

Violent backlash in Pakistan

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badly damaged plans to restore democracy in this nuclear-armed US ally.

Angry Benazir supporters ran amok through the streets after her assassination, lighting cars and stores on fire in violence that killed at least 32 people. The attack on Benazir also killed 20 others.

A remote-controlled bomb killed four people including a politician from the main party backing President Musharraf in northwest Pakistan's Swat Valley yesterday, police said.

No other details were immediately available, but security forces have been battling pro-Taliban militants in the restive valley for months.

Twenty-three people have died in clashes and protests in Benazir's political heartland of southern Sindh province since her killing Thursday, provincial home secretary Ghulam Mohammad said. Mohtaram said.

The army had been deployed in 16 districts of Sindh, including the main city Karachi, he said.

Another eight people died in a bomb blast in North West Frontier Province, including a member of Musharraf's former ruling party, police said.

The remote-controlled bomb exploded as the pro-Musharraf candidate left a political rally in a suburb of Mingora, the main town in the troubled Swat Valley, which has been wracked by violence in recent months.

A security official said one person had also died in central Punjab province.

In Rawalpindi, where Bhutto was killed, protesters burned down a shopping plaza and set tyres ablaze, AFP correspondents on the scene said.

AL-QAEDA CLAIMS RESPONSIBILITY
The al-Qaeda terror group yesterday claimed responsibility for the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, Adnkronos International (AKI) news agency reported.

"We terminated the most precious American asset which vowed to defeat (the) Mujahideen," it quoted al-Qaeda commander and main spokesperson Mustafa Abu Al-Yazid as saying in a phone call from an unknown location, speaking in faltering English.

According to the agency, Al-Yazid is the main al-Qaeda commander in Afghanistan.

It is believed that the decision to kill Bhutto... was made by al-Qaeda No. 2, the Egyptian doctor, Ayman al-Zawahiri in October," AKI said.

"Death squads were allegedly constituted for the mission and ultimately one cell comprising a defunct Lashkar-i-Jhangvi's Punjabi volunteer succeeded in killing Bhutto," it added.

SHOOT-ON-SIGHT ORDERS IN KARACHI

In Karachi, Pakistani paramilitary forces in the southern city of Karachi were Friday ordered to shoot rioters on sight to prevent unrest after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, a paramilitary officer said.

"Paramilitary Rangers have been given orders to shoot on sight if they see miscreants indulging in anti-state activities, attacking government property or setting fire to private property," Major Athar Ali told reporters.

He said the force had deployed 16,000 troops in southern Sindh province, 10,000 of them in Karachi alone.

A mob in Karachi looted three banks and set them on fire, police said.

About 7,000 people in the central city of Multan ransacked seven banks and a gas station and threw stones at police, who responded with tear gas. In the capital, Islamabad, about 100 protesters burned tires in a commercial quar-

ter of the city.

Violent mobs burned 10 railway stations and several trains across Benazir's Sindh province, forcing the suspension of all train service between the city of Karachi and the eastern Punjab province, said Mir Mohammed Khaskheli, a senior railroad official. The rioters uprooted one section of the track leading to the Indian border, he said.

About 4,000 Benazir party supporters rallied in the northwestern city of Peshawar on Friday and several hundred of them ransacked the office of the main pro-Musharraf party, burning furniture and stationery. The office was empty and no one was hurt.

Protesters, carrying the green, red and black flags of Benazir's Pakistan People's Party shouted "Musharraf dog" and "Benazir is alive yesterday, Benazir is alive today." In Peshawar, protesters also burned the office of a small party allied with Musharraf.

Other areas were nearly deserted Friday morning as businesses closed and public transportation came to a halt at the start of three days of national mourning for the opposition leader.

The repercussions of her murder will continue to unfold for months, even years," read a mournful editorial in the Dawn newspaper. "What is clear is that Pakistan's political landscape will never be the same, having lost one of its finest daughters."

As many Pakistanis mourned, others demanded answers as to who killed her.

Musharraf blamed the attack on the resurgent Islamic militants Pakistan is fighting along the border region with Afghanistan, pledging in a nationally televised speech that "we will not rest until we eliminate these terrorists and root them out."

But authorities said they had yet to identify the attacker.

"It is too early to say who may have been responsible," said Saud Aziz, the chief of police in Rawalpindi, the city near Islamabad where the attack took place. A joint task force of police and officials from other law enforcement agencies were investigating, he said.

FBI spokesman Richard Kolko in Washington said the agency was trying to determine the validity of a purported claim of responsibility for the attack by al-Qaeda.

"The bomber also apparently fired three times at her but missed," Cheema said.

When she ducked, she hit the lever of the sunroof of the car that was to speed her away from a campaign rally as she was gearing up to contest parliamentary elections set for January 8.

"The lever struck near her right ear and fractured her skull," Cheema said. "There was no bullet or metal shrapnel found in the injury."

Cheema showed a brief video of the moments before the attack and the blast itself but it was unclear.

He said intelligence services had intercepted a call Friday from the man considered to be a top al-Qaeda figure for Pakistan, Baitullah Mehsud, congratulating a militant after Benazir's death.

He said there was "irrefutable evidence that al-Qaeda, its networks and cohorts are trying to destabilise Pakistan".

"We have recorded his conversation in which he is congratulating a militant for the attack," Cheema said, adding that Mehsud was also behind the suicide attack on Benazir's homecoming rally in October that killed 139 people.

"He is responsible for most of the attacks that have taken place in the country," the spokesman said, calling for national unity "to eliminate the proponents of death and destruction who are trying to destabilise Pakistan."

Pakistani authorities say Mehsud is based in the troubled tribal region of South Waziristan, where troops have been battling Islamist rebels since the fall of the Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan in 2001.

Mehsud had until recently been described by officials as the top pro-Taliban militant commander in the region but is increasingly said to have links to bin Laden's al-Qaeda group.

A smiling Benazir had stuck her

head out of the sunroof to respond to youths chanting her name, said Sardar Qamar Hayyat, an official from Benazir's party.

"Then I saw a thin, young man jumping toward her vehicle from the back and opening fire. Moments later, I saw her speeding vehicle going away. That was the time when I heard a blast and fell down," Hayyat said.

Benazir was rushed into emergency surgery, but died from her gunshot wounds. Another 20 people were killed in the bombing, according to police and witnesses.

Mother, son drown in Meghna

UNB, Narsingdi

A woman and her son drowned and 10 others received injuries when a boat capsized in the Meghna at Rajnagar under Raipura upazila yesterday.

The victims are Shefali, 24, and her 4-year-old son Rabbi. They hailed from Bashgari village in the upazila.

Local sources said a Narsingdi-bound boat from Bashgari sank in the river after being hit by another boat around 12:30pm.

The injured passengers were given first aid at a local hospital.

Benazir: Sunroof

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"If she had not come out of the vehicle, she would have been unhurt, as all the other occupants of the vehicle did not receive any injuries," ministry spokesman Brigadier Javed Cheema said.

He said the post-mortem on the populist opposition leader, whose funeral earlier Friday was attended by hundreds of thousands of mourners, found her mortal wound came when she tried to duck after the bomber attacked.

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ODI series

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chairman of Bangladesh Police Cooperative Society Ltd, said plans for six housing projects in six divisional headquarters are also under consideration.

Nepal parliament

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by a two-thirds majority if the king attempts to disrupt the elections.

The Maoists, who stormed out of the interim government in September demanding greater power-sharing, agreed to rejoin the government after striking the agreement at the weekend.

The former rebels had called for the immediate abolition of the monarchy as one of their key demands to ensure fair elections that would shape the country's political future.

After months of wrangling, the ultra-leftists abandoned demands for full proportional representation, which analysts said the rebels wanted in order to give them more seats.

The Maoists formally ended their decade-long insurgency that claimed more than 13,000 lives after striking a landmark peace deal in November last year.

The former rebels came out of the jungle and joined with the mainstream political parties after weeks of massive pro-democracy protests forced King Gyanendra to end his 14-months of direct rule in April 2006.

Earlier, while addressing the meeting, the IGP said, "We are trying to work for the welfare of police. The establishment of a Police Bank is under consideration." The IGP, also

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JBP regains

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Prem Kumar Dhumal.

The state witnessed a high voter turnout in the two-phased polls held on November 14 and on December 19.

The victory for BJP in Himachal came as an icing on the cake after its stunning triumph in polls in Gujarat where its top leader Narendra Modi overcame anti-incumbency and a united opposition to retain power.

For Congress headed by Sonia Gandhi, the loss in the tiny Himalayan state came as a double blow after the loss in Gujarat.

Even before it could undertake a thorough introspection of its defeat in Gujarat, Congress leaders are faced with the additional task of explaining its loss in Himachal Pradesh.

"I spent three or four years chasing people around Dhaka and overseas trying to convince them that this idea would really work," he said.



PHOTO: STAR
Law enforcers search the trunk of a car at Gulshan-1 yesterday as part of beefed up around the diplomatic enclave in the capital following the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan.

Who will lead PPP?

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only 26 years old when her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was hanged in Rawalpindi in 1979. She was only 32 years when her younger brother

Shahnawaz Bhutto was mysteriously killed in France in 1985. She was 43, when her second brother Murtaza Bhutto was killed by the police in 1996. That was a great tragedy for her because she lost her brother when she was the prime minister of the country.

PPM was established in 1967.

Benazir Bhutto celebrated the 30th anniversary of her party in November this year. This party faced a crisis of leadership in 1979, when the founder chairman of the party, Zulfikar Bhutto, was hanged, but Benazir Bhutto filled the leadership vacuum immediately with the help of her mother Begum Nusrat Bhutto.

Twenty eight years after the hanging of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, PPP is once again facing a leadership crisis.

Benazir Bhutto was hanged, but Asif Ali Zardari faced a very long imprisonment. Benazir Bhutto spent more than 9 years in exile without her husband. She raised her children as a single parent. She used to teach them holy Quran regularly with the help of her mother Begum Nusrat Bhutto.

Twenty eight years after the hanging of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, PPP is once again facing a leadership crisis.

Senior PPP leaders are confident that the party is intact and there is no crisis. For the time being senior vice-chairman of the party, Makhdoom Amin Fahim, is looking after the day to day affairs. According to some reliable sources in the party, an informal meeting of the central executive committee of PPP will be held today in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh, and that meeting will form a future strategy for the party.

According to those sources, the future chairperson of PPP will also be elected very soon and there will be no leadership crisis.

Saman, the younger sister of Benazir Bhutto, is not interested in taking over the party because she is an apolitical person living in London for the last three decades. Nusrat Bhutto, mother of Benazir, is badly sick. Many PPP old guards are of the view that Asif Ali Zardari should be given a chance to lead the party as he himself spent three years in jail between 1990 and 1993 and then again for nine years between 1996 and 2005. Benazir once declared her husband as the Nelson Mandela of Pakistan. No doubt that Zardari have been a controversial personality and faced charges of corruption for years and years, but none of the charges was proven in any court of law.

(The author is executive editor of Pakistani television channel GEO. He will contribute regularly to The Daily Star from now on.)

An NRB who did it

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more spectacularly in the last decade than Iqbal Quadir, founder of Grameenphone who brought the mobile phone to the masses.

He said it was equally difficult to convince local and overseas investors about the viability of the PPP candidates to go back in their constituencies and continue the election campaign. Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif have already announced a boycott of the elections to be held on January 8 next year.

Many political analysts have said the elections should be delayed at least for some weeks. Top government functionaries have contacted some PPP leaders and requested them to help in bringing peace back to the country.

The government have also offered PPP that they may nominate

talking of his time as a stakeholder in Grameenphone in the mid-1990s, which started with the idea of providing phones to the masses.

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