

Bhutto's hometown in frenzy at return of exiled leader

By Omar Waraich
in Larkana

A small queue of peasant girls approaches the grave of Pakistan's former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, on the outskirts of his family's ancestral home in Larkana. One by one, they climb the steps and kneel with their heads slightly bowed. The eldest leans over to kiss the silk cloth that shrouds the marble-encased remains of Pakistan's most explosive leader, while her sisters raise their cupped hands in prayer.

Others stand at a distance, silently sprinkling rose petals from between the surrounding pillars.

These displays of reverence – more usually found at the shrines of sufi saints – are wearily familiar to Muhammad Issa, the caretaker of the grave and the vast Mughal-imitation tomb that houses it. "Some 50 to 60 carloads arrive every day," he says. "They come from all over the country and beyond to pay their respects to Bhutto sahib."

Later this week, it will be the turn of his eldest daughter and political heir. Eight

years after fleeing the country amid allegations of corruption on an epic scale, Benazir Bhutto plans to return to Pakistan on Thursday to launch a bid for an historic third term as prime minister.

"She'll get her crown back, God willing," says Abdul Ghafoor, a flower seller in the hot and dusty bazaar, who is gathering orders for roses that will be showered on Ms Bhutto as she tours the streets. "It will be our heart's delight if she returns. We were saddened she left us."

The sentiments are met with vigorous nods from the

crowd that has assembled around the stall. "She never forgot us when she went," says another man. "It was just because of the government. They forced her to be away from us."

Others weigh in with tales of how prayers for her return to power are routinely offered in the local mosques, and scores of cows are being slaughtered in her honour.

Those who manage to move beyond the cultish devotion all complain that little has been done over the past decade to improve their lives. Along with the summer heat, poverty in Pakistan is at its most severe in this Sindh region.

Many still live in serfdom on the sprawling estates of feudal landowners. Water supplies are limited. And levels of crime are disturbingly high.

According to Hussain Haroon, a prominent Sindh political commentator who also keenly awaits Ms Bhutto's return, Islamabad has long been content to ignore the smallest province. "The only time that the people of Sindh have got their rights," he says, "is when the PPP [Pakistan People's Party] is in power."

Much of the enthusiasm for Ms Bhutto is buttressed on the memory of her father, whose portraits are just as inescapable as hers across the town. "I love Benazir because of her Zulfikar Ali Bhutto," explains a shopkeeper, Muhammad Ali Sheikh. "He made our people famous. He took them to new glories."

Born to one of Sindh's wealthiest landowning families, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto emerged as Pakistan's first democratically elected leader after the civil war that led to the creation of Bangladesh. His fiery speeches, often laced with taunts against the generals and the rich, won him prestige among



An artist works on a roadside 'welcome' portrait of Benazir Bhutto with her father AP

the poor of Punjab and Sindh. In 1977, he was toppled in a military coup, and hanged on trumped-up murder charges two years later.

Ms Bhutto inherited the torch of leadership of the PPP through the bars of her father's death cell. After braving years of prison and exile, she returned to Pakistan in 1986 as the heroine of the pro-democracy struggle to a million-strong welcome in Lahore. The resonance of the Bhutto name was enough for her to secure a narrow triumph at the polls two years later. But her stock fell sharply over the next decade as she was accused of salting away the spoils of power.

While her party's popularity has remained mostly untouched by the corruption allegations, her moves

towards a power-sharing deal with the unpopular General Pervez Musharraf may damage her at the parliamentary elections expected in January. Over recent months, the woman who once sang the virtues of toppling military dictatorships has come under fire from rivals, former party members and estranged family members for betraying her father's legacy.

None more so than Mumtaz Ali Bhutto, Benazir's great-uncle and head of the Bhutto clan. At his estate on the edge of the town, Mumtaz believes that Benazir has brought disgrace on the family's name.

"The Bhuttos have been in politics since politics began in united India," he says indignantly. "Never during that

time was the stain of corruption ever associated with the Bhutto name. She has been living abroad to save her skin, and now is willing to support a politically dead general in return for relief."

Ms Bhutto has maintained she is merely working towards a transition to democracy. But though her popularity in Sindh is undisturbed, a recent poll from the US-based International Republican Institute, says it has slipped by 4 per cent nationally. General Musharraf's has hit an all-time low.

But, some 300 miles south in Karachi, preparations for are nearly complete. Vast billboards, bearing life-size images of Ms Bhutto beside her father, are being consecrated to her "historic welcome".

Chinese President promises greater accountability

By Chris Buckley
in Beijing

The Chinese President, Hu Jintao, and other members of the Communist Party's ruling inner core, the Politburo, will be accountable to a wider party membership under reforms pledged by Mr Hu himself yesterday.

The President made the pledge as part of efforts to

find viable checks and balances to curb official corruption but made it clear the Communist Party would continue to monopolise power in China.

"We will establish a healthy system under which the Politburo regularly reports its work to plenary sessions of the Central Committee and accepts (Central Committee) oversight," Mr Hu told more than 2,200 del-

egates at the opening of the party's 17th congress. He did not elaborate.

The Politburo currently has 22 full members after Vice Premier Huang Ju died in June and Chen Liangyu lost his job in September last year. Mr Chen faces trial for corruption.

The Central Committee, ranked one notch below the Politburo, has 198 members, whose five-year term ends

this week. A new Central Committee will be elected on Sunday. Delegates refused to be drawn on just how internally competitive the elections would be.

The party has resisted calls for Western-style democracy, fearing a threat to its grip on power. "We must uphold the party's role as the core of leadership in directing the overall situation," Mr Hu said. REUTERS

Stalemate over Leno's late-night chat show could cost NBC dear

By Andrew Gumbel
in Los Angeles

When Jay Leno signed a contract extension three years ago to maintain his position as the king of the late-night USTV chat-show circuit, he wasn't too perturbed about the contract's end-date in 2009. If anything, he welcomed it.

"You can do these things until they carry you out on a stretcher or you can get out while you're still doing good," he said at the time.

Now, however, 2009 is that much closer and Leno – an enduringly popular figure – isn't at all sure he wants to bow out of *The Tonight Show* in favour of the man who now follows him on the late-night NBC schedule, comedian Conan O'Brien.

Senior entertainment

sources told the *LA Times* that Leno, now 57, is having cold feet about the deal he signed. And that, in turn, creates a headache for NBC, which doesn't want to lose Leno altogether – his is still the top-rated chat show – but also doesn't want to lose O'Brien, who has stayed with the network largely because of the promise that *The Tonight Show* will soon be his.

The succession matters because the host of *The Tonight Show* is about the closest thing to an anointed monarch American television has. Before Leno, the longtime occupant of the job was Johnny Carson, a figure still revered in US entertainment circles.

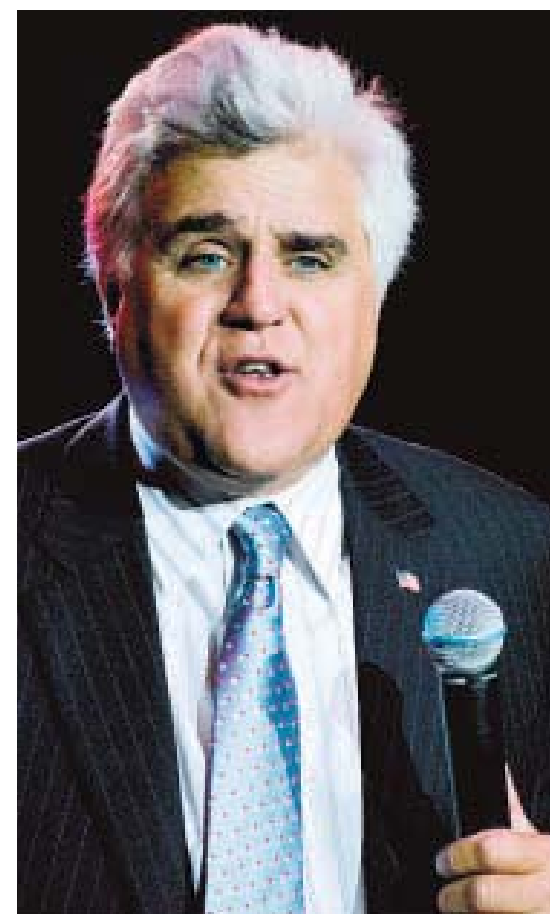
The race to succeed Carson in 1992 turned into a distinct mess when NBC chose

to go with Leno, Carson's understudy, rather than Dave Letterman, the cult host whose own late-night show on NBC followed on directly from Carson's.

The decision bruised countless egos and created buckets of bad blood. Letterman ended up leaving the network to start his own late-night show on CBS and made bitter rivals of two men who

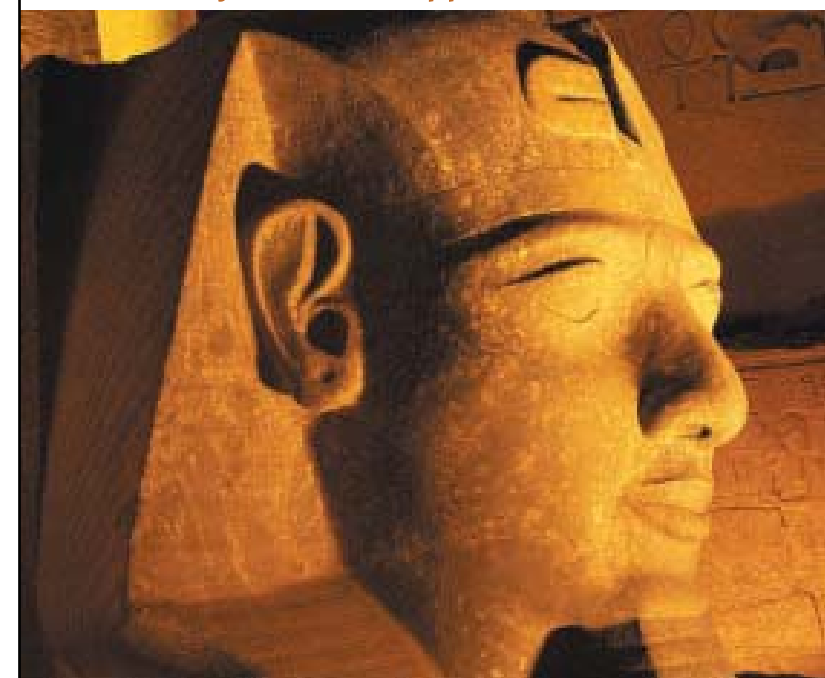
had previously been friends.

If Leno does fight to stay on, NBC has a big problem. The network can choose to find another slot for him, knowing he will more than likely bolt to another network, taking his large audience with him. Or it can renegotiate on its deal with O'Brien, giving him a reported \$40m and, more than likely, waving goodbye.



Jay Leno is contracted until 2009 but may not want to quit

THE INDEPENDENT TRAVEL Five-Star Nile Cruise Seven days from £499pp - 10 Free Excursions



The price includes return flights from Gatwick or Manchester (supplement of £35), taxes, fuel surcharge, transfers, seven nights Nile Cruise onboard the *Star of Luxor* with full-board and ten fully escorted excursions.

Dep Date	Offer Price
29 Oct '07	£599
12, 19 Nov '07	£549
3, 10 Dec '07	£499
17 Dec '07	£549
31 Dec '07	£679
7, 14, 21, 28 Jan '08	£549
4, 11 Feb '08	£599
18 Feb '08	£649
25 Feb, 3, 10 Mar '08	£629
17 Mar '08	£819
24 Mar '08	£749
31 Mar '08	£599
7, 14 Apr '08	£649
21, 28 Apr '08	£579

Tours include the West Bank, Valley of the Kings, Valley of the Queens, the Colossi of Memnon, Edfu and the Temple of Horus, Kom Ombo, Aswan, the High Dam and Philae Temple, a Felucca trip on the Nile and the Luxor and Karnak temples.

0870 086 1365 quoting RINE32

Prices are per person, based on two sharing a Semera deck cabin. Subject to availability. New bookings only. Operated by African Safari Club Ltd A601 2313, A604 14000, a company independent of Independent News and Media Plc. When you respond to offers, The Independent and Independent News and Media plc may use your information to contact you with offers/services that we believe will be of interest. Please give your mobile or email details if you wish to receive offers by sms or email. We will not give your data to other companies without your permission; please let us know if you are happy for us to do so. 0870 calls charged at 80p from BT landlines.

BT Business Total Broadband. It now adds up to more with £200 of extras.

Sign up and get £200 of extra features¹ designed to help you focus on doing what you do best:

- 50Mb web space to help you find more customers online
- Secure 'Workspace' for storing and sharing information online
- A business VoIP line with calls at capped rates
- 10 email accounts to help your business look professional

Plus you'll get a freephone 24/7 helpdesk and extra support to make switching hassle-free².

Available from just £19.79 a month³.

To find out more call
0800 917 0242
or visit bt.com/extras

Bringing it all together **BT**

IT • Communications • Support

1. Value of extras based on usual cost of BT Broadband Voice Line (£60 pal); equivalent of BT Workspace Lite offered by Basecamp (£45.60 pal); and equivalent of BT Webhosting offered by KT Hosting (MySql, £99 pal). 2. New BT Total Broadband customers only. Requires BT Business telephone line. Conditions and service restrictions apply. 3. When signing up for 24 months, or £21.99 (ex VAT) per month for 12 months. Plus router charge from £59/Hub £79. New Total Broadband connection required. See www.bt.com/business/broadband for details. All prices and information correct at time of going to print (September 2007), but may be varied from time to time.



Let yourself go

BOOK YOUR TRIP WITH EXPEDIA.CO.UK AND GET FREE CALLS* WHEN ABROAD.

FREE CALLS
BOOK NOW



Book with Expedia.co.uk today and get a free international SIM card giving you free outgoing and incoming calls when abroad worth £30*

*Book your international trip now and get a free SIM4travel SIM card worth £20, giving you free incoming calls and £10 worth of outgoing call credit when abroad. Terms and conditions apply. See Expedia.co.uk for more details.

In partnership with
SIM4travel