She later described the period in her memoir, *Daughter of the East* (1988); it included photo-captions such as: 'Shortly after President Reagan praised the regime for making "great strides towards democracy", Zia's henchmen gunned down peaceful demonstrators marking Pakistan Independence Day. The police were just as brutal to those protesting at the attack on my jeep in January 1987.'

Her tiny Barbican flat in London became the centre of opposition to the dictatorship, and it was here that we often discussed a campaign to take on the generals. Benazir had built up her position by steadfastly and peacefully resisting the military and replying to every slander with a cutting retort. Her brothers had been operating on a different level. They set up an armed group, al-Zulfikar, whose declared aim was to harass and weaken the regime by targeting 'traitors who had collaborated with Zia'. The principal volunteers were recruited inside Pakistan and in 1980 they were provided with a base in Afghanistan, where the pro-Moscow Communists had taken power three years before. It is a sad story with a fair share of factionalism, show-trials, petty rivalries, fantasies of every sort and death for the group's less fortunate members.

In March 1981 Murtaza and Shahnawaz Bhutto were placed on the FIA's most wanted list. They had hijacked a Pakistan International airliner soon after it left Karachi (a power cut had paralysed the X-ray machines, enabling the hijackers to take their weapons on board); it was diverted to Kabul. Here Murtaza took over and demanded the release of political prisoners. A young military officer on board the flight was murdered. The plane refuelled and went on to Damascus, where the Syrian spymaster General Kholi took charge and ensured there were no more deaths. The fact that there were American passengers on the plane was a major consideration for the generals and, for that reason alone, the prisoners in Pakistan were released and flown to Tripoli.

This was seen as a victory and welcomed as such by the PPP in Pakistan. For the first time the group

began to be taken seriously. A key target inside the country was Maulvi Mushtaq Hussain, the chief justice of the High Court in Lahore, who, in 1978, had sentenced Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto to death, and whose behaviour in court had shocked even those who were hostile to the PPP. (Among other charges, he had accused Bhutto of 'pretending to be a Muslim' – his mother was a Hindu convert.) Mushtaq was in a friend's car being driven to his home in Lahore's Model Town area when al-Zulfiqar gunmen opened fire. The judge survived, but his friend and the driver died. The friend was one of the Chaudhrys of Gujrat: Chaudhry Zahoor Elahi, a dodgy businessman who had ostentatiously asked General Zia to make him a present of the 'sacred pen' with which he had signed Bhutto's death warrant. The pen became a family heirloom. Zahoor Elahi may not have been the target but al-Zulfiqar, embarrassed at missing the judge, claimed he was also on their list, which may have been true.

It is the next generation of Chaudhrys that currently provides Musharraf with civilian ballast: Zahoor Elahi's son Shujaat organised the split with Nawaz Sharif and created the splinter PML-Q to ease the growing pains of the new regime. He still fixes deals and wanted an emergency imposed much earlier to circumvent the deal with Benazir. He will now mastermind the general's election campaign. His cousin Pervez Elahi is chief minister of the Punjab; his son, in turn, is busy continuing the family tradition by evicting tenants and buying up all the available land on the edge of Lahore. It has not been divulged which member of the family guards the sacred pen.

The hijacking meanwhile had annoyed Moscow, and the regime in Afghanistan asked the Bhutto brothers to find another refuge. While in Kabul, they had married two Afghan sisters, Fauzia and Rehana Fasihudin, daughters of a senior official at the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Together with their wives they now left the country and after a sojourn in Syria and possibly Libya ended up in Europe. The reunion with their sister took place on the French Riviera in 1985, a setting better suited to the lifestyles of all three siblings.

The young men feared General Zia's agents. Each had a young daughter. Shahnawaz lived in an apartment in Cannes. He had been in charge of the 'military apparatus' and life in Kabul had exacted a heavier toll on him. He was edgy and nervous. Relations with his wife were stormy and he told his sister that he was preparing to divorce her. 'There's never been a divorce in the family. Your marriage wasn't even an arranged one . . . You chose to marry Rehana. You must live with it,' was Benazir's revealing reply, according to her memoir. And then Shahnawaz was found dead in his apartment. His wife claimed he had taken poison, but according to Benazir nobody in the family believed her story; there had been violence in the room and his papers had been searched. Rehana looked immaculate, which disturbed the family. She was imprisoned for three months under the 'Good Samaritan' law for not having gone to the assistance of a dying person. After her release she settled in the United States. 'Had the CIA killed him as a friendly gesture towards their favourite dictator?' Benazir speculated. She raised other questions too: had the sisters become ISI agents? The truth remains hidden. Not long afterwards Murtaza divorced Fauzia, but kept custody of their three-year-old daughter, Fatima, and moved to Damascus. Here he had plenty of time for reflection and told friends that too many mistakes had been made. In 1986 he met Ghinwa Itaoui, a young teacher who had fled Lebanon after the Israeli invasion of 1982. She calmed him down and took charge of Fatima's education. They were married in 1989 and a son, Zulfiqar, was born the following year.

Benazir returned to Pakistan in 1986 and was greeted by large crowds who came out to show their affection for her and to demonstrate their anger with the regime. She campaigned all over the country, but felt increasingly that for some of the more religious-minded a young unmarried woman was not acceptable as a leader. How could she visit Saudi Arabia without a husband? An offer of marriage from the Zardari family was accepted and she married Asif in 1987. She had worried that any husband would find it difficult to deal with the periods of separation her nomadic political life

would entail, but Zardari was perfectly capable of occupying himself.

A year later General Zia's plane blew up in midair. In the elections that followed the PPP won the largest number of seats. Benazir became prime minister, but was hemmed in by the army on one side and the president, the army's favourite bureaucrat, Ghulam Ishaq Khan, on the other. She told me at the time that she felt powerless. They wouldn't let her do anything. 'Tell the people,' was my advice. Tell them why you can't deliver on your promises to provide free education, proper sanitation, clean water and health services to improve the high infant mortality rate. She didn't tell them; in fact she did nothing at all apart from provide employment to some of her supporters. Being in power, it seemed, was satisfaction enough. She went on state visits: met and liked Mrs Thatcher and later, with her new husband in tow, was received politely by the Saudi king. In the meantime there were other plots afoot – the opposition was literally buying off some of her MPs – and in August 1990 her government was removed by presidential decree and Zia's protégés, the Sharif brothers, were back in power.

By the time she was re-elected in 1993, she had abandoned all idea of reform, but that she was in a hurry to do something became clear when she appointed her husband minister for investment, making him responsible for all investment offers from home and abroad. It is widely alleged that the couple accumulated \$1.5 billion. The high command of the Pakistan People's Party now became a machine for making money, but without any trickle-down mechanism. This period marked the complete degeneration of the party. All that shame-faced party members could say, when I asked, was that 'everybody does it all over the world,' thus accepting that the cash nexus was now all that mattered. In foreign policy her legacy was mixed. She refused to sanction an anti-Indian military adventure in Kargil on the Himalayan slopes, but to make up for it, as I wrote in the LRB (15 April 1999), her government backed the Taliban takeover in Kabul – which makes it doubly ironic that Washington and London should be promoting her as a champion of democracy.

Murtaza Bhutto had contested the elections from abroad and won a seat in the Sind provincial legislature. He returned home and expressed his unhappiness with his sister's agenda. Family gatherings became tense. Murtaza had his weaknesses, but he wasn't corrupt and he argued in favour of the old party's radical manifesto. He made no secret of the fact that he regarded Zardari as an interloper whose only interest was money. Nusrat Bhutto suggested that Murtaza be made the chief minister of Sind: Benazir's response was to remove her mother as chairperson of the PPP. Any sympathy Murtaza may have felt for his sister turned to loathing. He no longer felt obliged to control his tongue and at every possible opportunity lambasted Zardari and the corrupt regime over which his sister presided. It was difficult to fault him on the facts. The incumbent chief minister of Sind was Abdullah Shah, one of Zardari's creatures. He began to harass Murtaza's supporters. Murtaza decided to confront the organ-grinder himself. He rang Zardari and invited him round for an informal chat sans bodyguards to try and settle the problems within the family. Zardari agreed. As the two men were pacing the garden, Murtaza's retainers appeared and grabbed Zardari. Someone brought out a cut-throat razor and some warm water and Murtaza shaved off half of Zardari's moustache to the delight of the retainers, then told him to get lost. A fuming Zardari, who had probably feared much worse, was compelled to shave off the other half at home. The media, bemused, were informed that the new clean-shaven consort had accepted intelligence advice that the moustache made him too recognisable a target. In which case why did he allow it to sprout again immediately afterwards?

Some months later, in September 1996, as Murtaza and his entourage were returning home from a political meeting, they were ambushed, just outside their house, by some seventy armed policemen accompanied by four senior officers. A number of snipers were positioned in surrounding trees. The street lights had been switched off. Murtaza clearly understood what was happening and got out of his car with his hands raised; his bodyguards were instructed not to open fire. The police opened fire

instead and seven men were killed, Murtaza among them. The fatal bullet had been fired at close range. The trap had been carefully laid, but as is the way in Pakistan, the crudeness of the operation – false entries in police logbooks, lost evidence, witnesses arrested and intimidated, the provincial PPP governor (regarded as untrustworthy) dispatched to a non-event in Egypt, a policeman killed who they feared might talk – made it obvious that the decision to execute the prime minister's brother had been taken at a very high level.

While the ambush was being prepared, the police had sealed off Murtaza's house (from which his father had been lifted by Zia's commandos in 1978). The family inside felt something was wrong. At this point, a remarkably composed Fatima Bhutto, aged 14, decided to ring her aunt at Prime Minister's House. The conversation that followed remains imprinted on her memory and a few years ago she gave me an account of it. It was Zardari who took her call:

Fatima: I wish to speak to my aunt, please.

Zardari: It's not possible.

Fatima: Why? [At this point, Fatima says she heard loud wails and what sounded like fake crying.]

Zardari: She's hysterical, can't you hear?

Fatima: Why?

Zardari: Don't you know? Your father's been shot.

Fatima and Ghinwa found out where Murtaza had been taken and rushed out of the house. There was no sign on the street outside that anything had happened: the scene of the killing had been wiped clean of all evidence. There were no traces of blood and no signs of any disturbance. They drove straight to the hospital but it was too late; Murtaza was already dead. Later they learned that he had been left bleeding on the ground for almost an hour before being taken to a hospital where there were no emergency facilities of any kind.

When Benazir arrived to attend her brother's funeral in Larkana, angry crowds stoned her limo. She had to retreat. In another unusual display of emotion, local people encouraged Murtaza's widow to attend the actual burial ceremony in defiance of Islamic tradition. According to Fatima, one of Benazir's hangers-on instigated legal proceedings against Ghinwa in a religious court for breaching Islamic law. Nothing was sacred.

Anyone who witnessed Murtaza's murder was arrested; one witness died in prison. When Fatima rang Benazir to ask why witnesses were being arrested and not the killers she was told: 'Look, you're very young. You don't understand things.' Perhaps it was for this reason that the kind aunt decided to encourage Fatima's blood-mother, Fauzia, whom she had previously denounced as a murderer in the pay of General Zia, to come to Pakistan and claim custody of Fatima. No mystery as to who paid her fare from California. Fatima and Ghinwa Bhutto resisted and the attempt failed. Benazir then tried a softer approach and insisted that Fatima accompany her to New York, where she was going to address the UN Assembly. Ghinwa Bhutto approached friends in Damascus and had her two children flown out of the country. Fatima later discovered that Fauzia had been seen hobnobbing with Benazir in New York.

In November 1996 Benazir was once again removed from power, this time by her own president, Farooq Leghari, a PPP stalwart. He cited corruption, but what had also angered him was the ISI's crude attempt at blackmail – the intelligence agencies had photographed Leghari's daughter

meeting a boyfriend and threatened to go public. The week Benazir fell, the chief minister of Sind, Abdullah Shah, hopped on a motorboat and fled Karachi for the Gulf and thence the US.

A judicial tribunal had been appointed by Benazir's government to inquire into the circumstances leading to Murtaza's death. Headed by a Supreme Court judge, it took detailed evidence from all parties. Murtaza's lawyers accused Zardari, Abdullah Shah and two senior police officials of conspiracy to murder. Benazir (now out of power) accepted that there had been a conspiracy, but suggested that 'the hidden hand responsible for this was President Farooq Ahmad Leghari': the intention, she said, was to 'kill a Bhutto to get rid of a Bhutto'. Nobody took this seriously. Given all that had happened, it was an incredible suggestion.

The tribunal said there was no legally acceptable evidence to link Zardari to the incident, but accepted that 'this was a case of extra-judicial killings by the police' and concluded that such an incident could not have taken place without approval from the highest quarters. Nothing happened. Eleven years later, Fatima Bhutto publicly accused Zardari; she also claimed that many of those involved that day appear to have been rewarded for their actions. In an interview on an independent TV station just before the emergency was imposed, Benazir was asked to explain how it happened that her brother had bled to death outside his home while she was prime minister. She walked out of the studio. A sharp op-ed piece by Fatima in the LA Times on 14 November elicited the following response: 'My niece is angry with me.' Well, yes.

Musharraf may have withdrawn the corruption charges, but three other cases are proceeding in Switzerland, Spain and Britain. In July 2003, after an investigation lasting several years, Daniel Devaud, a Geneva magistrate, convicted Mr and Mrs Asif Ali Zardari, in absentia, of money laundering. They had accepted \$15 million in bribes from two Swiss companies, SGS and Cotecna. The couple were sentenced to six months in prison and ordered to return \$11.9 million to the government of Pakistan. 'I certainly don't have any doubts about the judgments I handed down,' Devaud told the BBC. Benazir appealed, thus forcing a new investigation. On 19 September 2005 she appeared in a Geneva court and tried to detach herself from the rest of the family: she hadn't been involved, she said: it was a matter for her husband and her mother (afflicted with Alzheimer's disease). She knew nothing of the accounts. And what of the agreement her agent Jens Schlegelmilch had signed according to which, in case of her and Zardari's death, the assets of Bomer Finance Company would be divided out equally between the Zardari and Bhutto families? She knew nothing of that either. And the £120,000 diamond necklace in the bank vault paid for by Zardari? It was intended for her, but she had rejected the gift as 'inappropriate'. The case continues. Last month Musharraf told Owen Bennett-Jones of the BBC World Service that his government would not interfere with the proceedings: 'That's up to the Swiss government. Depends on them. It's a case in their courts.'

In Britain the legal shenanigans concern the \$3.4 million Rockwood estate in Surrey, bought by offshore companies on behalf of Zardari in 1995 and refurbished to his exacting tastes. Zardari denied owning the estate. Then when the court was about to instruct the liquidators to sell it and return the proceeds to the Pakistan government, Zardari came forward and accepted ownership. Last year, Lord Justice Collins ruled that, while he was not making any 'findings of fact', there was a 'reasonable prospect' that the Pakistan government might be able to establish that Rockwood had been bought and furnished with 'the fruits of corruption'. A close friend of Benazir told me that she was genuinely not involved in this one, since Zardari wasn't thinking of spending much time there with her.

Daniel Markey, formerly of the State Department and currently senior fellow for India, Pakistan and South Asia at the Council on Foreign Relations, explained why Washington had pushed the marriage of convenience: 'A progressive, reform-minded, more cosmopolitan party in government would help

the US.' As their finances reveal, the Zardaris are certainly cosmopolitan.

What then is at stake in Pakistan as far as Washington is concerned? 'The concern I have,' Robert Gates, the US secretary for defense, recently said, 'is that the longer the internal problems continue, the more distracted the Pakistani army and security services will be in terms of the internal situation rather than focusing on the terrorist threat in the frontier area.' But one reason for the internal crisis is Washington's over-reliance on Musharraf and the Pakistani military. It is Washington's support and funding that have given him the confidence to operate as he pleases. But the thoughtless Western military occupation of Afghanistan is obviously crucial, since the instability in Kabul seeps into Peshawar and the tribal areas between the two countries. The state of emergency targeted the judiciary, opposition politicians and the independent media. All three groups were, in different ways, challenging the official line on Afghanistan and the 'war on terror', the disappearance of political prisoners and the widespread use of torture in Pakistani prisons. The issues were being debated on television in a much more open fashion than happens anywhere in the West, where a blanket consensus on Afghanistan drowns all dissent. Musharraf argued that civil society was hampering the 'war on terror'. Hence the emergency. It's nonsense, of course. It's the war in the frontier regions that is creating dissent inside the army. Many do not want to fight. Hence the surrender of dozens of soldiers to Taliban guerrillas. This is the reason many junior officers are taking early retirement.

Western pundits blather on about the jihadi finger on the nuclear trigger. This is pure fantasy, reminiscent of a similar campaign almost three decades ago, when the threat wasn't the jihadis who were fighting alongside the West in Afghanistan, but nationalist military radicals. The cover story of Time magazine for 15 June 1979 dealt with Pakistan; a senior Western diplomat was quoted as saying that the big danger was 'that there is another Gaddafi down there, some radical major or colonel in the Pakistani army. We could wake up and find him in Zia's place one morning and, believe me, Pakistan wouldn't be the only place that would be destabilised.'

The Pakistan army is half a million strong. Its tentacles are everywhere: land, industry, public utilities and so on. It would require a cataclysmic upheaval (a US invasion and occupation, for example) for this army to feel threatened by a jihadi uprising. Two considerations unite senior officers: the unity of the organisation and keeping politicians at bay. One reason is the fear that they might lose the comforts and privileges they have acquired after decades of rule; but they also have the deep aversion to democracy that is the hallmark of most armies. Unused to accountability within their own ranks, it's difficult for them to accept it in society at large.

As southern Afghanistan collapses into chaos, and as corruption and massive inflation takes hold, the Taliban is gaining more and more recruits. The generals who convinced Benazir that control of Kabul via the Taliban would give them 'strategic depth' may have retired, but their successors know that the Afghans will not tolerate a long-term Western occupation. They hope for the return of a whitewashed Taliban. Instead of encouraging a regional solution that includes India, Iran and Russia, the US would prefer to see the Pakistan army as its permanent cop in Kabul. It won't work. In Pakistan itself the long night continues as the cycle restarts: military leadership promising reforms degenerates into tyranny, politicians promising social support to the people degenerate into oligarchs. Given that a better functioning neighbour is unlikely to intervene, Pakistan will oscillate between these two forms of rule for the foreseeable future. The people who feel they have tried everything and failed will return to a state of semi-sleep, unless something unpredictable rouses them again. This is always possible.

P.S.

* From the London Review of Books. Circulated by South Asia Citizens Wire | December 8-9, 2007 |

Dispatch No. 2474 - Year 10 running.

* Tariq Ali's The Duel: Pakistan on the Flight Path of American Power will be published next year.