In Pakistan, the Making of a Martyr

To a short, unhappy history already scarred by assassination, coups and national dismemberment, Pakistan last week added another trauma, the execution of its most charismatic leader. The death of former Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto hoisted yet another danger signal for a region made edgy by Marxist takeover in Afghanistan and Islamic revolution in Iran.

Passion and refusal to compromise were the hallmarks of Mr. Bhutto's politics, and to the end he refused to beg forgiveness. Alive, he had a following of millions. Dead, his lieutenants vowed that his memory would destroy the Moslem fundamentalist general, President Mohammed Zia ul-Haq, who ousted him two years ago and revamped the Supreme Court before it rejected Mr. Bhutto's appeals from conviction for murder.

World leaders, from the Kremlin and Peking to the Vatican and Washington, had called for presidential clemency. "Nobody," President Zia said, "is indispensable. . . . [or] above the law." He added: "I am of the opinion that the higher you go the harder you fall."

After the hanging, police used tear gas and batons against demonstrators who set fire to government buildings and vehicles, shouting "death to Zia, the dog!" Police reportedly had jailed 2,000 leaders of Mr. Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party to prevent orchestrated mass protest. Some of the violence was attributed to anti-Bhutto groups, raising the threat of anarchy of the kind that preceded President Zia's seizure of power.

Mr. Bhutto, the son of a wealthy politician knighted under British colonial rule, studied at Berkeley and Oxford. He promoted alliance with Communist China against India and the Soviet Union, as Foreign Minister in the early 1960's, a left fork from Pakistan's former client relation with Washington. Accusing then-President Ayub Khan of a sellout peace after losing the 1965 war with India, he founded his own political party. Despite personal epicurean self-indulgence in a country of deep poverty, he became a popular hero when jailed in 1968. But in 1970 Mr. Bhutto's unbending tactics led to the split with East Pakistan that brought civil war, an estimated million deaths and the loss of Bangladesh.

After defeat, Mr. Ayub's successor, President Yahya Khan, resigned and gave the presidency to Mr. Bhutto in December 1971. Under a new constitution, Mr. Bhutto nationalized industries and proclaimed land reform. He also abolished capital punishment and defied Moslem conservatives whom he privately dismissed as "darned beards." But ruinous inflation and harsh repression undermined popular support. General Zia, the army chief of staff, seized power in July 1977, after riots provoked by charges of election fraud against Mr. Bhutto's party. Mr. Bhutto was jailed and later convicted of ordering the attempted murder of a political enemy whose father died in the shooting. (Post-Bhutto Pakistan, Page 3.)