

Violent backlash in Pakistan

FROM PAGE 1
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 Mohitram 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) Mujahadeen," it quoted al-Qaeda commander and main spokesman 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 official 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 on fire 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 tyres in a commercial quarter 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 Khakhsh, 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 was 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.

In the wake of the killing, Nawaz Sharif, another former premier and leader of a rival opposition party, announced his party would boycott the elections.

The election was seen as a pivotal step toward restoring democracy here, eight years after Musharraf seized power in a coup. It also was intended to restore credibility to the government after Musharraf used a six-week state of emergency to arrest thousands of political opponents and crack down on the independent judiciary.

However, with Sharif's party on the sidelines and Benazir's party leaderless and in disarray, the election will have little, if any, credibility.

"This assassination is the most serious setback for democracy in Pakistan," said Rasul Baksh Rais, a political scientist at Lahore's University of Management Sciences. "It shows extremists are powerful enough to disrupt the democratic process."

Sharif demanded Musharraf's resignation. "Musharraf is the cause of all the problems," Sharif said.

Benazir had just addressed more than 5,000 supporters in Rawalpindi on Thursday when the attacker struck as she was leaving the rally in a white sports utility vehicle.

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

FROM PAGE 1

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.

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 Taliban 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.

ODI series

FROM PAGE 16
How, who scored 88 in the six-wicket victory in the first match on Wednesday, adding 74.

Big-hitting all-rounder Jacob Oram produced a sparkling example of his power at the end of the innings, blasting four boundaries and four sixes in scoring 55 off 31 balls.

New Zealand's score was their second-highest in one-day internationals against Bangladesh, falling just short of the 338-4 they scored in Sharjah in 1990.

BJP regains

FROM PAGE 16
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.



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?

FROM PAGE 16

only 26 years old when her father Zulfiqar 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.

Just a few months after the assassination of the brother, Benazir Bhutto lost her government and then her husband 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 English translation. She tried her level best that her kids should not feel the absence of their father. When her sick husband was released on medical grounds, he was sent to the USA for treatment and once again Benazir was all alone in Dubai with her kids. She did not allow her husband and three kids to come along with her to Pakistan on October 18. The last 30 years of her life were full of struggle and troubles, but she proved to be a lady of iron nerves. She was a caring wife, loving mother and a courageous leader. Just a few days before her assassination, Benazir Bhutto told this scribe at a breakfast meeting that she was aware of the threats to her life, but she believed there is a difference between a politician and a leader.

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 Taliban 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.

Benazir had just addressed more than 5,000 supporters in Rawalpindi on Thursday when the attacker struck as she was leaving the rally in a white sports utility vehicle.

A smiling Benazir had stuck her

someone of their own choice for the inquiry of the assassination. Asif Ali Zardari is pointing his fingers towards the government for the security lapses, and the government is trying to establish that Al Qaeda is responsible for the assassination, while some people on both sides are trying to bridge the gap between PPP and the government. There is a realisation on both sides that unnecessary confrontation at this time will only help the enemies of Pakistan.

PPP 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, Zulfiqar 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 Zulfiqar 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 Bakhs, 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.

Sanam, 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.

He said Mallinath was the daughter of Kumbharaja of Mithila and Prabhavati. Mallinath was 19th of the 24 Jain Tirthankars.

Shihabuddin expects that more antiques will be found at the site where digging work is still going on.

Redwan

FROM PAGE 1
The Daily Star that the former state minister was yesterday released on bail in a case under Section 16/2 of the Emergency Power Rules (EPR).

Redwan was also accused in several other cases and granted bail in those cases.

Atiqur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), Ramna Zone, said Redwan Ahmed was arrested in Shahbagh area in the evening.

Akhter Morshed, second officer of Shahbagh Police Station said, "We arrested Redwan Ahmed near the BSMU at around 7:00pm on apprehension that he may violate the EPR."

Quadir explained that by gaining a greater understanding of the dynamics of Bangladesh allowed him to tap the resources of Grameen Bank, opening up its vast and dense network in the rural areas to the possibilities of mobile phone technology.

Quadir personifies the new globalised entrepreneur: a mobile, highly skilled worker who is willing to venture into uncharted territories with a new idea.

Born in Jessore in 1958, he studied at Jhenidah Cadet College and moved to the US in 1976 attending Swarthmore College and Wharton Institute. Later, he worked for the World Bank and private companies in Wall Street.

He is investing in Bangladesh again with a new project through the Anwarul Quadir Foundation (named after his father) and Harvard University.

The project, called "Innovations in Bangladesh", assists people in pursuing innovative projects by giving scholarships worth \$25,000 every year to the best idea that empowers Bangladeshis.

Again, Quadir is putting his money in the audacity of hope and tenacity of action—the sweat equity.

6 children die of pneumonia at Rangpur hospital

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

At least six children died of pneumonia at a Rangpur hospital in the last two days as cold wave continues to sweep across the northern region.

The dead are four-month-old Nasima, daughter of Lavlu of Syedpur in Nilphamari, three-month-old Nur Nahar, daughter of Anisuddin of Parbotipur in Dinajpur, Nijam, 7, son of Abdul Wahab of Aulia Nagar in Rangpur, two-day-old Shafiq of Pirganj in Rangpur and five-month-old Nashri of Kaliganj in Lalmonirhat.

Besides, several hundred people mostly children and elderly persons have fallen victim to different cold related diseases in the northern districts.

Sources said at least two hundred children with pneumonia were admitted to the Rajshahi Medical College and Hospital (RMCH) in a week.

RMCH Director Dr Saidur Rahman said usually children and elderly people get affected by pneumonia and other respiratory diseases at a time when the temperature remains low.

People of low income in the northern districts are suffering badly as cold spell has been lashing the region for the last few days.

Terracotta

FROM PAGE 16
direct supervision of the Khulna Archaeology Department office.

Besides the seven-inch-long red sandstone terracotta image of Jain Mallinath, more antiques including earthenware from the 200-year-old Jain dynasty were discovered at the site, Shihabuddin said.

He said Mallinath was the daughter of Kumbharaja of Mithila and Prabhavati. Mallinath was 19th of the 24 Jain Tirthankars.

Shihabuddin expects that more antiques will be found at the site where digging work is still going on.

Redwan

FROM PAGE 1
The Daily Star that the former state minister was yesterday released on bail in a case under Section 16/2 of the Emergency Power Rules (EPR).

Redwan was also accused in several other cases and granted bail in those cases.

Atiqur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), Ramna Zone, said Redwan Ahmed was arrested in Shahbagh area in the evening.

Akhter Morshed, second officer of Shahbagh Police Station said, "We arrested Redwan Ahmed near the BSMU at around 7:00pm on apprehension that he may violate the EPR."

AL prepares

FROM PAGE 16
like-minded political parties to get the detained party chief and other leaders released.

However, sources said the party will continue its legal battle to free Hasina through legal procedure. It will also strengthen its campaign abroad to mount pressure on the caretaker government to free Hasina.

Sources said BNP Secretary General Khandakar Delwar Hossain called acting AL President Zillur Rahman recently and proposed sitting for a discussion.

The AL leader neither rejected nor accepted the proposal due to strategic reasons. If necessary, the party would consider the proposal, sources said.

The front organisations of the party might take initiatives to strengthen their movement across the country to put pressure on the government to free Hasina, AL sources said.

AL Organising Secretary Mahmudur Rahman Manna stressed the need for unity in the party adding that they hope the caretaker government would keep its commitment by holding a free and fair election by the end of next year.

US urges Pakistan

FROM PAGE 16
which Benazir had been tipped to win.

Bush telephoned Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf to discuss the situation, the White House said, while US officials appealed for calm in Pakistan amid deadly riots following Benazir's murder.

"The US strongly condemns this cowardly act by murderous extremists who are trying to undermine Pakistan's democracy," Bush told reporters near his ranch in Texas where he is spending the end-of-year holidays.

He called on Pakistanis to stay on the path of democracy after Musharraf ended six weeks of emergency rule ahead of the elections due on January 8.

White House spokesman Scott Stanzel gave no details of Bush's conversation with Musharraf, but cited the US president's concerns for democracy and security in Pakistan, which has aided the United States in its hunt for extremists linked to the al-Qaeda network.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice telephoned Bhutto's widow, Asif Zardari, and her successor as head of the Pakistani People's Party, Amin Fahim, to express her condolences, said State Department spokesman Tom Casey.

Casey urged Pakistan to maintain the date for the elections and said Washington hoped Benazir's party would participate in the vote.

Benazir "does have a strong political party, and we hope that it will continue to move forward and be able to participate in the democratic process in Pakistan under its new leadership," Casey said. "We think that is what she would have wanted."

Rice said in a statement that Benazir's passing was "a great loss for Pakistan."

She also urged the Pakistani people, political leaders, and civil society to maintain calm and to work together to build a more moderate, peaceful, and democratic future.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's government has not yet made a decision on whether to postpone national elections on January 8 and was consulting parties on the next step, a senior government official said Friday.

The fate of the vote, which President Pervez Musharraf had insisted would be a free and fair step toward democracy, has been in the balance since the assassination of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto on Thursday.

The other main opposition figure, former premier Nawaz Sharif, announced after the killing that his influential party would boycott the vote.

Asked whether the vote would be postponed, caretaker prime minister

Mohammedman Soomro said: "For now, the elections stand as they were announced. We'll take the next step after consulting political parties."

"I'll be writing letters to them," said Soomro, appointed by Musharraf as the interim head of the Pakistan government in the run-up to the election.

Official sources said that the ultimate decision would be taken by President Musharraf, who held a top-level meeting on Thursday and was expected to hold another meeting on Friday afternoon with political aides.

A senior government official said all political parties would be consulted before deciding.

"The government will take the decision about whether to postpone the January 8 elections, or go ahead with them, only after consultation with all political parties," the official said.

The official said that if the parties agree to it, the government would convene a conference of all parties next week to take stock of the situation.

Sharif pulled his party out of the election race to protest at Benazir's killing. In the earlier campaigning, Sharif and Benazir both accused Musharraf of planning to rig the vote.

Lift emergency

FROM PAGE 16

of press freedom and strongly demanded immediate withdrawal of the state of emergency for restoration of democratic process in the country.

Press Club General Secretary Kamal Uddin Sabuj in his written speech hoped that democratic process would be restored in the country soon and emergency be lifted.

The meeting was addressed, among others, by club members Ataur Samad, Poet Ali Muzahid, Ershad Majumder, Rezwan Siddique, MA Aziz, Shaikh Rakibuddin, Saiful Amin, Enayet Hossain Khan, Kazim Reza and Asaduzzaman Asad. Club Treasurer Syed Abdul Ahmed placed his annual financial report at the meeting.

Ataur Samad in his speech said assassination of Benazir Bhutto is a big blow to the security of this subcontinent.

Prof Abdul Gafur of Daily Inqilab said emergency should be lifted immediately for reintroducing democratic rule in the country.

Earlier, the members stood silent for a minute in memory of former Pakistani premier Benazir Bhutto, Sidr victims and club members Obaidul Haque, Fazlul Karim, Wahidul Haque, Zahurul Haque, Masud Nizami and Syed Mostafa Kamal.

Stolen artefacts

FROM PAGE 1

the Guimet Museum.

"We are now concentrating on further interrogation of the arrestees and efforts to hunt down Abbas," Additional Director General of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) Colonel Gulzar Uddin Ahmed told The Daily Star yesterday.

Earlier, a number of the arrestees have confessed to having a role in stealing the seventh century images and tearing those to shreds. They have named Abbas to be the mastermind.

The Rab official also said that the chips that have been recovered so far would be handed over to the investigation officer and used as evidence in trial.

Though they were confirmed to be of the stolen relics, if the authorities want, reconfirmation can be done. Besides, there could always be a scientific test in this regard, Swapan Kumar said.

He added that they identified the pieces primarily by matching them with photographs of the statues. In cases of those too tiny to match the photographs, they were depending on their experience.

"It would have felt great had the artefacts been recovered intact. It really hurts to see them smashed into pieces as they can neither be remade nor be restored to their previous condition," said the stand-in-keeper.

Captain Mahbubul Haider of Rab, one of those involved in the recovery drive, said "The pieces that are being retrieved are very small and I'm afraid we won't be able to get back every part of the relics."

Talking to The Daily Star, he also described the sequence of events leading to the retrieval.

He said as it took six days for them to obtain the confessions, the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) cleaners by that time had taken remains of the broken statues collected as garbage from Uttara to a vast 300-acre dump at Ballypur.

Unable to trace the broken parts in Uttara, the investigators contacted the DCC staff who had collected the garbage of December 22. With help of the DCC staffers, the law enforcers marked