ASSASSINATION OF BENAZIR BHUTTO

Introduction

On December 27, 2007, moments after completing a campaign speech in the city of Rawalpindi, Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan’s main political opponent to the regime of President Pervez Musharraf, was assassinated. A suicide bomber fired shots at Bhutto while she emerged briefly through an opening in the roof of her vehicle to acknowledge the cheers of her supporters. Then he blew himself up. Along with Bhutto, another 20 people were killed in the attack, including members of her security staff and bystanders. Bhutto’s death, while not completely unexpected, threw an already chaotic and unstable country into a downward spiral of crisis and conflict, leading many observers, both in Pakistan and elsewhere, to fear for the country’s future.

Bhutto had returned to Pakistan in October 2007 to resume her position as leader of the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), the main political rival to Musharraf, and to campaign in elections that were to be held on January 8, 2008. Shortly after her arrival, she survived a massive bomb attack that struck her entourage as it made its way through the streets of Karachi. Over 140 people were killed in this attack. Since that failed attempt on her life, Bhutto knew that the political forces inside the country that opposed her policies and hated her as a woman in the public arena would not rest until they had removed her from the scene once and for all. Nevertheless, she refused to stop campaigning. Bhutto defiantly proclaimed that she was confident Islamic fundamentalist extremists, her main enemies, would not try to assassinate her, since their religion strictly forbids the murder of women.

In the aftermath of this dramatic and tragic event, Pakistan’s ongoing political crisis reached a new point of danger and unpredictability. The elections originally scheduled for January 8 were postponed to February 18, ostensibly to give the PPP time to regroup after its leader’s untimely death. But elements within the party believed that the government’s real motive for the delay in the vote was to enable Musharraf’s own unpopular party, the Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PML-Q) more time to consolidate its position and possibly even tamper with the electoral process. A wave of sympathy for their fallen leader spread throughout areas of Pakistan where the PPP was strong, especially Bhutto’s home province of Sindh, where her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was hanged in 1979, had originally built the family’s political power base. In the ensuing instability that gripped the country after Bhutto’s killing, pro-PPP mobs ransacked government offices and police stations, venting their anger and frustration against Musharraf’s regime. Many people lost their lives as a result.

Bhutto’s will named her son Bilawal Bhutto Zardari as her political heir, but since he is only 19 years old, the PPP’s real leaders will be her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, and Makhdoom Amin Fahim, a senior party backroom official and former Bhutto aide. The party expects that the sympathy generated in the wake of Bhutto’s killing should translate into votes when the election is finally held and anticipates its return to power and the removal of Musharraf’s unpopular government.

In the meantime, PPP officials are extremely skeptical of the government’s explanation of her killing, which alleges that she died from a skull fracture after the explosion of the bomb threw her head against the open hood of the car. Instead, they believe that she died from two
She was practising politics of reconciliation. I don’t think there will be any reconciliation now. People are very angry. What is next? This is total darkness. Nobody can say what the future of Pakistan can be.” — Rana Suhail, editor of The Khabarnama (Canadian Pakistani newspaper, in the Toronto Star, December 29, 2007)

Yielding to considerable domestic and international pressure, Musharraf reluctantly permitted the elite British security agency, Scotland Yard (www.met.police.uk), to enter the country to take part in the investigation. But his comments in a press conference called shortly after her death, where he speculated that Bhutto herself bore some of the responsibility by exposing herself to potential attackers through the sunroof of her vehicle, angered many of her supporters.

In the days following Bhutto’s death, Musharraf and much of the international community were quick to put responsibility for the murder squarely at the feet of Baitullah Mehsud, a leading Islamic fundamentalist figure in Pakistan who is believed to have close links to Osama bin Laden’s Al Qaeda terrorist group. Bhutto was the sworn enemy of these organizations because of her strong support for the U.S.-backed war on international terrorism and her moderate, secular policies at home. But Maulvi Mohammed Umar, a Mehsud spokesman, rejected the allegations, claiming that his group had played no part in Bhutto’s assassination. The arrest in late January of a 15-year-old suspect in the killing, who stated that he was part of a five-man team Mehsud had dispatched to Rawalpindi to kill Bhutto, appeared to bolster the government’s case. However, the exact circumstances of her death, to say nothing of the identity of those responsible for it, and even more importantly what its long-term impact will be on Pakistan’s political future, still appeared very unclear a month after she was killed.

To Consider
1. Why does the assassination of Benazir Bhutto lead to the worsening of Pakistan’s already serious political crisis?

2. Why are members of Bhutto’s political party skeptical of the government’s explanation of her death and those responsible for it?

3. How is Bhutto’s death likely to influence the results of the elections that have been rescheduled for February 18, 2008?

4. What group is believed to have been responsible for the assassination? Why? How have its leaders reacted to this charge?
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Video Review

Watch the video and answer the following questions.

1. Why was Pakistan already in a state of political crisis before the assassination of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto?

2. Why is Pakistan regarded as a key player in Asia?

3. What is the name of Bhutto's political rival who promised he would carry on her fight after her killing?

4. What is the name of the president of Pakistan? Why does Bhutto's death pose a problem for his regime?

5. What Pakistani leader was killed in the same park where Bhutto was assassinated?

6. What was the official explanation for Bhutto's death?

7. What investigative agency has been permitted to enter Pakistan to investigate Bhutto's killing?

8. According to the Pakistani government, who was behind the assassination?

9. In the view of Akbar Ahmed, why is Pakistan not an ordinary Muslim nation?

10. Why is the future of Pakistan so important to other countries, both in the region and far away?

Quote

“As long as the sun and moon are alive, so is the name of Bhutto.” — chant of Bhutto mourners (Toronto Star, December 29, 2007)
11. Who has been named as Bhutto’s successor? ____________________________
   What is so remarkable about him?

12. Why do many Pakistani women have mixed feelings about Bhutto and her political legacy?

13. Why is the situation women face in Pakistan so difficult? In what respect was Bhutto a role model for Pakistani women?

For Discussion
After viewing the video, discuss the following comments made in it with your classmates, stating whether or not you agree with them and why:

“Musharraf is probably the one to lose the most from Benazir Bhutto’s assassination because, with her demise, any possible power-sharing deal between him and her party has now ended. Musharraf is going to have to go it on his own. He doesn’t have any allies or friends inside Pakistan.” — Sajjan Gohel, Pakistani security analyst

“We should all be very concerned because Pakistan is not an ordinary Muslim nation. This has to be understood in the West. It has 165 million people. It is the only nuclear power in the Muslim world, and what happens in Pakistan does not only affect the region; it has an impact on the entire area . . . and then far beyond the region. It is a country with very motivated, very committed individuals, and therefore if Pakistan swings left or right, it will impact world politics.” — Akbar Ahmed, former Pakistani diplomat

“[Bhutto’s killing] will scare off many Pakistani women now from entering politics. I mean, their families would tell them off completely. . . . This was a new process for us where we were just beginning, and look at what happened to her. What a sad and tragic way to go.” — Nilofer Bakhtiar, Pakistan Senator

Did you know . . .
Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Turkey, the four most populous Muslim nations, had female leaders long before Germany elected its first woman chancellor in 2005.
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Pakistan: Timeline of a Crisis

Here is a timeline of the mounting political crisis that has been developing in Pakistan since early 2007:

March 2007 Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf suspends Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry for questioning Musharraf’s legal eligibility to stand as a candidate in upcoming elections.

May 2007 Many people are killed and injured in Karachi following clashes between supporters of the ousted chief justice and pro-Musharraf factions.

July 2007 Pakistani military units storm the Red Mosque in Islamabad, the country’s capital, ending a standoff between radical Islamic students and Muslim clerics that had lasted for over a week. The ensuing firefight results in 43 deaths. Pakistan’s Supreme Court rules that Musharraf’s removal of Chaudhry was unconstitutional and orders his reinstatement.

August 2007 The Supreme Court defies Musharraf again by ruling that exiled opposition leader and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif may return to Pakistan from Saudi Arabia. One month later he is arrested at the airport on arrival and sent back to Saudi Arabia.

September 2007 Benazir Bhutto announces that she will return to Pakistan from exile in Dubai and resume leadership of the PPP in the upcoming national elections. Prior to this she and Musharraf have discussed a possible power-sharing agreement to be implemented after the vote.

October 2007 Musharraf is re-elected president, but the Supreme Court challenges the result, arguing that as head of the army he is ineligible to hold the presidency as well. Benazir Bhutto returns to Pakistan, but a suicide bomb detonated near her vehicle kills over 140 people in Karachi.

November 2007 Musharraf proclaims a state of emergency, citing the threat of Islamic extremists and a hostile Supreme Court as his justification. The constitution is suspended, and many opposition leaders, including Bhutto, are placed under house arrest. In response, the Commonwealth suspends Pakistan’s membership. A new Supreme Court, containing a number of judges hand-picked by Musharraf, recognizes the legitimacy of his re-election as president. Musharraf promises to step down as head of the army before being sworn in again as president. Nawaz Sharif returns again from exile.

December 2007 Musharraf lifts the state of emergency after resigning as army head and being sworn in as president and announces that parliamentary elections will be held on January 8, 2008. On December 27, Benazir Bhutto is assassinated shortly after addressing a political rally in Rawalpindi.

January 2008 In the wake of Bhutto’s assassination, a wave of violent protest sweeps Pakistan. The PPP alleges that Musharraf was at least partly responsible for the killing because he refused to authorize adequate security for Bhutto. The official explanation links the crime to a radical Islamic leader, Baitullah Mehsud, who has close ties with the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Elections are postponed to February 18, and the PPP names Bhutto’s husband and son as its new leaders.

Did you know . . .

70 000 Pakistanis living in Canada are eligible to vote in the February 18, 2008, elections. However, they must vote overseas back home.
Activities

1. Rank order what you feel are the top five events over the past year that contributed to Pakistan’s current political crisis. Be prepared to explain your choices.

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2. In what ways does the assassination of Benazir Bhutto further complicate Pakistan’s political situation and add to the uncertainty of its people regarding their country’s future?

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ASSASSINATION OF BENAZIR BHUTTO

Pakistan Profile

Here is an overview of important information about Pakistan, including its political system, economy, and society.

Pakistan shares borders with Iran to the west, Afghanistan and China to the north and India to the east. Its coastline on the Arabian Sea is 1,064 kilometres long.

About two-thirds of Pakistan’s people belong to the Punjabi ethnic group, which is also found in the province of Punjab in neighbouring India. Other important ethnic groups include Sindhis (13 per cent), Pashtuns (11 per cent), Muhajirs (8 per cent), and Baluchis (2.5 per cent). Islam is the dominant religion, comprising 97 per cent of the population, most of whom belong to the Sunni branch of that faith. Hindus, Christians, and other religious minorities account for barely three per cent.

Pakistan is a federal state, divided into four provinces: Baluchistan, the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), Punjab, and Sindh. In addition, there are also the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the Federally Administered Northern Areas (FANA), and the Islamabad Federal Territory. The part of Kashmir under Pakistani control is known as Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK).

Pakistan’s unit of currency is the rupee, with one Canadian dollar worth about 61 rupees. Its Gross National Product per capita is $690, according to a 2006 World Bank estimate, and its rate of economic growth from 2006 to 2007 was seven per cent. Life expectancy for men and women is 63 years. Pakistan’s major industries include the production of cotton yarn and thread, raw cotton, cotton fabrics, leather goods, and rice cultivation. Its main trading partners are the United States, Hong Kong, Germany, and Japan.

Pakistan is a tropical country, with three seasons: cool (October to February), hot (March to June), and wet.
(July to September), although there are important climatic variations, with the low-lying coastal regions generally much hotter and wetter than the mountainous interior to the north.

Pakistan’s head of state is Pervez Musharraf, who came to power as a result of a military coup in 1999 that overthrew the elected government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. This action was widely condemned by the international community, and led to Pakistan’s expulsion from the Commonwealth, an organization of former British colonies of which Canada is a member. However, after the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, Musharraf became a key ally in President George W. Bush’s war on international terrorism. He broke with his former ally, the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban regime in neighbouring Afghanistan, which had harbouring Al Qaeda, and its leader Osama bin Laden, and permitted U.S. forces to use his country as a base from which to attack and eventually overthrow the Taliban.

After lifting the state of emergency, which he had proclaimed in November 2007, Musharraf stepped down as head of the army and was sworn in as a civilian president. He promised free elections would be held on January 8, 2008, but the assassination of his main political rival, Benazir Bhutto, on December 27 led to their postponement until February 18. The main political parties contesting the election are Musharraf’s Pakistan Muslim League-Q, the Pakistan Muslim League-N, led by Nawaz Sharif, the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), now led by Bhutto’s husband and son, and the Islamic fundamentalist coalition known as the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA). There are also two smaller parties, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), and the Awami National Party (ANP).

**Activities**

1. Based on your reading of the information above, what evidence would you provide to conclude that Pakistan is a developing nation?

2. What would you regard as the main sources of instability and division within Pakistan today?

3. Describe what role, if any, you think Canada should play in Pakistan. Be specific.
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Bhutto in Her Own Words

Here is a compilation of quotes from Benazir Bhutto, reflecting on her political beliefs and career:

“We have to modify our campaign to some extent because of the suicide bombings. We will continue to meet the public. We will not be deterred.” — shortly after she narrowly avoided death when a suicide bomber attacked her entourage in Karachi in October 2007, killing over 140 of her supporters.

“I told him on my oath in his death cell that I would carry on his work.” — recalling her visit to her father, former Pakistani prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, just before his execution in 1979.

“The primary message of the visit and the talks will be that freedom has returned to Pakistan. It is not only a success for the people of Pakistan but for all those who believe in freedom.” — preparing for a visit to the United States, shortly after assuming office as Prime Minister for the first time in 1989.

“The voter has gotten more demanding. In 1988, the voters just wanted democracy. Our campaign was much more general then. Now we are more specific.” — comment made after the PPP gained power.

“I always said that I was innocent and a victim of a politically motivated trial.” — commenting in 2001 on her 1999 conviction on charges of corruption after Musharraf’s coup d’état.

“I haven’t given myself away. I belong to myself and I always shall.” — promising in 1987 that her arranged marriage to Karachi business executive Asif Ali Zardani would not affect her political career.

“Democracy needs support, and the best support for democracy comes from other democracies. Democratic nations should come together in an association designed to help each other and promote what is a universal value—democracy.” — 1989 speech at Harvard University.


“We will handle the [Islamic fundamentalist] extremists. I will handle them. You will save the country and so will I.” — her last words to her supporters shortly before she was assassinated in Rawalpindi on December 27, 2007 (CBC News in Review video, February 2008).

“They might try to assassinate me. I have prepared my family and my loved ones for any possibility.” — said before returning home to Pakistan in October 2007 (Reuters, December 28, 2007).

Analysis

1. After reading the quotes above, prepare a profile of Benazir Bhutto, stating what you think were her main political views, her attitude toward her political career, and her goals for herself, her party, and her country.

2. Do you find anything prophetic or ironic about her last statement? Why?

3. Outline your general opinion of Benazir Bhutto.
Here is a selection of viewpoints on Benazir Bhutto’s political career and legacy from a number of Pakistani and international commentators:

“Benazir Bhutto’s death is, of course, a calamity, particularly as she embodied the hopes of so many liberal Pakistanis. But, contrary to the commentary we’ve seen . . . she was not comparable to Myanmar’s Aung San Suu Kyi. Ms. Bhutto’s governments were widely criticized by Amnesty International and other groups for their use of death squads and terrible record of deaths in police custody, abductions, and torture. As for her democratic bona fides, she had no qualms about banning rallies by opposing political parties while in power. Within her own party, she declared herself to be president for life and controlled all decisions. She rejected her brother Murtaza’s bid to challenge her for its leadership, and when he persisted, he was shot dead in highly suspicious circumstances during a police ambush outside the Bhutto family home.

Benazir Bhutto was certainly a brave and secular-minded woman. But the obituaries painting her as dying to save democracy distort history. Instead, she was a natural autocrat who did little for human rights, a calculating politician who was complicit in Pakistan’s becoming the region’s principal jihadi paymaster, while she also ramped up an insurgency in Kashmir that has brought two nuclear powers to the brink of war.” — “Bhutto’s deadly legacy,” William Dalrymple, author and historian, New York Times online January 4, 2008 (www.nytimes.com/2008/01/04/opinion/04dalrymple.html)

“They have killed a woman. A beautiful woman. A visible, indeed a conspicuously, spectacularly visible woman. A woman who made a point not only of holding rallies in one of the world’s most dangerous countries, but did so with her face uncovered, unveiled—the exact opposite of the shameful, hidden women, the condemned creatures of Satan, who are the only women tolerated by these apostles of a world without women. They have killed Benazir Bhutto—killed her because she was a woman, because she had a woman’s face, unadorned yet filled with an unswerving strength, because she was living out her destiny and refusing the curse that, according to the new fascists (the jihadis) floats over the human face of women. They killed this woman incarnation of hope, of spirit, of the will to democracy, not only in Pakistan, but in all the lands of Islam. . . . From now on Benazir Bhutto will be much more than a chief of state. She has become a symbol. . . . All those who have not yet given up on freedom in the land of Islam must gather behind that standard. Her name must become another password, bloody but beautiful, for those who still believe that the good genius of the Enlightenment will win out over the evil genius of fanaticism and crime. It is for us, citizens of Europe and the United States, to mourn, to display the grief that our leaders have, at least for the moment, shamefully avoided.” — “Grieving for Benazir,” Bernard-Henri Levy, French philosopher, Wall Street Journal online, December 30, 2007 (www.opinionjournal.com/forms/printThis.htm)

“Even those of us sharply critical of Benazir Bhutto’s behaviour and policies—both while she was in office and more recently—are stunned and angered by her death. Indignation and fear stalk the country once again. . . . 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 the 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 ever known, students, peasants, and workers who saw it as their party. That feeling persists in some parts of the country to this day, despite everything. Benazir’s horrific death should give her colleagues pause for reflection. To depend on a person or a family may be necessary at certain times, but it is a structural weakness, not a strength for a political organization. The Pakistan People’s Party needs to be refounded as a modern and democratic organization, 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 stabilize occupied and war-torn Afghanistan. This can and should be done. The Bhutto family should not be asked for any more sacrifices.” — “A tragedy born of military despotism and anarchy,” Tariq Ali, Pakistani political journalist, The Guardian Unlimited, December 28, 2007 [www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/story]

“While Benazir represented modernity and a quest for gender equality, the Islamist establishment and the Army’s Inter-Services Intelligence—that Islamists have so effectively penetrated—wanted to turn back the clock of history and permanently exclude women from the corridors of power. When the first suicide bombings killed more than a hundred of her followers in October 2007, on the day she returned to Pakistan after years of exile, Benazir’s naysayers claimed she had staged the attack herself. The Islamists and the left mocked her, labelling her as the poodle of George W. Bush. The cruelty of that slander was matched by her resolve. Why did they have to kill her? If she was as corrupt as her critics claim, couldn’t they have bought her loyalties? Her killers, however, knew that the woman who spent years in jail, lived in exile for a decade, had one thing on her mind: the end of Islamic extremism in Pakistan. For that, and for the fact that she was a woman, she had to be eliminated.” — “She died as her father did: bravely,” Tarek Fatah, founder of the Muslim Canadian Congress, The Globe and Mail, December 27, 2007

“[Benazir Bhutto] was a self-proclaimed democrat who was also the chairman-for-life of the Pakistan People’s Party. When she was in power, she lent support to the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, as part of Pakistan’s strategic struggle with India, and, particularly in her second term, she did little to halt the rise of a nuclear Pakistan. After she fell from power the second time, in 1996, she and her husband Asif Ali Zardari, who acted as her minister of investment, were accused of taking colossal kickbacks on government contracts. Bhutto always claimed that the charges were politically motivated. Amnesty on those corruption charges was part of the deal, brokered by the U.S., that allowed her to return to Pakistan. Among American diplomats, the hope was that she would play a role in the restoration of a legitimate civilian government in Pakistan—a hope that her assassins sought to destroy. — “Bhutto and the candidates,” The New Yorker, January 7, 2008

Activities
1. For each of the above quotations, summarize the main points the author is making about Benazir Bhutto in your own words, and determine whether his/her evaluation of the slain Pakistani political figure is positive or negative and why.

2. State whether or not you agree with the views of the authors of these evaluations of Benzair Bhutto and why.
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Bhutto’s Successors: Her Husband and Her Son

Like the Gandhi-Nehru dynasty in neighbouring India, or the Kennedys in the United States, the Bhuttos are a powerful Pakistani political family that appears to be stricken with a fatal curse. Benazir Bhutto’s assassination is just the latest in a series of tragedies to strike the Bhutto clan. It began with the hanging for treason of her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the founder of the dynasty, in 1979. Six years later, Benazir Bhutto’s younger brother, Shanawaz, was found dead in his apartment on the French Riviera under mysterious circumstances that have, as yet, not been explained. It was believed that he had been poisoned after attending a family reunion in Pakistan. In 1996 Benazir’s other brother, Murtaza, who had played a major role in PPP political affairs, appearing to rival his better-known sister for the party leadership, was shot dead in the middle of an election campaign. There were strong allegations that Benazir’s husband, Asif Ali Zardari, may have been behind Murtaza’s killing, fearing a potential challenge to his wife’s and his own political ambitions.

1. “Mr Ten Per Cent”

For most of his adult life, Benazir Bhutto’s husband, Asif Ali Zardari, has been a very controversial figure in Pakistan. His nomination as de facto head of the Pakistan People’s Party following Benazir’s assassination was expected but not met with universal approval in party ranks. In fact, shortly before her death, Benazir had made it clear that, because of his questionable past, her husband would not be taking an active part in the upcoming national elections, fearing that he would be a liability to the PPP’s efforts to gain power. This was because Zardari’s name has been invariably tainted with allegations of corruption, stemming from his period as a member of Bhutto’s cabinet during her two terms in office in the 1990s. During that time, he was accused of accepting numerous bribes in return for the awarding of contracts to foreign firms anxious to do business in Pakistan. Because of his insistence on always receiving a “piece of the action” for such transactions, Zardari earned the nickname “Mr. Ten Per Cent.”

Zardari spent eight years in prison for these crimes until he was finally released in 2004 as part of a deal between the Musharraf government and the PPP. Throughout his career, he has staunchly denied any wrongdoing, claiming that all of the accusations against him have been politically motivated by his and his wife’s opponents. For her part, Bhutto remained loyal to her husband, whom she wed in an arranged marriage that united the Bhutto clan with the Zardaris, another powerful landowning family in her home province of Sindh. Growing up, Zardari gained the reputation as something of a playboy because of his love of fast cars, horses, fancy clothes, clubs, and the jet-set lifestyle. But he has also demonstrated considerable personal bravery, as he survived a long prison term in Pakistan’s notoriously brutal jails and once rescued the daughter of a German diplomat who fell into a bog while riding her horse.

Zardari now suffers from diabetes and must use a walking stick to move. After years of estrangement from his children, he has worked to achieve reconciliation. He has become a close advisor to his 19-year-old son Bilawal, who has been named the official head of the PPP. Until the latter is old enough to assume a real leadership position, it is expected
that Zardari will play a key behind-the-scenes role in the party. Whether his questionable past will continue to haunt him and influence the PPP’s electoral fortunes remains to be seen.


2. The Heir Apparent
Before his mother’s tragic death catapulted him into the international spotlight, Bilawal Zardari was a 19-year-old expatriate Pakistani student about to begin his second term of courses at Britain’s prestigious Oxford University. But when Benazir Bhutto’s will named him as the next leader of the Pakistan People’s Party, his life was changed forever. At 19, he is as yet too young to assume a real leadership position, since he cannot vote or run for office before he turns 21. Until then, his father, Asif Ali Zardari, will direct the affairs of the PPP from behind the scenes, employing Makhdoom Amin Fahim, a faceless party functionary, as his front man.

Bhutto’s death was a personal tragedy for Bilawal, compounded by the fact that he was expected to appear before the world’s media and answer complex questions about the motives behind his mother’s killing and its likely consequences for Pakistan. At first, the young man appeared uncertain and hesitant as he took questions from 150 reporters at a hastily organized briefing in London just days after his mother’s death. But he quickly found his stride. After reading from a prepared text, he made it clear that he intended to complete his university studies before assuming political leadership. He believed that this is what his mother would have wanted him to do so he could be thoroughly prepared for the difficult challenges that lie ahead of him. But he committed himself to perpetuating what he called his mother’s “political blood line” that has made the PPP something of a personal Bhutto fiefdom for three generations now.

Bilawal also stated that from now on, he would add Bhutto to his name, in honour of his dead mother. He paid tribute to her bravery and promised to remain true to her vision of Pakistan as a moderate, peaceful, and secular Islamic state where radical fundamentalists and terrorists would not find shelter or support. He also dedicated himself to the struggle to achieve real democracy in Pakistan after years of President Pervez Musharraf’s military dictatorship, stating that in his mother’s words, “democracy is the best revenge.”

Of course the question of whether he himself fears assassination was asked, and Bilawal did not try to avoid it. Although he has never lived in Pakistan for any period of time, he is aware of the dangers he is facing once he returns, and the very real possibility that like his grandfather and his mother, he himself might one day fall victim to an assassin. But he defiantly ended the press conference with the following observation. “How many Bhuttos can be killed? From many houses more Bhuttos will come.” Linking the fate of his party and his country to his family, in the traditional Bhutto manner, Bilawal indicated that he is a true successor to his mother and grandfather. Whether or not he will be able to gain the necessary experience to assume an effective role in his country’s troubled political life in the years to come, and whether he will indeed survive the challenge, remains completely unclear at this time.

Source: “Bhutto heir takes centre stage” and “Profile: Bilawal Bhutto Zardari,” BBC News Online http://newvote.bbc.co.uk

Quote
“Although I admit that my experience to date is limited, I intend to learn.”
—Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Los Angeles Times, January 9, 2008
Activities

1. Why is Benazir Bhutto’s husband Asif Ali Zardari such a controversial figure and a potential political liability for the PPP?

2. What enormous challenges does the young Bilawal Bhutto Zardari face now that he has been named the official head of the PPP following his mother’s assassination?

3. Do you think that Bilawal Bhutto Zardari is likely to succeed as a future leader of Pakistan? Explain.

4. Why do the Bhuttos seem to feel that the PPP is their own personal property? Is this a good thing for a political party and the country it seeks to govern? Explain.

5. What role might Canada and Canadians play to assist Pakistan in becoming a modern democratic state? Offer some concrete suggestions.
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Activity

1. Using the information contained in this resource guide and some of the resources listed below, write an obituary for the assassinated Pakistani political leader Benazir Bhutto, providing a summary of her life and political career, an assessment of her achievements, and a final evaluation of her legacy and what her departure from the scene is likely to mean for her country's future and that of the troubled region of which it is such an important part. Be prepared to read your obituary at a special memorial session in your class.

OR

2. Pakistan is sometimes referred to as “the world's most dangerous nation.” Based on what you have learned about this country and its recent history from this CBC News in Review story and the previous one in December 2007, evaluate the validity of this statement. Explain the factors that have contributed to Pakistan’s political instability in the past, and discuss what you think its possible future will be in the post-Benazir Bhutto era, and what this means for the region as a whole.

Useful Web Sites

Home page of the Pakistan People’s Party: [www.ppp.org.pk](http://www.ppp.org.pk)

Home page of the Muslim League-N, Nawaz Sharif’s party: [www.pmln.org.pk](http://www.pmln.org.pk)

Official home page of President Pervez Musharraf: [http://presidentofpakistan.gov.pk](http://presidentofpakistan.gov.pk)

Official home page of the government of Pakistan: [www.pakistan.gov.pk](http://www.pakistan.gov.pk)

Home page of the Pakistan Electoral Commission, the body responsible for administering the February 18, 2007, elections: [http://ecp.gov.pk](http://ecp.gov.pk)

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Did you know . . .

Benazir Bhutto became leader of the PPP when she was just 22 years old.