**[The little prince](https://www.dawn.com/news/1793202/the-little-prince)**

[Arifa Noor](https://www.dawn.com/authors/57/arifa-noor) Published November 28, 2023

FINALLY, there is a twist in the tale and we have some new political stuff to discuss. And for this, one has to thank Asif Ali Zardari (AAZ), whose candidness will allow us to spend a few days away from the usual conjecture over the PTI’s fate and PML-N’s honeymooning and what it will bring for different members of the Sharif family.

In a [surprise interview](https://www.dawn.com/news/1791862) to Hamid Mir on *Geo*, which stretched on for two hours, the former president spoke about all things politics, which ranged from the coming election to economic miracles that sugar and agriculture policies can bring.

But as I know very little about the latter, all I could focus on was the political stuff, especially his remarks about his heir and co-chairman, Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari (BBZ). The 30-something, who has been heading this party for 15 years and has travelled the world as foreign minister, needs more training said the father.

The party can try and spin it as much as it wants, but this is a snub, BBZ will not find easy to recover from.

Indeed, in those remarks lay the basic dilemma of both Maryam Nawaz and BBZ, struggling to grow in the shadow of their respective parents. And it appears the growth simply means being sunflower-like and to keep turning their gaze in the direction of their fathers.

So Maryam blows hot when her father is in trouble and is silent when he is basking in the glory of a fourth victory. That politics and public opinion do not allow for periods of fiery leadership followed by dutiful shadowing, is lost on all political parties.

It was a snub that Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari will not find easy to recover from.

BBZ has been through similar phases of ‘now you see him now you don’t’, so much so that it has been hard for people to view him as an independent player, even when he gave up his part-timing for full-time politicking. And this image refuses to change because the party continues to treat him like a poster boy rather than the man in charge.

And I say this not because of his father’s assertion during the interview that he (AAZ) was the one who would decide the party tickets including the one given to Bilawal but also the manner in which the vote of no confidence played out in 2022.

Bilawal led a long march to Islamabad from Sindh, which was to culminate in the overthrow of Imran Khan. However, once he reached Islamabad, the big three (Shehbaz Sharif, AAZ and Maulana Fazlur Rehman) held a press conference and announced filing the no-confidence motion. And once that was done, few were interested in the speech BBZ gave as his rally reached the capital.

The attention and focus had shifted; if BBZ was really the man around whom the party revolved, this would not have happened.

The more public and direct snub by the father in the *Geo* interview is simply more of the same, in a way. And as South Asia happens to be a place where the children rarely ever break away from their parents, chances are BBZ will not defy this tradition (the Mughals proved an exception).

But there is a second aspect to the notion that the father and son are not always on the same page. Indeed, it is not a new phenomenon. Back in 2013, it was reported that BBZ had stormed off to Dubai because he didn’t see eye to eye with his father and his aunt, Feryal Talpur on ticket distribution.

This time around, it appears AAZ’s comments about his son needing more training were partially due to the latter being aggressive and vocal about the facilitation being provided to the PML-N and Nawaz Sharif. While the jury is still out on whether this is a serious rift or simply a good cop bad cop routine (which Hamid Mir brought up), this has to be seen in the larger political context.

The PPP has two distinct views within; while most of those from Sindh are satisfied with the party’s focus on palace intrigues, those who were part of the party in Punjab — and the few who continue to still be around — felt it needed to be more aggressive, especially in confronting the PML-N, the dominant power in the province.

However, this never became party policy and as a result, the entire anti-PML-N space was captured by the PTI, as Imran Khan proved indefatigable in taking them on. Be it voters or politicians who are not in the PML-N camp, they flocked to the former sportsman and his party.

This lack of aggression is a major reason the PPP stopped being a contender in the province.

However, the voices within the party which wanted BBZ to play a role closer to Khan’s were never completely silenced; especially as the party also saw the utility of using this opposition to PML-N whenever needed.

What we witnessed in recent days was perhaps a mix of both the subdued voices within the party plus the cynicism the party has become known for. And for reasons only he is aware of, AAZ decided it was a good moment to send a message to the right quarters by pooh-poohing his own party’s stand, embarrassing his son in the process.

That this snub will simply add to the struggles of Bilawal in the eyes of the voters, perhaps does not bother those who think palace intrigues and jorr-torr are easier ways of doing politics.

Politics is a ruthless game but who would know this better than the Bhutto family, which has paid a very high price for this.

If the past is any guide, the rift will be addressed and the family will soon be crooning ‘hum saath saath hain’. The picture Bakhtawar Bhutto tweeted of herself along with the father and son was a step in this direction — it is to be noted, however, that the picture included the former president’s sister and not the former prime minister’s sibling, who is also in Dubai if reports are to be believed.

Blood is not thicker than power. And who knows this better than the dynastic families of Pakistan.

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