



Family members of slain Pakistani former premier Benazir Bhutto attend a Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Central Executive Committee meeting at Bhutto's residence in Naudero yesterday. Benazir's party held a crucial meeting to pick the slain Pakistani opposition leader's successor and decide a policy for next month's elections, party officials said.

## Over a dozen killed in Pak tribal unrest 2 bombers die in failed attack

AFP, AP, Peshawar/Islamabad

More than a dozen people have died in fresh clashes between heavily armed rival tribes in a northwestern Pakistani region plagued by sectarian violence, security officials said yesterday.

Sunni and Shia tribes perch on hills in villages outside the town of Parachinar. The tribes are using heavy weapons including rockets, mortars, missiles and cannons to destroy each other.

The death toll in the violence since last week reached 63 after 13 more died in clashes overnight, a security official said, requesting anonymity.

Local administration chief Zaheer ul-Islam confirmed the unrest, but declined to say how many people had been killed.

"Rival tribes are using heavy

weapons, there are casualties, but at the moment I cannot give the exact figure," Zaheer told AFP.

The latest clashes started on December 22, four days after the Shia Turki and Sunnite Mengal tribes signed a ceasefire agreement following weeks of fighting which left more than 100 people dead.

The unrest, which is not related to violence since the death of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, forced the government to deploy troops and impose a curfew.

"We are trying to involve local tribal chiefs to arrange a new truce," Zaheer added.

Earlier two suspected suicide bombers died Sunday when they prematurely detonated their bomb near the residence of a senior leader of the ruling party in eastern Pakistan, police said.

AFP, Karachi

Tens of millions of Pakistanis unable to buy food or petrol during three days of mourning for Benazir Bhutto saw life begin inching back to normal yesterday, as a wave of violence appeared to ease.

Shops started to re-open across the country as the end of an official period of mourning for the slain former premier approached Sunday night, bringing some relief to a nation wracked by turmoil after her assassination on Thursday.

"Karachi is rapidly coming back to normal," said Akhtar Zamin, home minister for Sindh province, where the city -- Pakistan's largest and the nation's economic hub -- is

located.

Akhtar Zamin, home minister for Sindh, told AFP there had been "a definite improvement in the security situation" across the province.

An outpouring of rage after Bhutto's murder left at least 38 people dead, dozens more wounded, and the country reeling from what the interior ministry said was tens of millions of dollars in damage.

Demonstrators at times fought running battles with riot police and torched hundreds of banks, shops, railway stations, offices, trains and vehicles.

But Zamin said his province, where most of the deaths were recorded amid tensions between ethnic Sindhis and Punjabis, was

now slowly getting back to normal.

"Petrol stations re-opened and many more will re-open," he said. "We have restored supplies of daily essentials. makeshift Sunday bazaars were held at 12 places in the city."

In the Karachi slum of Lyari, a Bhutto party stronghold, an AFP reporter saw several shops open and a vendor selling vegetables from his cart. Some boys played a pick-up game of cricket on the street.

But signs of violence remain everywhere on the ground. The streets are dotted with burnt-out vehicles, shop windows are smashed and the roads in many places are littered with bricks and stones hurled by rioters.

## Pakistanis blame Musharraf

AP, Islamabad

The assassination of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto has pitched Pakistan into a political freefall and raised fears that increasingly bitter divisions in the society are turning the country into another Iraq.

Shocked citizens blame the deepening turmoil on President Pervez Musharraf and his US-backed crackdown on Islamic extremists. Overwhelmingly poor and more concerned with survival than anti-Western terrorism, most crave stability above all, and many believe things will only get better if Musharraf resigns.

"The government of Musharraf has created an Afghanistan and Iraq-like situation in our country."

said Zaheer Ahmad, 47, who works at a private clinic in Multan. "I don't know who killed Benazir Bhutto. But I do know that it is the result of Musharraf's wrong and bad policies."

While many Pakistanis want him gone, there is no consensus on who could replace Musharraf or whether anyone can unify the country's bickering political factions.

The suicide attack that killed Benazir on Thursday has unleashed a maelstrom of anger among her supporters and three days of unrest have left more than 40 dead and tens of millions of dollars in damage. In some cities, security forces are now authorised to shoot rioters on sight.

## Bhutan heads to first polls as kingdom moves from royal rule

AFP, New Delhi

The Himalayan outpost of Bhutan stages its first parliamentary polls this week as the kingdom steers away from royal rule, but officials worry many voters will stay away.

The December 31 elections represent a dramatic shift of power in Bhutan orchestrated by former king Jigme Singye Wangchuck to end absolute royal authority for a more ceremonial role.

Only 15 of the seats will hold polls on December 31, five will be held on January 29 and the remaining seat filled sometime after lower house polls are held, the election commission said in an email.

Electronic voting will be used for all seats and results are expected shortly after polls close at 4:30pm.

Candidates for the upper house cannot have political party affiliation.

The 47-seat lower house will see at least two main parties -- the Virtuous Bhutan Party, an alliance headed by former home minister Jigme Yehse Thinley, and the People's Democratic Party, led by former prime minister Sangay Ngedup.

Bhutan, about the size of Switzerland, is widely known for a motto coined by the former king as aiming for "gross national happiness" over gross domestic product.

However the one-time Shangri-La also faces serious problems including the wrath of Indian militant groups based on its 275km southern border with Assam state.

Last week, Bhutan sealed the border with Assam over fears that the militants might take revenge for a 2003 military crackdown with the help of India that evicted three separatist groups -- two from Assam and one from West Bengal.

"We are worried that militants from Assam might try and create problems during the elections," said Sangay Thinley, district magistrate of Sarpang district of Bhutan.

Bhutan also evicted ethnic Nepalese Hindus as part of a campaign by the former king in the 1990s to forge "national identity" which consists of traditional dress and wider use of the Bhutanese language.

## 'Pakistan can survive latest chaos'

AFP, Islamabad

Her killing has also deepened the sense that the rule of law, let alone prospects for democracy after eight years of authoritarian rule under Musharraf, are now in danger.

Benazir was the leader of the biggest secular political party and lionised by the rural poor.

Although her strongest support came from her home province of Sindh, she was perhaps unique in Pakistan for having national appeal across ethnic and religious divides, including among the moderate Muslim majority and minority Christians and Hindus.

There is an alarming gap between Pakistan's rich elite which she belonged to and the majority of the 160 million people with a per capita annual income of just \$720.

Critics derided her a political opportunist, tainted by corruption allegations during her two terms in office. Nevertheless, her passing has left a vacuum in Pakistani politics.

The most natural successor to Benazir is another former prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, who leads the other main opposition party.

Sharif is more conservative than Benazir and rose to political prominence under a former military regime. It appears very unlikely he could coexist with Musharraf, who toppled him in a 1999 coup.

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Marie Lall, an expert at British think-tank Chatham House.

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