

# Voters boot out Benazir

**S**urprise. Voters in Pakistan showed they are just as angry and fed up as those here in North America.

Last week, in national and provincial elections, the mediagenic Benazir Bhutto and her leftist Pakistan People's Party were dealt a crushing and thoroughly humiliating defeat. This after being booted out of office in August by Pakistan's president for gross incompetence and corruption.

A sore loser to the end, Benazir claimed her disastrous defeat was due to vote rigging by the opposition Islamic Democratic Alliance and its ally, the armed forces. Foreign poll-watchers monitoring the elections, however, found them fair and denied Benazir's charges of fraud.

The most interesting results came in Benazir's home province of Sindh. There, her PPP failed to win even a majority. The rout was complete and left many of Bhutto's foreign backers with curry all over their red faces. Notably the wildly misinformed Toronto *Star*, whose reporter in Pakistan had been claiming the Bhutto forces were on the verge of a landslide victory, and the New York *Times*, which editorialized feverishly for Bhutto. More sore losers.

Equally unhappy was the U.S. Congress, whose liberal democrats love Benazir as much as they hated Pakistan's late, assassinated leader, Zia ul-Haq. In a ham-fisted effort to influence the election, Congress "suspended" vital military aid to Pakistan just before the vote. This crude bullying clearly backfired, enraging Pakistani voters.

Benazir may now be in political purdah, but this won't end either her miseries or those of badly stressed Pakistan. Bhutto, her husband Asif Ali Zardari and a coterie of in-laws and aides, are facing a whirlwind of criminal charges.

During Bhutto's two years in office, corruption in Pakistan went from rampant to monumental. It seems clear that many of Bhutto's relatives and political allies are going to go to jail. Husband Asif is a prime candidate. So would be Bhutto's father-in-law and her powerful mother, except that both have wisely decided to go on extended visits to London.

## Punch



"We're having a collection for the office computer. It's being replaced by a newer model."

### ERIC MARGOLIS



Father-in-law Zardari, besides having reportedly helped himself to \$840 million, was also in charge, rather incredibly, of an office supervising all government contracts. In other words, the fox was put to watching the hens.

Corruption and hanky panky are endemic in Pakistani society, an unhealthy combination of feudalism, tribalism, Industrial Revolution capitalism and military politics. Even so, the Bhuttos and their cronies surpassed all acceptable norms for illicit behavior and treated Pakistan as their personal piggy bank.

They deserve to have the book thrown at them. So do all the other rascals and miscreants who infest Pakistani political life. The victorious opposition could also use a thorough house-cleaning.

Even though Benazir's inept regime has been deep-sixed, Pakistan's other troubles will persist. India has massed 600,000 troops on the border and is threatening war over Kashmir. Largely unnoticed by the world press, the Muslim intifada in Kashmir is getting more violent and bloody by the day. While the world blasts Israel for shooting down scores of Palestinians, *thousands* of Kashmiri Muslims have been killed by Indian troops in recent months in a reign of terror.

Inside Pakistan, Sindh province is still plagued by ethnic violence and the spectre of civil war.

The flight of tens of thousands of Pakistani workers from the Gulf and the surge in oil prices are inflicting severe pain on Pakistan's battered economy. The war in neighboring Afghanistan still drags on, while 3.5 million Afghan refugees languish in Pakistan and strain Islamabad's budget to the breaking point. Add to these woes the suspension of U.S. aid, and Pakistan is in bad shape.

Meanwhile, we can look forward to some nasty infighting among the victorious Islamic Democratic Alliance, which is headed up by three leaders with Himalayan-sized egos. One of them will emerge as prime minister in what promises to be a shaky, feuding coalition that was united only by its opposition to Bhutto. Perhaps an alliance of warring tribes might be a better description than coalition.

Pakistan, the Muslim world's most important and technologically advanced nation, deserves better than the inept, topsy-turvy politics it has suffered in the past few years. Unfortunately, the chronic problems of illiteracy, corruption, feudalism and regionalism that have afflicted Pakistan are not going to soon go away, no matter who runs the government. But at least the new leadership has pledged to carry on the good work started by the Zia regime.

And getting rid of the feudal Bhuttos — at least for a while — will bring Pakistan some badly needed relief.