

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article1396>



**Benazir assassination**

# **Unprecedented mass reaction**

- IV Online magazine - 2007 - IV395 - December 2007 -

Publication date: Sunday 30 December 2007

---

**Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved**

---

**Pakistan has never seen so many people protesting in the streets as over the last two days. They were all united in condemnation of Benazir Bhutto's brutal murder. The news was heard with a great shock; immediate mass anger erupted. 28th December was the first day of general strike called by many organizations, ranging from political parties to various professional groups.**

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/aljzpak.jpg>]

The first targets were most of Pakistan Muslim League's election posters, banners, flags and billboards. The PMLQ is a major split from Pakistan Muslim League, which is headed by Nawaz Sharif, the former prime minister. The PMLQ "comprised of the most corrupt feudalists, capitalists, former army generals and black marketers" has been in a power-sharing arrangement with General Musharraf since 2002.

The PMLQ had spent billions on its election advertising; all that was gone within a few hours. The crowd was proud it has done its home work. Removing all these anti-people election materials was done with utmost sophistication. None of the Pakistan Peoples Party or Pakistan Muslim League material was removed.

In many cities throughout the province of Sind (Bhutto's home province), banks were attacked and burned, and most ATM machines were destroyed. Banks were targeted because they had made unprecedented profits over the last few years, while also eliminating services such as free banking. In some places, people were lucky enough to bring some money home.

In Sind there were also incidents of trains being damaged. According to the Daily Jang 28 railway stations, 13 engines and seven trains have been burnt, resulting in a loss of over three billion Rupees. (In a bid to reduce railway losses, the Musharraf regime increased rail fares several fold, partly privatizing the system as well. But since the night of 27th December the railway system has collapsed. Thousands of passengers are waiting in the rail stations but there is no sign service being restored. The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and two private airlines, Air Blue and Shaheen Air, have cancelled their domestic flights in the name of "rescheduling." The reality is that the staff did not turn up.

Throughout the country hundreds of private buses were burned. During Musharraf's eight years of rule public buses have been eliminated and fares on the private lines have skyrocketed. In fact many PMLQ government ministers had their own bus companies, making huge gains out of mass poverty.

Thousands of private cars have been damaged all over Pakistan by the angry mobs, mainly youth. They were showing their anger on the car companies (mainly Toyota, Suzuki and Honda) because while the majority of the population has no subsidized public transport, the companies have been raking in tremendous profit. Many leasing companies have been robbing the growing middle class by offering cars at abnormally high prices.

Houses and offices of PMLQ politicians, local mayors and administrators were also damaged or burnt.

Over 100 people involved in incidents related to mass protest have died during the first 40 hours. They were murdered by the police or were caught in cross firing from different groups.

Following the death of Benazir Bhutto, hundreds of thousands have raised slogans against Musharraf's regime

## Unprecedented mass reaction

---

and American imperialism. The anger accumulated during the last eight years simply exploded. This was the masses' response to the strict implementation of a neoliberal agenda, resulting in unprecedented price hikes, unemployment and poverty. After the assassination anger that was to be channeled through either boycotting or participating in the elections has spilled over.

There is a great anti-Musharraf consciousness. It is shown in different ways in different parts of the country and to a different degree. The so-called capitalist economical growth under Musharraf has left millions in absolute poverty. There was no "Pakistan shining" as the dictatorship proclaimed.

2007 has been a year of mass awakening. It started with lawyers' movement after the removal of Ifikhar Choudry as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. The Chief Justice said "No" when the generals pressured him into resigning. He was removed, only to be reinstated on 20th July, after a massive movement of 80,000 lawyers. They were joined by political activists from almost all political parties, but not by the masses. The masses only welcomed the chief justice from the side roads; they did not actively participate in the movement for his reinstatement.

Then Musharraf got himself elected as president for the second five-year term in a "democratic manner" by a parliament elected for one five-year term. He was still wearing the military uniform when elected as a "civilian" president. His theme was "elect me president for the second term and I will take off the uniform after taking oath as a civilian president."

The November imposition of martial law in the name of an "emergency" was used to remove the rather independent top judges of Pakistan. The law also put restrictions on the media; over 10,000 were arrested.

So Musharraf got himself duly elected president and took off his uniform after removing the top judges. His hand-picked judges gave him all the necessary backing. He was helped in this process by Benazir Bhutto who, in the words of Tariq Ali, was forced into an "arranged marriage" by U.S. and British imperialism. In this unholy alliance, every one was cheating everyone with utmost honesty.

After large-scale repression and removal of an independent judiciary, Musharraf announced general elections for January 8th and lifted the emergency. The regime was happy that everything was going according to "plan." The three major parties [Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party, Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League Quid Azam (PMLQ),] had agreed to participate in these fraudulent elections. The religious fundamentalist political alliance (MMA) had split over the question of participation, with a major part contesting in the election.

But when the religious fundamentalist struck and killed Benazir Bhutto on the evening of 27th December, the "plan" was shattered into pieces. It was a big blow to the agreed-upon terms and conditions of various participating parties. It was not a bump on the road to conciliation and compromise but a total destruction of the road.

The murder of Benazir Bhutto is a double-edged sword. While it is a big blow to the plans of British and American imperialism, it will not cause celebration for the religious fundamentalist forces. The initial anger has gone against the military regime and its crony politicians. But it can go against the fundamentalists as well. No party will be able to celebrate the shocking killings.

The Musharraf regime has understood this clearly and now is trying consciously to steer the direction of the movement against the religious fundamentalists. On the 28th December, in a two-hour press conference, a military brigadier, representing the government, named Baitullah Mehsud, an Al-Qaeda associate in tribal areas of Pakistan, as the one who carried out the attack.

## Unprecedented mass reaction

---

Foolishly the military officer tried his best to prove that Benazir Bhutto, while waving to crowds after the bomb blast, was not killed by a bullet but by the lever of the sun roof in the bullet-proof car. What difference does it make if it is proven that Benazir Bhutto is not killed by the bullet but in another way? Not much.

The Military Brigadier's explanation did not satisfy the angry journalists, who asked him again and again about the connection between Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) and Abdullah Mahsood. Their question went unanswered: Why was Mahsood released quietly on the day emergency law was imposed, the same day over 200 Pakistan army men, kidnapped by Mahsood's group the week before, were also released? The ISI has had a relationship with religious fundamentalists dating back to the 1980s, when imperialists and fundamentalists were close friends.

It is very volatile, unstable, unpredictable, explosive, dangerous, impulsive, fickle and capricious political situation. It has been many years since mass reaction has erupted to this degree. The general strike was a total success. All roads were empty. No traffic at all. All shops were closed. All industrial and other institutions were completely shut down.

After the initial inhibition to curb the strike, the regime has now issued strict orders to kill anyone on the spot if there is any "looting." It has called the regular army into 16 districts of the Sind provinces and paramilitary forces elsewhere in Pakistan.

The regime has not postponed the scheduled election so far but it will be very difficult to hold it on 8th January. Nawaz's Muslim League and several other political parties have already announced their intention to boycott the fraudulent elections.

The Labour Party Pakistan is demanding the immediate resignation of the Musharraf dictatorship and the forming of an interim government comprised of civil society organizations, trade unions and peasant organizations. This government would then proceed to hold free and fair general elections under an independent election commission.

The LLP is also demanding immediate restoration of the top judges and their convening an investigation into the two attempts on Benazir Bhutto's life. Further, as part of the All Parties Democratic Movement, the LPP is supporting a three-day general strike, linking it to the overthrow of the military dictatorship. It is asking that all parties reject the general elections fraud on 8th January.

*29th December 2007*

Farooq Tariq  
spokesperson  
Labour Party Pakistan  
40-Abbot Road Lahore, Pakistan  
Tel: 92 42 6315162 Fax: 92 42 6271149 Mobile: 92 300 8411945  
[E-mail] [www.laborpakistan.org](http://www.laborpakistan.org) [www.jeddojuhd.com](http://www.jeddojuhd.com)