

The Bhuttos: A political dynasty

AYESHA ALEEM

The Bhutto family began with Sir Shah Nawaz Bhutto, the son of Khuda Bux, a mechanic in the Indian Railways, prior to Independence. England educated Shah Nawaz became a well known, wealthy feudal lord in the Sindh province of Pakistan. He later became the 'Dewan' of Junagadh (now part of India) and founded the Sindh Peoples Party in the 1940s. He was the father of Pakistan's first elected Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Founder of the Pakistan Peoples Party and having served as President and Prime Minister of Pakistan, University of Southern California and UC Berkeley educated Zulfikar Ali Bhutto served his country in politics from 1971 to 1977. He is the father of two-term Pakistan Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto. He was executed in 1979, following a controversial trial that accused him of authorizing the murder of a political opponent - a move seen as politically influenced under the directives of General Muhammed Zia-ul-Haq. Despite criticism that he was a nationalist, an opportunist and one to intimidate his opponents, he continues to be one of the most popular leaders of Pakistan's chequered past.

Begum Nusrat Bhutto is a former first lady of Pakistan as



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the second wife of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Now his widow, her children include Benazir and Murtuza Bhutto. She has also dabbled in politics in the 1980s, serving as an MP to the National Assembly. Estranged from Benazir after she supported her son in a family dispute, mother and daughter

settled their differences after his death. She currently resides in Dubai ailing from a stroke and Alzheimer's disease.

Benazir Bhutto elected to office twice as prime minister of Pakistan. However, she was also ousted out of them each time on charges of corruption. In 1998, she went on a self-imposed exile, spending her time between Dubai and London. She recently returned to her country this October. When General Musharraf declared Emergency in Pakistan in November 2007, she was placed under house arrest for criticizing this move. Educated at Oxford and holding a degree from Harvard University, Bhutto is married to Asif Ali Zardari, who last held office in 1999 as a senator, with whom she has three children.

Murtuza Bhutto is the son of, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Begum Nusrat Bhutto and brother of Benazir Bhutto. Rebelling at a young age, the educated man took to arms after his father was overthrown from office by successor, Zia-ul-Haq and began 'al-zulfikar' - a militant wing of the PPP. With this group growing, he attacked state and military infrastructure, that threatened the army's stability. Following the 1996 Karachi bombings, he denied involvement in the incident and accused authorities of unjustly scrutinizing his organization. The same year, he committed suicide, shooting himself through the head multiple times. He was 42 years old.

In conclusion, it can be ascertained that the Bhuttos were a very powerful family that have played a big role in Pakistan's politics for the past several years and the course the country has taken. Wealthy, highly educated but with very complicated personal lives, they promise to continue to actively participate in the future of a country that has often found itself in the midst of controversy.

Iran and US: A volatile relationship

AMITESHWAR SINGH

Iran's recent proposal to shift the trading currency for oil from the dollar is just another of several dents in the already chequered Iran-US relationship. Such a move could depreciate the dollar's value further, adding to the US economy's woes. But then, Iran has never really been concerned about the US economy's problems, not at least in the recent past.

There was a time, almost till the end of the World War II when the two countries had cordial ties with contracts for military and economic cooperation. The Persian Constitutional Revolution (in the early 1900s), which ushered in a pro-US ruler brought the two countries even closer.

It was in 1951, when Iranian Prime Minister Muhammad Mussadeq tried to limit foreign interests in Iran including Britain's control over the oil industry, that the first cracks began to appear. But he was quickly overthrown by the Shah with British and US help. And there followed another period of peace between the two countries.

The real break came when in 1963, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a religious leader, began a tirade against the the Shah and his relationship with the US. Khomeini was exiled to Turkey in 1964, but the damage was done. President Jimmy Carter criticised the Shah's government and its human rights record. He pressurised the Shah to allow more freedom for political dissidents.

The Iranian revolution of 1979 not only brought in a complete change in the Iranian society, but also its foreign policy. Khomeini, the new leader began vicious rhetoric against the US, describing the country as the "Great Satan". The occupation of the American embassy in Tehran in November 1979 was the last straw. Fifty two hostages were held for over 444 days and the US froze Iran's assets, banned American exports to the country and expelled Iranian diplomats. The hostages were released minutes after President Carter's term ended in 1981, in exchange for some Iranian assets. The break was complete.

The eight-year Iraq - Iran war contributed to the acrimony between the two nations. The US naturally, supported Iraq. This, however, did not stop the US from supplying weapons to Iran in order to fund the anti-communist Contras, in Nicaragua. This event led to a political scandal in US in which President Reagan himself affirmed the sale.

To add grist to the mill, on July 3, 1988 a US naval

ship shot down an Iranian Airbus on a scheduled commercial flight in Iranian airspace, resulting in 290 civilian fatalities. Iran saw it as evidence that the US planned to get involved in the war against Iraq. The war ended on July 18, 1988 as the Ayatollah accepted a UN-brokered cease-fire agreement.

A roller-coaster ride followed. In April 1995, President Bill Clinton imposed a total embargo on dealings with Iran. The next year, the Iran-Libya Sanctions act was passed which threatened anybody investing in Iran or Libya.

But, a few years later, in 1998, reformist president Khatami made efforts to thaw the relations. The US responded somewhat and the embargo was lifted for two Iranian export items - carpets and pistachios. Informal inter-Parliamentary talks also took place in 2000.

Since George W. Bush came to power, the air has been thick with intrigue, subterfuge and some plain display of muscle. The US has gone hammer and tongs at Iran. It provided Israel with jet bombers capable of bombing Iran, deployed naval forces in the Persian Gulf, captured Iranian officials in Iraq, and supported terrorist groups to attack Iran. It also refused the Iranian government's offer in 2003 to broker peace through an agreement that included an offer to disarm the Hezbollah. Iran has accused the US of violating the territorial sovereignty of Iran by flying unmanned aerial vehicles and sending US soldiers into Iranian territory.

In its second term, the Bush administration continued its anti-Iran stance. Their major complaint is that Iran plans to develop nuclear weapons, while Iran has maintained that its nuclear program is aimed only at generating electricity. The Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has cooperated with the IAEA for inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities like Bushehr. Many observers believe that the US stance is only an excuse to ensure oil security for the Western world.

Four months ago, the US contemplated labelling the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organisation. The IRGC is Iranian military's elitist arm and if it is labelled a terrorist organisation, Iran will face a lot more sanctions.

Iran's suggestion, therefore at the recently-concluded OPEC session, should not come as a surprise to anyone. It's easy to dismiss this stance as just another move in the battle of wits between the two countries. It's not easy, however, to make genuine efforts at reconciliation. That will take a lot of work.

Media hushed in Pakistan

AYESHA ALEEM

Almost a month since its occurrence the emergency imposed in Pakistan still stands. That means that the constitution of the land is still down and civil liberties of the people are still suspended. The judiciary has been ousted. The people of Pakistan are vehemently opposing the condition. With its enforcer, General Pervez Musharraf, out of the country recently visiting Saudi Arabia, the situation was slightly relaxed. However, it still prevails. An announcement of ending the emergency in November or early December 2007 has been made.

Meanwhile, the media has been silenced. A complete media blackout has ensued with news channels being blocked in the country. Musharraf's reasons cited for this move were that the media was being irresponsible and misrepresenting facts, which was leading to discord within the country. Pakistani television network, Geo TV, part of one of the country's oldest media empires, was forced to close down its

operations and go off cable, without any reason being given. Even international news agencies such as BBC and CNN have not been spared. Musharraf defended his actions by stating that he was cracking down on a media to whom he had once given full freedom, but that the portrayal of facts on certain news channels was negative - something he had clearly directed against.

It's often said that it's only when there's something to hide that every trick in the book is used to keep the matter under wraps. People are willing to go to great lengths to conceal what is deemed shameful, controversial or just too colourful for the average person to digest. So, if Musharraf is going as far as to place Benazir Bhutto under house arrest, shutting up the media while his own countrymen are hitting out, chances are that something must be seriously amiss. The international community has expressed sharp criticism towards his actions, and the General needs to pay attention to the indications.



The French railworkers' strike against the Government's policies left millions of commuters stranded-Pic Courtesy Reuters