**Martyrdom of Murtaza Bhutto**

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I was posted as Consul in our Mission in Birmingham when the iconic son of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was martyred near the Bhuttos’ ancestral house -70 Clifton in Karachi on 20 September 1996. The gloom of that tragic evening is etched in my memory when I was showered with queries from angry and worried Pakistanis about the authenticity of this nerve-wrenching event. Similar frantic calls were being received by Higher Commissioner Wajid Shamsul Hassan. He was in contact with the Prime Minister House Islamabad and waiting for further instructions from the Prime Minister. There was a pall of uncertainty, gloom and angst overcasting the evening.

The political situation back at home was taking an ugly turn in the backdrop of the tragic killing of Mir Murtaza Bhutto in a police shootout. This was a devastating blow to Muhtarma Benazir Bhutto, personally, and her government. She lost her sibling and the only surviving male member of the Bhutto family in a tragic way. She had no one else to blame for this irreparable loss. Her mother returned from Dubai and lapsed into a shock after hearing the devastating news and never recovered from it. There was not a single soul in Birmingham I knew – friends and foes alike – who did not receive this shocking news with soaked eyes.

We were hearing about the differences between Muhtarma Benazir Bhutto and Mir Murtaza Bhutto – the two iconic heirs of Bhutto. Serious differences had actually cropped up between Mir Murtaza Bhutto and his brother-in-law: Asif Ali Zardari. There was also news of the highhanded treatment of certain police officers in Karachi by the former. We were also aware of a growing wedge between Benazir Bhutto and her handpicked President–Sardar Farooq Leghari. The casus belli of this widening gulf between the two leaders, unfortunately, was no other person than Asif Ali Zardari. The quarrels between Sardar Farooq Leghari and Asif Ali Zardari had turned into personal rancour and animosity.

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The opposition, spearheaded by Mian Nawaz Sharif, was relentlessly bringing out serious allegations of corruption against Mr Zardari. Amid these allegations, the national media kept highlighting the purchase of the Rockwood Surrey Palace by Mr Zardari. President Leghari had reportedly brought the instances of Zardari’s corruption to the notice of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto; pleading with her to sack him as the Minister of Investment. Similarly, differences between Mr Zardari and Mir Murtaza Bhutto had morphed into open enmity. Despite all this, nobody had the slightest idea that the innocent blood of a Bhutto would be mercilessly shed on the streets of Karachi near 70-Clifton by the brutal use of police force and the elected government would be dismissed by an old and ardent loyalist.

A single Judge tribunal was appointed to investigate the tragic murder of Mir Murtaza Bhutto. His findings insinuated the involvement of high-ups but did not name the names. High Commissioner Wajid Shamsul Hassan was directed to hire a team from Scotland Yard to probe the crime. Media reports suggested that the evidence at the crime site had already been wiped out. The local police cold-shouldered the Scotland Yard team. No police officer came forward to record his statement about the crime. One of the police officials who had participated in the operation was found murdered in his quarter. The Scotland Yard team could not do anything under these hostile circumstances.

Muhtarma Benazir Bhutto’s second government was dismissed by President Sardar Farooq Leghari in the first week of November 1996. High Commissioner Wajid Shamsul Hassan was in Pakistan with the Scotland Yard team. The team returned after staying a week or so in Pakistan. We had paid a staggering amount of some 200,000 sterling pounds to Scotland Yard for this enquiry. Asif Ali Zardari was arrested from the Governor House Lahore on corruption and murder charges. He was destined to have his longest stay in jail this time. Muhtarma Benazir Bhutto was also implicated in corruption charges that would haunt her for long 11 years in self-imposed exile and finally force her to strike a shady deal with General Pervez Musharraf to return home in October 2007.

Besides some serious charges of malfeasance and corruption, Asif Ali Zardari was also nominated in the murder of Mir Murtaza Bhutto along with some senior police officers including DIG Shoeb Saddle, SP Wajid Durrani, and ASP Shahid Hayat. At the time, there were many accusing fingers pointed at Mr Zardari for the murder of Mir Murtaza Bhutto, Justice Nizam and the former Federal Secretary Muhammad Alam Baloch. All these murder cases, one by one, were dropped against Mr Zardari for lack of proper investigation and incriminating evidence. However, a decade later, all the police officers implicated in the murder of Mir Murtaza Bhutto, one after the other, would allegedly reach the apotheosis of their careers in the fourth PPP government headed by Asif Ali Zardari. Some of them were also said to benefit greatly from the well-touted largesse of Mr Zardari, even after their retirement.

History repeated itself after ten years. Muhtarma Benazir Bhutto was martyred in the Liaquat Bagh of Rawalpindi on 27 December 2007. This folly of hiring the services of the Scotland Yard for the investigation of her murder was repeated though the crime site there too had already been hosed clean by the police officers probably after a wink from some shadowy silhouettes. The Scotland Yard faced the same hurdles in the investigation of her murder, too. The investigation reports of the Scotland Yard in both these high-profile murders were silently shelved into the cubicle of a low official in the Ministry of Interior and would never see the daylight.

The PPP was in disarray. The elections in February 1997 were won by PML (N) with a “heavy mandate” and Mian Nawaz Sharif returned as Prime Minister of the country for the second term. This time around too, he had quarrels with the premier institutions stumbling on small pebbles. The rest is history.

*The author was a member of the Foreign Service of Pakistan and he has authored two books.*