

View of Bhutto: Two Extremes

*Some See Him as a Hero,
Others Want Him Dead*

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ISLAMABAD, Pakistan, Feb. 8 — In the highly volatile political climate of Pakistan, conflicting emotions swirl around the case of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto as the deposed Prime Minister, under sentence of death by hanging for a political murder committed nearly five years ago, waits behind prison bars for the disposition of his case.

News
Analysis

His admirers, said to number in the millions, fervently hope that the military Government of President Mohammad Zia ul-Haq, the general who ousted the Bhutto Government in a bloodless coup on July 5, 1977, will heed appeals received this week from many world leaders, including President Carter, that he spare Mr. Bhutto's life.

It is widely believed that Mr. Bhutto would be returned to office by an overwhelming vote in a free election. Because of that popularity, many members of the middle and upper classes, recalling the corruption and other excesses during his five and a half years in power, want him dead so that there will no possibility of his heading the government again.

Among Pakistanis there seems to be scant middle ground. "People either hate Bhutto or love him," a foreign diplomat commented.

Local Reaction May Be the Key

Meanwhile, there is no sign that General Zia's Government has been moved by the intercessions from abroad. Diplomats feel that the general and his councilors are more likely to respond to local reaction than to any from outside, however eminent the source.

Public disturbances in favor of Mr. Bhutto, which his supporters predicted, have failed to materialize since the adverse decision by the Supreme Court that edged him closer to the gallows. His adherents attribute the calm in the streets to the wholesale arrest of leaders of his political party in recent days.

The former Prime Minister, whose appeal of the verdict was rejected by the court in a 4-to-3 decision Tuesday, is in the second day of a seven-day grace period, mandatory under law, during which he or another may file an appeal for clemency with the President. The reprieve can be extended if the Supreme Court decides to consider a petition for review of its latest decision, to be filed by Mr. Bhutto's lawyers on the ground — still undefined — of legal errors.

While Mr. Bhutto awaits his fate in a cell at the Rawalpindi district jail measuring 10 feet by 7 and, it is reported, suffers from malnutrition brought on by his confinement, the country he once ran in dictatorial style is totting up the balance sheet on his career. From one point of view the abuses perpetrated under his autocratic rule represented a cancerous infection that must be eradicated for the national moral health. Others see him as the greatest champion of the common man that this nation of feudalistic background has had.

Disenchantment With the Military

Some support of Mr. Bhutto can be traced to disenchantment with the military regimes that have governed during much of Pakistan's three decades as a nation, though he served as a Cabinet minister in the military Government of Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan and imposed martial law on occasion when political disorders seemed to be getting out of hand. There are also those who are willing to go along with military government in the frequent times of political trouble but are less than enamored of the individual generals in charge. More numerous, it is said, are those who are committed to the principle of civilian supremacy, but not under Mr. Bhutto.

The 51-year-old former Prime Minister is also controversial as a conspicuously worldly figure in a country dedicated, at least in principle, to the austere tenets of orthodox Islam. Born wealthy, and dapper in dress and flamboyant in temperament, he projected a sophistication acquired as a student at the University of California at Berkeley and later at Oxford. His principal offense, in the orthodox Moslem view, was that he made no secret of a liking for a Scotch or two in relaxed moments.

Overriding all flaws in his deportment in or out of his official role, according to his admirers, was his accomplishment in imparting to the common citizen, in field or factory, a sense of pride in a shared national identity that was lacking before. "He made ordinary Pakistanis aware of their rights as individuals," a supporter declared recently, insisting that this was more important than his failure to do much to improve the actual conditions of the poor.

To some his death on the gallows would be a punishment he deserves and a reaffirmation of the doctrine of "equality and accountability under the law," a phrase heard frequently in anti-Bhutto circles. For others his death would be martyrdom, perhaps to be an enduring symbol or to be forgotten in a short time.