

IN MEMORY OF BENAZIR BHUTTO*

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Seven years have passed since the death of one of the most remarkable women of the Muslim world, Benazir Bhutto, whose image doesn't cease to be admired by millions of people all over the planet.

Benazir was the first-born of landowner Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the future president (1971-1973) and Prime Minister (1973-1977) of Pakistan, and Begum Nusrat Bhutto, nee Isfahan, Iranian businessman's daughter. Having graduated from the missionary school of Jesus and Mary in Karachi, where studied children from wealthy Muslim families, Benazir continued her education at Harvard (USA) and Oxford (UK) universities.

Passion for political struggle, the desire for power can be called pedigree feature of Bhutto, thanks to which appeared this dynasty of Pakistani politicians. In 1996, Z.A. Bhutto resigned from the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan and in 1967 founded opposition People's Party of Pakistan (PPP). Bhutto called to "restore democracy" offering the program of economic reforms under the name of "Islamic socialism", as a result he was arrested and imprisoned (1968-1969). As a result of the political struggle Bhutto became a president of Pakistan on December 21st, 1971. It is interesting to remember that he became the only leader of Pakistan to visit Soviet Union: as a president in March 1972 and as a Prime Minister in October 1974.

In March 1977, elections to the parliament and provincial legislature bodies were carried out, both of them were won by PPP. Opposition leaders said that the vote was rigged and refused to recognize the official results of the elections, launched a campaign of protest, during which more than 270 people were killed. This gave rise to military intervention: on July 5th, 1977 was a military coup, as a result Bhutto was arrested and the country was set to military law. General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq took over as the Chief Military Administrator and in 1978 became President of Pakistan. Bhutto was accused of planning the murder of political opponents and put on trial. In March 1978, in the conditions of declared in the country martial law, Bhutto was sentenced to death.

Ignoring the threat, Benazir returned to her homeland, where opposed the dictatorship and was persecuted by the junta. She was taken into custody shortly before the execution of her father in April 1979 and spent most of her five-year sentence in solitary confinement. Bhutto remembered prison conditions as very severe.

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When Bhutto in 1984 managed to leave Pakistan for treatment she became a leader of PPP, thus she worked from London and continued political campaign against General Zia-ul-Haq.

In 1896, Bhutto returned to her homeland and became a leader of opposition. In 1987 she got married with a Pakistani businessman Asif Ali Zardari, who was three years younger. Benazir admitted that her marriage with Asif Zardari was arranged by their families. "On July 29th, 1987 my personal life took a drastic change - I gave consent to marriage at the insistence of my family. Thus I had to pay for the forced choice of political career. My position in Pakistan excluded that I could just meet a person, get to know him closer and then marry him."¹ Sister Sanam, who was four years younger than Benazir, married six years earlier.

After the death of Zia ul-Haq in 1998 in a plane crash, due to an explosion on board of the plane, imperious and political vacuum appeared in Pakistan. Bhutto won the elections in 1988 and took the post of Prime Minister, having become the first female leader of a Muslim state in modern history and the youngest Prime Minister in the history of Pakistan. She quickly gained the trust of Pakistanis, largely due to the immense popularity of her father and personal charm. Before Bhutto representation of women in governmental and decision making bodies was quite insignificant, despite the fact that all four Pakistan's Constitutions (1956, 1962, 1973 and 1985) provided certain amount of seats in legislature bodies². Therefore, Benazir's victory in the political arena can be considered a breakthrough in the national consciousness of Pakistanis.

At the peak of her popularity, shortly after she had been elected as a prime minister for the first time, Bhutto became one of the most influential women in the world politics. Young and glamorous, she successfully positioned herself as a political innovator, clearly stood out of the male political establishment.

During the elections in October 1990, President Ghulam Ishaq Khan dismissed her from the post of prime minister and appointed new elections in which the PPP failed. The reason for this defeat was the accusation in corruption.

After the election of 1993, Bhutto again became a Prime Minister. The total number of votes received by PNP was lower than of its main rival - the Pakistan Muslim League, so to form a government Bhutto formed a coalition with the conservative wing.

In the parliamentary elections of 1996 the PPP had won again. However, in the same year, Bhutto was dismissed from her post by President Sardar Farooq Ahmed Leghari due to the charges of embezzlement of international aid. After the second defeat in her career, for many Pakistanis her name became synonymous to corruption and immorality of state authorities.

In the parliamentary elections of 1997 Bhutto's party was defeated and received only 17 seats out of 217. In early 1998, Bhutto, her husband and mother were formally charged in corruption, their accounts in British and Swiss banks were frozen, but soon the investigation was suspended and the charges were dismissed.

Both terms that Bhutto held the post of prime-minister, prominent and highly controversial role in politics was played by her husband. Pakistani authorities have repeatedly accused Zardari of embezzling huge amount of funds from the state treasury. It was alleged that the money was secretly transferred to the accounts in European banks. Many observers have noted that the drop in Bhutto's popularity is directly

1 B. Bhutto. *Daughter of the East: The Autobiography*. M., 1991, p. 404.

2 Mahkamova S.A. *The women's movement in Pakistan*. M., 1978, p. 18–19.

related to the accusations against her husband. More than 20 criminal cases had been filed within 10 years but none of them was proven in the court. Nevertheless, in total he was detained for about eight years. In 2004, Zardari was released on bail for lack of charges.

Bhutto also strongly rejected brought against her allegation of corruption, which, as she said, were politically motivated. Before the amnesty in October 2007, five criminal cases on corruption charges were filed against her in Pakistan, but she wasn't condemned by neither one of them.

In 1999, Bhutto was convicted for failure to appear at the trial but later the Supreme Court of Pakistan overturned this decision. Shortly after the verdict tapes with conversations of the judge and some aides of the Prime Minister Mahammad Nawaz Sharif were found and confirmed that the judge was pressured. Thereafter Bhutto left Pakistan and for some time was living abroad. But even there she was pursued with discussions about the wealth owned by her and husband. In 2003 she even filed an appeal against the verdict of Swiss court in the case of money laundering.

Bhutto spent years of exile with her three children (son Bilawal, Daughter Bahtavar and Asif) in Dubai (UAE), where after the liberation also arrived her husband. She often visited Western capitals, where she lectured in universities, met with officials.

In 2006, Bhutto formed an alliance with the leader of the party "Pakistan Muslim League" Sharif, intending to engage in active political struggle. In an interview to British TV channel BBC world on September 14th she confirmed her decision to come back to Pakistan and into the politics on October 18th, 2007. This happened after signing by President Pervez Musharraf a decree to grant her and other opposition leaders amnesty on corruption charges. Unsuccessful assassination attempt has been made on the day of her arrival, however, it claimed the lives of hundred people.

The day of 27th December 2007 became fatal for Benazir Bhutto. She was 54 years old...

References

1. B. Bhutto. Daughter of the East: The Autobiography. M., 1991, p. 404.
2. Mahkamova S.A. The women's movement in Pakistan. M., 1978, p. 18–19.
