
INTERVIEW

Pakistan's Begum Nusrat Bhutto: a portrait in political courage

by Daniel Sneider, Asia Editor, and Mary Lalévee, Wiesbaden Bureau Chief

While the military dictator of Pakistan, General Zia-ul Haq, was getting ready to leave for Washington in the first days of December, we were sitting in a hotel room in Munich talking to a woman who truly represents that nation. Sitting before us was a woman whose life is a portrait of human courage, moving proof that while dictatorships may survive through terror for some time, they can ultimately be defeated by the ability of a people to conquer fear.

The woman was Begum Nusrat Bhutto, the widow of Pakistan's only democratically elected prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and, since his murder in 1979 by the dictatorship, the leader of his political party, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). Forced by dire circumstance to take up the mantle of political leadership held by her martyred husband, her face shows the weariness and effects of years in prison.

Yet as Begum Bhutto sits and quietly tells us the story of what is really happening behind the curtain of terror in Pakistan, there is a sense of quiet strength. The victory of forces outside and inside the country in forcing the junta to allow her abroad for medical treatment, which according to her doctor has saved her life, has brought new life to the resistance to the junta.

After arriving in Munich, Begum Bhutto phoned Javed Shah, president of the PPP in the United States, and told him: "I have this disease, but I promise you that I will live until we bring down Zia."

More than anything else, it is her example, and that of her still-imprisoned daughter Benazir, which inspires the people of Pakistan to conquer fear.

We asked Mrs. Bhutto what has been happening inside Pakistan, how the regime has dealt with the resistance of the population to its repression. She recounted first the story of the workers of a factory in Multan who went on strike some weeks after the July 1977 overthrow of the Bhutto govern-

ment to protest the military gathered at the factory, as she described the scene, soldiers surrounded it. "They [the soldiers] faced the road and faced the factory" she told us, "and they machine-gunned, mowed them down." Two hundred fifty people were killed that day, including schoolboys passing by on the road. Officially 70 workers were declared victims when the event was publicized to shock the populace into submission.

Mrs. Bhutto described Pakistan under those conditions:

That was the first jolt which the people got, and they were very much terrified and they became careful. The second [jolt] was the public flogging. The flogging was not to punish the crime but to maim the men. Their kidneys were ruined. Some, their spine was injured. There was a boy of 16 years old who was flogged. Now he can't stand straight, he can't walk, he goes on all four hands and feet.

It is pathetic! And for what? Not for murder, not for looting a bank. Just for saying you want democracy or just saying "Don't kill Bhutto." That's all.

He [Zia] maimed them. There was a shock when they showed on the television about the flogging. And the way they flogged—oh my God! The strongest army chap is brought, with a huge stick, and he runs up from far (away). That was the second shock and the third was the assassination of Mr. Bhutto. Before my husband's assassination, that was the time when every jail was full. They used the race course [in Karachi] to dump people there with barbed wire around them. They put them there under the sun and the sky and the days were very hot and the nights were very cold.

Begum Bhutto had painted a dark picture, a picture of a

people literally beaten into submission. Does it mean, we asked, that the regime can now rule with complete impunity, that the terror has become complete?

"After five years, the people have gotten used to it. They are not frightened. That fear has gone. He wanted to put fear into the minds of the people. That fear has slowly, slowly [disappeared]—people are not fearful. People are coming out again. There are people who have had their ten lashes, and come out and gone again and gotten the second 15 lashes or 30 lashes. There are people I know.

"We formed the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy [MRD], with the other political parties, because we [the PPP] said that all those who believe in democracy in the country and are against military regimes and military rule, we should come on one platform so that our voice could be even stronger. That is the reason I joined hands with all these people (in other parties—ed.) who were very much against us (PPP) and had said a whole lot of things. But I said, in the interests of democracy, in the party's interests, we had better join hands—and we joined hands.

Mrs. Bhutto spoke sharply about the dangers facing Pakistan as a result of the Jamaat-e-Islami's growing strength under the patronage of the regime:

What we are fearing in Pakistan is that if we don't have early elections and the removal of this martial law, Pakistan will be another Iran. Because the Jamaat-e-Islami which is a fanatical Muslim party, for the last five years they have been hoarding a lot of arms and ammunition. They are training their people for civil war and for fighting and killing.

One movie director once met me in Lahore. I had been released from jail just for a few days and he came to me and said: "Begum Sahiba, come and see behind my studio where there is a big open area which has been walled off. There the Jamaat-e-Islami is training. Come and see what they are doing—they are training with machine guns, other guns, hand grenades, in groups. People come and lecture them.

He thought the government did not know, this gentleman, but I think Zia knows. It is not possible that he doesn't know. If he knows how many times we have yawned in a house, how is it possible that he would not know what they are doing?

This is what we don't want—another mullah coming, another chap coming and taking us back 1400 years. *We don't want this.* We don't want them to come and kill everyone who they think are the bad guys. I feel we are going towards that. This is what my analysis of the situation in Pakistan is.

We have got information that in every mosque they are stocking arms and ammunition, in the mosques

under their control and most of the mosques are under their control because slowly, slowly General Zia has removed the government mullahs. You see there are many kinds of mosques [in Pakistan]—the "party" mosques, run by various groups, and there are many mosques which are government mosques. Now the government mosques have government mullahs. Those government mullahs, those who were anti-martial law or army Zia has removed them. And of course, on the advice of the Jamaat-e-Islami, he has put their men there. So most of the mosques are in their hands and they are stocking a lot of arms in these mosques.

We asked Begum Bhutto about the reports that the demonstrators who burned the U.S. embassy in Pakistan [killing two Americans] in late 1980 were organized by the same Jamaat-e-Islami, with the connivance of the Zia regime. She responded without hesitation:

Yes, definitely it was them. We got information that Zia organized it! Look, if six people are standing [together], they come over to find out why six people are talking [together]. These people [the demonstrators] had buses, hired buses, to take them from Rawalpindi to Islamabad, so far away, so many miles.

Of course they knew it. They told them to go ahead and do it. That was our information. The local authorities, the submartial law administrator, told them: "Go ahead and do it!"

The MRD alliance has been the umbrella of political resistance to the regime in Pakistan. Despite the banning of all political parties and all political activity by the regime, the MRD has continued to function. However, as Mrs. Bhutto described the situation, it functions under conditions of heavy repression. After the victory of her gaining permission to leave the country, the MRD had planned a civil disobedience campaign which was set to begin on Nov. 27. The leaders of the MRD, most of whom are out of jail unlike Begum Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto, had planned to go out on the streets that day and court arrest.

"They were going to court arrest," Begum Bhutto told us, "going democratically on the streets with banners saying 'We Want Democracy, We Don't Want Martial Law, We Want Justice, We Want the Rule of Law, and the Release of Political Prisoners.' But before they could do [that], the night before they came and arrested all of them. So they just don't let us *move*."

The danger of another Iran

The military regime in Pakistan is distinguished even from previous military governments in that country's history not only by the level of repression but also by the close links between Zia and a fanatic-extremist Islamic fundamentalist organization, the Jamaat-e-Islami. The Jamaat-e-Islami is the Pakistani branch of the infamous Muslim Brotherhood.

The U.S., Zia, and the future of Pakistan

The picture which Begum Bhutto paints of Pakistan under the Zia regime is a grim one. However, there is clear evidence that indeed "the fear has gone." The most crucial crack in the wall of terror was the forced release of Begum Bhutto herself, a highly visible victory over a regime which was openly intending to murder her by denying her medical treatment abroad. The importance of that victory was evident in the tumultuous scene which occurred at the Karachi airport as Begum Bhutto departed the country. An eyewitness to the scene there described it to us.

In open defiance of the police and the army, thousands of people, many of them women, gathered to see her off. The crowds were thick around her, men and women weeping in the emotionally charged atmosphere. The police and army completely withdrew from sight and officials at the airport treated her as if she was the leader of the country. Quietly, officials, including army men, came up to her and said: "Begum, we are with you." The crowd was so intense that the weak Begum Bhutto fainted and was picked up and carried in through the airport by her personal physician, Dr. Saeed, who accompanied her out of the country.

Begum Bhutto contends, without fear of contradiction, that her party would win an overwhelming victory in any free election in Pakistan. This is a fact admitted by even supporters of the regime outside the country. It is precisely for this reason that the junta has refused to hold elections, breaking every promise to do so. And it is also for this reason that dictator Zia has every interest in following up his murder of Z. A. Bhutto with the murder of his widow and daughter, who are the leaders of the PPP and the symbols of resistance to his rule.

The welcome given Zia by the Reagan administration in Washington flies in the face of this reality. While State Department officials proclaim that elections will be held in "two to three years," privately they know perfectly well that the Zia regime is an unstable dictatorship totally unsupported by its population. Perhaps they also know what Pakistani sources told us, that a significant portion of the army officers do not support the regime and want to "return to the barracks" and let civilian rule come back. Where will Washington be when the inevitable happens, when the dictatorship of Zia falls, probably in a far-from-peaceful way?

As we concluded our conversation with this graceful and courageous leader, we asked Begum Bhutto what she would say to the American people on the occasion of Zia's visit to the United States.

I would like to tell them that when there was martial law in Poland, there was such a hue and cry. Even wheat was stopped to the Polish people. But when there is such repression in Pakistan, much worse martial law than in Poland, why do you give them wheat? Not only wheat but arms, ammunition, F-16s. It's not fair!! Treat us both alike—treat all countries alike.

Bhutto supporters 'flog' Zia in U.S.

by Susan Brady

Judging from the itinerary, the first state visit to America of Pakistan's Chief Martial Law Administrator, Gen. Zia ul-Haq, was designed to give an official boost to the petty tyrant's status and make a show of "cementing" relations. It was Zia who overthrew the democratically elected Z. A. Bhutto in 1977 and subsequently hanged the national leader and founder of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP)—clamping a reign of terror over the country which he dares not lift for fear of immediately being driven from power. Since 1979 the United States has embraced the Zia junta as a "bulwark" against the Soviet Union.

But as it turned out, the official welcome, replete with pomp and professions of deep friendship, was unofficially punctured time and again, starting at Zia's first meeting, a working luncheon with Secretary of State George Schultz, where the dictator was confronted by a group of angry demonstrators led by Dr. Ghulam Hussain, Secretary-General of the PPP and representatives of the Club of Life. They let it be known, in demonstrations, press conferences and meetings in the capital, that all over the world, opponents of butchery and barbarism will not rest until Zia's regime is compelled to return power to the elected representatives of the people of Pakistan.

The demonstration at the State Department was only one of the many erupting across the United States as Zia visited New York, Houston, and San Francisco. The PPP, the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy in Pakistan (MRD), the Club of Life and National Democratic Policy Committee (NDPC) had already come together this fall in a successful international campaign to force the release from arrest in Pakistan of Begum Nusrat Bhutto, PPP chairman and widow of Z. A. Bhutto, to permit her to travel to Europe for treatment of lung cancer. The coalition is now pressing the demand for the release of Benazir Bhutto, her daughter, to permit her to carry on her mother's political leadership within Pakistan.

Before his entire entourage, Zia was confronted on this score by a representative of the NDPC following Zia's Dec. 9 address to the Foreign Policy Association in New York City. "General Zia, are you going to release Benazir Bhutto, or are you going to murder her the way you murdered her father?" the spokesman challenged him. "You are a killer. You are flooding our streets with heroin," he continued,