

# Benazir responsible for blast deaths: Niece

AFP, Karachi

Benazir Bhutto bears the responsibility for the deaths of 139 people in an attack on her homecoming parade by exposing them to danger for the sake of her own "personal theatre", her estranged niece said.

Newspaper columnist and poet Fatima Bhutto, the granddaughter of late Pakistani premier Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, also told AFP in an interview that her aunt's return from exile would plunge the country further into turmoil.

"She insisted on this grand show, she bears a responsibility for these deaths and for these injuries," the 25-year-old said at her plush family home in Karachi two days after the bombings.

Fatima Bhutto is the daughter of former prime minister Benazir's late brother Murtaza, who was killed by police in Karachi in 1996 amid murky circumstances that led to the collapse of her second term

in government.

Murtaza led a left-wing extremist group after military ruler Zia-ul-Haq executed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1979 and then fell out with his sister over what he felt was her betrayal of their father's political legacy.

Murtaza's daughter, often heralded in the Pakistani media as an inheritor of the dynasty's heavy crown and bears a family resemblance to Benazir Bhutto, has recently launched a series of salvos against her aunt.

Meanwhile, opposition politician Imran Khan said Sunday Benazir Bhutto has "only herself to blame" for the deadly suicide attack on her homecoming parade.

The former Pakistan cricket captain said Benazir Bhutto had made herself an assassination target by striking a deal with President Pervez Musharraf, which "deliberately sabotaged the democratic process."

"The bombing of Benazir Bhutto's cavalcade as she paraded



through Karachi on Thursday night was a tragedy almost waiting to happen. You could argue it was inevitable," he wrote in the Sunday Telegraph.

"Everyone here knew there was going to be a huge crowd turning up

to see her return after eight years in self-imposed exile. Everyone also knows that there has been a spate of suicide bombings in Pakistan lately."

In the latest Fatima Bhutto accused the opposition leader of protecting herself on her return to Pakistan with an armoured truck, while busing in hundreds of thousands of supporters despite warnings of an attack.

"They died for this personal theatre of hers, they died for this personal show," she said.

The suicide and grenade blast happened hours after Benazir Bhutto, a two-time premier, flew to Karachi from Dubai. She has blamed Islamic extremists, possibly with links to rogue or former intelligence agents, for the attack.

Her Pakistan People's Party dismissed "senseless accusations" that the 54-year-old was responsible for the deaths, saying it was the government's job to protect its citizens.



PHOTO: AFP

Flanked by security personnel carrying automatic weapons, former Pakistani premier Benazir Bhutto (L) waves as she boards her car in Karachi yesterday after a visit to the Jinnah Hospital to offer support to some of those wounded in a deadly suicide attack on her homecoming parade. Benazir made her first public appearance in the streets of Karachi since the bombings on October 18, that killed 139 people.

## 'Nepal's Maoists will rejoin govt soon'

THE KATHMANDU POST/ ANN, Kathmandu

Nepali Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula has claimed that the Maoists would rejoin the government after the Dashain, the biggest festival celebrated by people of Nepal.

Talking to The Kathmandu Post at the Biratnagar Airport on his way to his home district Jhapa, Sitaula also claimed that the new date for the Constituent Assembly (CA) elections will be fixed shortly after the festival, which ends next week.

Home Minister Sitaula is also a senior Nepali Congress leader who played an important role in forging the alliance of the parliamentary parties and the Maoists that led to the 2006 April uprising.

The Maoists quit the coalition government after Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala-led Nepali Congress--the largest political party of Nepal--did not agree on the "pre-requisites" demanded by the Maoists for "meaningful" CA elections.

## Crucial UPA-Left meeting on nuke deal today

PTI, New Delhi

A crucial meeting of the UPA-Left Committee on the Indo-US nuclear deal will be held on Monday with the outside allies of the Government demanding a clear statement that the deal is off.

The meeting, to be chaired by External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, may be the last of a series of meetings already conducted on the Left parties' apprehensions over the deal as it comes after last week's statement from Prime Minister Manmohan Singh that the deal may not be the end of life.

Singh, though, has not publicly opened up on the deal. CPM Politburo member Sitaram Yechury said the Left parties were expecting the government's final stand on the nuclear deal to be announced at the meeting.

"We do not know what exactly the UPA will tell us. But what we expect is that they should clearly say that the deal is off or that it has been put on hold. Only then the controversy will end," CPI General Secretary AB Bardhan said.

Striking an ominous note, he said that if the government was not a single-issue government, "then they should not make it the sole issue for deciding the fate of the government."

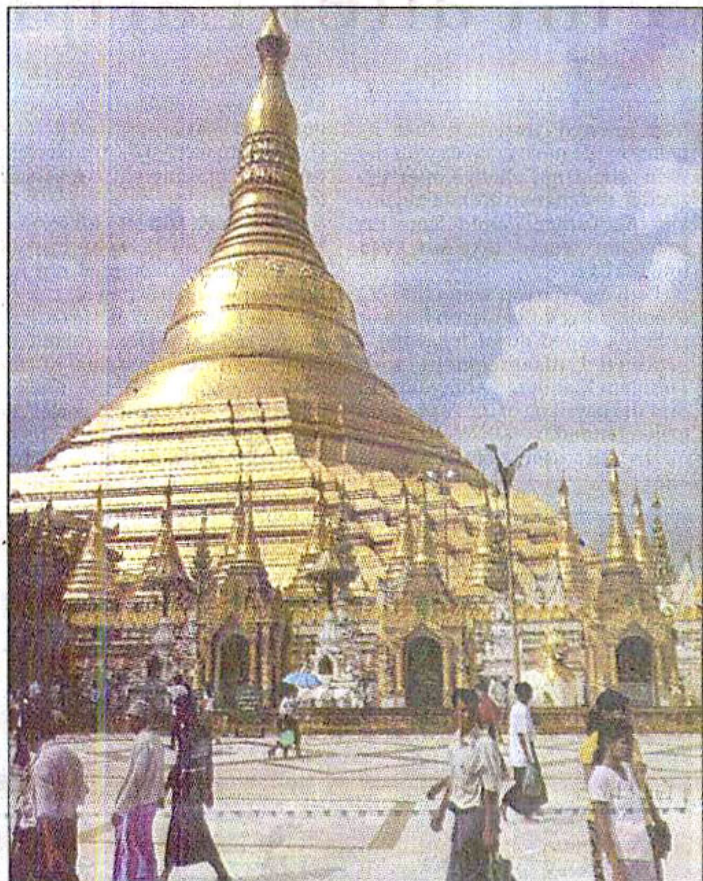


PHOTO: AFP

Buddhist faithful gather at the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon yesterday. Residents in Yangon welcomed the end of a curfew imposed on the eve of Myanmar's bloody crackdown on peaceful protests, but again voiced fears in private over the country's iron-fisted junta.

## Myanmar asks Suu Kyi to drop support for sanctions

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's junta yesterday demanded detained democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi drop her support for sanctions on the country, one of conditions set by the regime for talks with the opposition leader.

"As the government has made the official offer, it's your turn now," the official New Light of Myanmar daily said in a commentary.

"No dialogue can achieve success without sacrifices and concessions. Aunty Suu, you should understand the nature of giving up something for achieving another that is ten times (more) valuable and beneficial," it said.

Junta chief General Than Shwe has offered talks with Aung San Suu Kyi, but only if she gives up what he calls her support for "confrontation, utter devastation, economic sanctions on Myanmar and other sanctions."

Than Shwe's offer was seen as the regime's effort to defuse international pressure on Myanmar following its bloody suppression of peaceful protests, led by Buddhist

monks, in late September.

At least 13 people were killed and about 3,000 jailed in the crackdown.

Than Shwe is known to despise the 62-year-old Nobel Peace Prize winner, but her opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), has said Aung San Suu Kyi will consider the dialogue offer.

In the wake of the crackdown last month, the United States and the European Union tightened sanctions, and even Japan, one of Myanmar's major donors, cancelled aid as a Japanese video journalist was among the 13 dead.

On Friday, the United States slapped a new round of sanctions against Myanmar's military leaders. It is the second time in four weeks that Washington has increased sanctions on Myanmar, formerly known as Burma.

The United States has already imposed sanctions due to Myanmar's rights abuses, including the detention of Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent most of the past 18 years under house arrest in Yangon.

## Nobel laureate Lessing says 9/11 not as bad as IRA attacks

AFP, Madrid

Nobel prize winning author Doris Lessing said in an interview published Sunday that the September 11 attacks had not been "so bad" when compared to Irish Republican Army attacks.

"September 11 was terrible, but if one re-examines the history of the IRA, what happened in the United States wasn't so bad," Lessing, who captured this year's Nobel literature prize told Spain's leading El Pais daily.

The IRA waged a lengthy armed struggle against British rule in Northern Ireland. It declared an end to its armed campaign in 2005.

"Some Americans believe I'm crazy. Many people died, two prominent buildings fell, but it was neither as terrible nor so extraordinary as they think," Lessing said of the 2001 attacks in New York and Washington in which about 3,000 people were killed.

In similarly pointed remarks in the Spanish translation, she described former British prime minister Tony Blair as a "little showman" who proved disastrous for Britain and US President George W. Bush as a "world calamity."

## India, Pakistan set to resume talks

AFP, New Delhi

Top Indian and Pakistani security officials and diplomats meet today to resume anti-terror talks as part of a peace process launched by the South Asian rivals to cool regional tensions, an official said.

The ongoing talks, which were launched earlier this year are intended to put in place a regular mechanism to share intelligence on cross-border militant activity.

An Indian official said Sunday New Delhi was likely to prod Islamabad to share information it may have on a February 18 bombing in India of a Pakistan-bound train, which killed 68 people, mostly Pakistanis.

"In our last meeting earlier this year we handed over the photograph of a suspect, believed to be a Pakistani, and now we want to know what follow-up action has been taken," said the home ministry official, who did not wish to be named.

India claims Pakistan-based militants were behind the attack on the Samjhauta (Friendship) Express train as well as in a string of other bombings across India since

2006.

The one-day meeting in New Delhi is part of a slow-moving peace process launched by the nuclear-armed rivals in 2004 to cool regional tensions.

Officials, however, said Friday's suicide bombing in the Pakistani city of Karachi which killed 139 people during former premier Benazir Bhutto's homecoming from years of exile was likely to overshadow the talks.

"It seems we will be going through the motions only and one cannot expect any meaningful talks in view of the devastating attack in Pakistan," the Indian official said.

The talks also follow renewed accusations from New Delhi that Islamabad continues to support attacks in India.

India's national security advisor, M.K. Narayanan claimed Pakistan, already accused of backing Islamic rebels in Indian Kashmir, was also trying to revive Sikh militancy in the northern state of Punjab.

The allegation came after a weekend bomb attack in a Punjab cinema killed six people and wounded 32.

## No military solution possible in Lanka

Say terrorism experts

AFP, Colombo

Experts on counter terrorism have urged Sri Lanka's government to capitalise on recent victories against the Tamil Tigers and try to hammer out a political solution to the long-running ethnic war.

Earlier this year, government forces managed to eject the ethnic rebels from their last stronghold in the east of the island, while recent weeks saw the navy claim it had sunk the Tigers' last gun-ship.

But as Colombo turns its attention to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) mini-state in the north, experts at a terrorism conference in the capital this week said authorities should instead try to revive peace efforts.

"Going by the navy's recent success, about 75 per cent of the guerrillas' logistics capabilities to

transport weapons has been destroyed," said Shanaka Jayasekara of the Centre for Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism at Australia's Macquarie University.

He said the rebels now needed about 12-18 months to restore their supply capabilities to about 50 per cent.

"We need to invest military success into a viable peace deal," Jayasekara told delegates at an international conference on counter-terrorism in Colombo this week.

A 2002 truce brokered by Norway began to unravel in December 2005 and since then, thousands of people have killed and many more displaced as fighting in Asia's longest-running civil war once progressively escalates.

Former Indian army chief

General VP Malik said Sri Lanka needed to resist the temptation to attempt to go in for the kill -- and rather work towards reviving the moribund peace process.

"There are no quick solutions to counter terrorism... the military can only create conditions wherein the adversary is inclined to or feel it necessary to come to the negotiating table," Malik said.

Meanwhile, at least 10 people were killed and more than 50 wounded in clashes between Tamil Tiger rebels and Sri Lankan troops in the restive northern district of the island, the defence ministry said Sunday.

Eight guerrillas were killed and 20 wounded in two clashes with the army across the frontlines in the north on Saturday, the military said, putting its losses at one dead and seven wounded.

## Girls' school blown up in Pakistan

AFP, Miranshah

Pro-Taliban militants blew up a girls' school in Pakistan's restive tribal area bordering Afghanistan, security officials said yesterday.

The school building was destroyed in the attack in Miranshah, the main town in North Waziristan region, after militants planted explosives there late Saturday, a security official said on condition of anonymity.

"There were no casualties as the building was empty," he added.

The attack came amid an upsurge in violence in Pakistan's deeply conservative tribal zone where militants consider female education un-Islamic.

The region has seen previous attacks on video and music shops blamed on militants emulating the ultra-orthodox Taliban, who ruled Afghanistan from 1996 until their ouster in a US-led invasion in 2001.

The attack on the school was the second in two days after a similar incident in another tribal town of Khar in Bajaur district.

## Pakistan at tipping point after attack on Benazir

AFP, Karachi

The bloodbath at Benazir Bhutto's homecoming has pushed nuclear-armed Pakistan to crisis point, both politically and in its US-backed battle against al-Qaeda and the Taliban, analysts said.

Her carnage-strewn return from exile deepened the faultlines that threaten the Islamic republic of 160 million people, which has lurched from one existential threat to another in its six decades of independence.

The blasts could move Benazir Bhutto closer to a power-sharing deal with key US ally President Pervez Musharraf, which western nations have pushed as a solution to the militancy seeping from Pakistan across the world.

Benazir Bhutto pledged to take on Islamic extremism in a defiant speech after the suicide and grenade attack on her homecoming parade that killed nearly 140 people, adding that she did not blame

the "state or the government."

But fingerpointing over the alleged involvement of former officials and spy agencies in the wake of the attack could still scupper a pact that would likely bring a measure of stability ahead of general elections in January.

Military ruler Musharraf meanwhile could yet break his promise to quit as army chief by November, eight years after the coup that brought him to power, if the Supreme Court overturns his recent victory in a presidential election.

His popularity has slumped since he tried to sack the court's chief justice in March -- while Islamic militants have paid him back for a bloody raid on the Red Mosque in Islamabad in July with 22 suicide bombings since then.

The militants too are at a crucial juncture, having taken control of the tribal belt bordering Afghanistan but fearing the move to civilian, democratic rule will foil

their bid to spread Taliban-style Islamic Sharia law.

"We are heading towards a major crisis," Moonis Ahmar, professor of international relations at Karachi University, told AFP.

Analysts said Pakistan itself now faces the choice Benazir Bhutto did when she returned home -- face a mortal risk at the hands of militants, or give in to extremists.

If the country chooses to go head-on at the threat, then political consensus will be vital, they added.

"Benazir Bhutto and Musharraf will be more vulnerable if they stand divided and pursue power separately," said Rasul Baksh Rais, a political science professor at the Lahore University of Management Sciences.

"We have to put the political house in order, because as long as we have political contests and rivalries we may not be able to sustain our fight against terrorism," he added.

A key step will be severing the

militants' umbilical cord: their links to a network of rogue or former army and intelligence officials who offer financial and logistical support, analysts said.

Benazir Bhutto implicated such officials in the immediate aftermath of Thursday's Karachi attacks, while Musharraf admitted several months ago that some former spies were still backing the Islamists.

"Some of the rogue elements in the establishment who feel there is pressure on them for democracy want to create insecurity to deny mainstream political parties space," Karachi University's Ahmar added.

"They tried to kill two birds with one stone in Karachi."

Islamic militants have previously tried to kill Musharraf -- marked for death by Osama bin Laden in a recent video -- at least three times, including a bid to shoot down his plane during the Red Mosque crisis.

## Afghan president travels to Britain

AFP, Kabul

President Hamid Karzai left yesterday for Britain where he is due to meet Queen Elizabeth, Prince Charles and Prime Minister Gordon Brown for talks on post-Taliban Afghanistan, the palace said.

The four-day visit would cover "regional issues, and the role of Britain in Afghanistan's reconstruction, the strengthening of security, and the training of the Afghan national army," the presidential palace said in a statement.

Britain is the second main contributor of troops after the United States to an international force helping Afghanistan fight a Taliban-led insurgency.

It has about 7,000 British troops here and has lost more than 80 in Afghanistan since the start of operations in 2001 when the Taliban regime was removed from power in a US-led invasion for harbouring al-Qaeda chiefs.



PHOTO: AFP

Chief Minister of India administered Kashmiri Police Commemoration Day ceremony at police headquarters at Zewan on the outskirts of Srinagar yesterday. Tributes were paid to more than 92 policemen and paramilitary soldiers who have lost their lives in the past year while fighting separatist militants in the troubled Kashmir region.

## National Council elections on Dec 26 in Bhutan

PTI, Thimphu

The Himalayan nation's poll panel has announced the elections of Bhutan's National Council, the upper house of parliament to be held on December 26.

The National Council will have 20 directly elected members and five members appointed by the King.

The last date for filing of nominations is November 27. Campaigning will begin on November 30, also the last date for withdrawal of candidature.

"We will scrutinise the nomination of candidates to see if they fulfil all criteria on November 28," said Chief Election Commissioner Kunzang Wangdi.

"The campaign will end on December 24, two days before poll day," said Wangdi.

The results will be declared and submitted to the King on December 27.

The Election Commission has also released the final list of 864 polling stations for the National Council elections.

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