

A political giant in Pakistan

N.S.T 28/12/07 M/S 28



Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the then Foreign Minister, sending off Benazir Bhutto at the Subang Airport, Selangor, after her official working visit to Malaysia on July 10, 1995.

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, who was slain in a suicide attack in Rawalpindi yesterday, knew very well the risks she ran when she decided to wage a public campaign for the restoration of democracy.

Hours after she returned home in October this year after eight years of self-imposed exile, a suicide bomber killed nearly 150 people in an attack targeting her motorcade in the streets of Karachi.

The attack followed threats by militants linked to al-Qaeda, angered by Benazir's support for Washington's war on terrorism.

"They might try to assassinate me," Benazir had told the pan-Arab *Asharq al-Awsat* newspaper in an interview before she set out to return to Pakistan.

"I have prepared my family and my loved ones for any possibility."

Despite being in the wilderness for most of the past decade, the tall, stately Benazir remained one of the most recognisable female politicians in the world.

In 1986, a vast sea of supporters had welcomed her home as she came back to challenge a military dictator who had executed her father, deposed prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, seven years earlier.

Benazir became the first female prime minister in the Muslim world when she was elected in 1988 at the age of 35.

She was deposed in 1990, re-elected in 1993, and ousted again in 1996 amid charges of corruption and mismanagement.

She said the charges were politically motivated but in 1999 chose to stay in exile rather than face them.

After more years spent abroad, Benazir, 54, flew back again in October to lead her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) into national elections.

This time, rather than confronting a military ruler, she was hoping to work with army chief and President Pervez Musharraf for a peaceful transition to civilian rule.

Western allies saw their co-operation as the best way to sustain the nuclear-armed country's efforts against terrorism.

But after Musharraf imposed a state of

BENAZIR BHUTTO

1953	Born in Karachi
1986	Returns from exile to lead the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) against Zia ul-Haq, who hanged her former prime minister father in 1979)
1988	Elections held after death of Zia; Sworn in as first woman PM
1990	Dismissed by president Ghulam Ishaq Khan on charges of corruption and misrule
1993	Re-elected PM for second term
1996	Sacked as PM by then president Farooq Ahmed Leghari on charges of corruption
1999	Self-imposed exile in London, Dubai, vows to return for 2002 elections Army Chief Pervez Musharraf takes power in military coup
2002	Musharraf sworn in for fresh five-year term as president
Sept 2007	Musharraf and Benazir aides step up talks about power-sharing pact, PPP announces October 18 as return date for Benazir
Oct 4	Bhutto and Musharraf agree on reconciliation accord, Musharraf signs deal for Benazir amnesty
Oct 6	Musharraf wins vote for another term of office as president
Oct 18	Returns to Pakistan after 8 years in self-exile; homecoming parade in Karachi ends in carnage after suicide bomber kills 150 in massive blast aimed at Benazir
Nov 3	Musharraf declares state of emergency, suspends constitution, arrests hundreds, sacks the Chief Justice
Nov 4	Accuses Musharraf of staging a "second

Western allies saw their co-operation as the best way to sustain the nuclear-armed country's efforts against terrorism.

But after Musharraf imposed a state of emergency early last month, Benazir angrily protested and redoubled her calls for the president to quit the army and hold free elections.

Even when Musharraf resigned from the military late last month, Benazir and rival party politician Nawaz Sharif continued to keep him at arm's length, warning of attempts to rig the coming polls.

Benazir's family is no stranger to violence. Both of her brothers died in mysterious circumstances and she said al-Qaeda assassins had tried to kill her several times in the 1990s.

Intelligence reports had said al-Qaeda, the Taliban and Pakistani jihadi groups were sending suicide bombers after her.

Benazir had said that if she were in power she would allow US forces to hit al-Qaeda targets in Pakistani territory, if Pakistan's own forces were unable to carry out an attack.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the then Foreign Minister, sending off Benazir Bhutto at the Subang Airport, Selangor, after her official working visit to Malaysia on July 10, 1995.

Benazir, which means "unique", was born in 1953 into a wealthy landowning family. The first of four children, she was educated at a Christian mission school in Karachi, and then at Harvard and Oxford universities.

Her father was Pakistan's first popularly elected leader, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Her mission began in 1977 when army chief Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq overthrew her father. Twenty-one months later, it became a blood feud when Zulfikar was hanged after a controversial trial.

For years Benazir fought against Zia without success. She and her mother, Nusrat, were in and out of prison until she was allowed to go abroad for medical treatment in 1984.

In August 1988, Zia was killed in an air crash. Benazir's election victory later that year was welcomed worldwide as the advent of

democracy in Pakistan.

But many in the powerful security services distrusted her, and President Ghulam Ishaq Khan sacked her after 20 months, accusing her of presiding over large-scale corruption.

She accused the establishment of rigging elections three months later to bring their protegee, Nawaz Sharif, to power.

Benazir clawed her way back in 1993 but was again kicked out of power on charges of corruption and misrule.

Asif Ali Zardari, the businessman Benazir wed in an arranged marriage in 1987, was seen as her greatest liability.

He was released on bail after eight years in prison in 2004.

The deal under which Benazir returned home in October also erased charges against him. Reuters

	suspends constitution, arrests hundreds, sacks the Chief Justice
Nov 4	Accuses Musharraf of staging a "second coup"
Nov 7	Set to hold crisis talks with opposition leaders

