

## Benazir assassinated

Suicide attacker shoots her in neck, chest before detonation; 20 others also killed; violence erupts all over Pakistan; 3-day mourning declared

AGENCIES, Rawalpindi

Pakistani opposition leader and former premier Benazir Bhutto was assassinated at a party rally in Rawalpindi yesterday.

She was shot in the neck before a suicide bomber blew himself up at a park in the northern city, killing around 20 people, after Benazir had just addressed her supporters.

Benazir's supporters erupted in anger and grief after her death, attacking police and burning tires and election campaign posters in several cities. At the hospital where she died, some smashed glass and wailed, chanting slogans against President Pervez Musharraf.

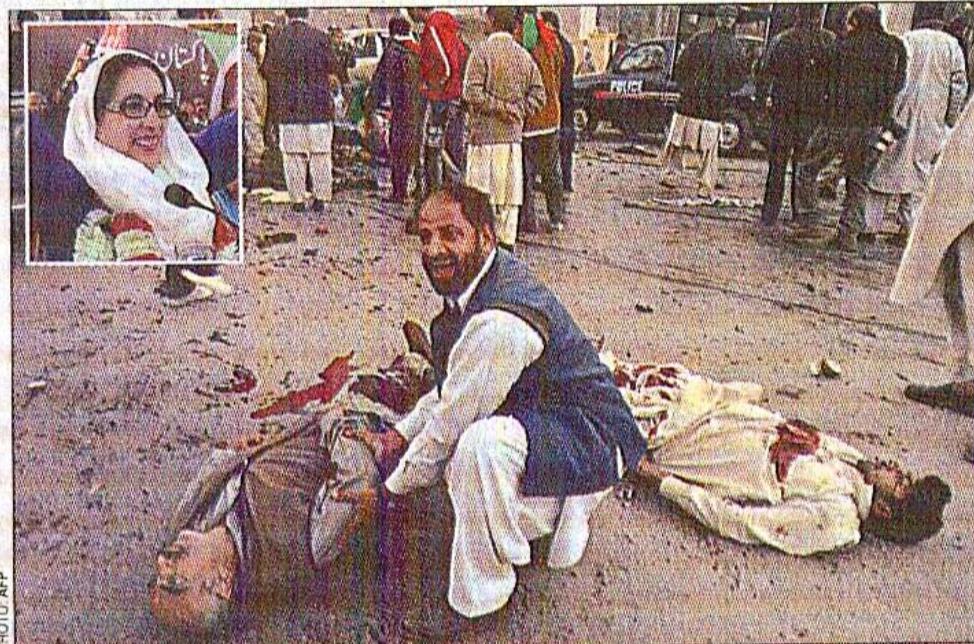
The death of the 54-year-old charismatic former prime minister threw the campaign for the January 8 election into chaos and created fears of mass protests and an eruption of violence across the country.

The attacker struck just minutes after Benazir addressed a rally of thousands of supporters in the garrison city, 13km south of Islamabad. She was shot in the neck and chest by the attacker, who then blew himself up, said Rehman Malik, Benazir's security adviser.

Benazir was rushed to the hospital and taken into emergency surgery.

"At 6:16 pm she expired," said Wasif Ali Khan, a member of Benazir's party who was at Rawalpindi General Hospital.

"The surgeons confirmed that she has been martyred," Benazir's



A smiling Benazir Bhutto, inset, minutes before her assassination in Rawalpindi yesterday. A Benazir supporter desperately cries out for immediate care of two people wounded in the suicide blast that left at least 20 others dead. Turned in Karachi as her exponents set a bus ablaze.

lawyer Babar Awan said.

Benazir's supporters at the hospital exploded in anger, smashing the glass door at the main entrance of the emergency unit. Others burst into tears. One man with a flag of Benazir's Pakistan People's Party tied around his head was beating his chest.

Some at the hospital began chanting, "Killer, Killer,

Musharraf," referring to President Pervez Musharraf, Benazir's main political opponent. A few began stoning cars outside.

"We repeatedly informed the government to provide her proper security and appropriate equipment including jammers, but they paid no heed to our requests," Malik said.

Pakistan police used tear gas

and batons to break up an angry demonstration Thursday in the city of Peshawar after the assassination of Benazir, an AFP reporter on the scene said.

More than 100 angry Bhutto supporters blocked the main trunk road in the northwestern city, torching billboards and posters of the main party behind President Pervez Musharraf, a Bhutto rival,

before police moved in.

Nawaz Sharif, another former premier and opposition leader, arrived at the hospital and sat silently next to Benazir's body.

The body of Benazir was taken from hospital in preparation for a flight to her hometown of Larkana, an AFP reporter on the scene said.

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