

## The assassination of Benazir Bhutto



## Land of the damned

Benazir Bhutto's death has left her country in flames, the region under threat and the world in danger. By **Raymond Whitaker**, **Saeed Shah** in Larkana and **Omar Waraich** in Karachi

MIAN KHURSHED/REUTERS

In a dramatic development which shows the depth of the crisis in Pakistan over the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the government yesterday called for her body to be exhumed to settle the question of how she died.

The charismatic political leader was buried in a sealed coffin on Friday, less than 24 hours after she died in an attack by a suicide bomber at a rally in Rawalpindi. The caretaker Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mohamud Mian Soomro, told the Cabinet that Ms Bhutto's husband, Asif Ali Zardari, had insisted on no autopsy, a statement he has not contested. But conflicting accounts of how she died, and disputes over who bore responsibility, have fuelled rioting that by yesterday had claimed more than 40 lives and caused tens of millions of dollars of damage.

Suspicious over the complicity of Pervez Musharraf's government in the killing were fuelled by its failure to order a post-mortem, regardless of Mr Zardari's wishes, and the fact that the scene of the bombing was washed down with a high-pressure hose within an hour, removing potential forensic evidence. Under the criminal law of Pakistan, an autopsy should have been mandatory, according to a leading lawyer, Athar Minallah. "It is absurd because without autopsy it is not possible to investigate," he said. "Is the state not interested in reaching the perpetrators of this heinous crime, or was there a cover-up?"

Yesterday an Interior Ministry spokesman said an offer had been made to Ms Bhutto's family and her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) to exhume her remains for scientific examination. There was no immediate response. But in her ancestral village of Naudero in rural Sindh province, where she was buried beside her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and where her husband was receiving a stream of mourners offering condolences - among them his wife's former bitter political rival, Nawaz Sharif - supporters continued to accuse the government of responsibility for her death.

Ms Bhutto died as she was leaving the rally on Thursday evening. The car in which she was travelling was bullet- and blast-proof, but she had stood up through the open roof to wave to her supporters when the attackers approached. Two or three shots were heard seconds before the explosion.

Doctors at the hospital where she was taken initially said she had been shot twice, but some of them later said the cause of death was shrapnel from the explosion. On Friday, however, the Interior Ministry said Ms Bhutto had suffered no bullet or serious shrapnel wounds, and the car's other occupants had been unharmed by the bomb explosion, which killed at least 20 other people. Instead a new explanation was put forward: the charismatic political leader had fractured her skull as the blast from the bomb slammed her into the handle which opened the car's roof.

The claim that her death was

accidental, and the announcement that intercepted phone calls showed al-Qa'ida carried out the bombing, were seen by her supporters as an attempt by the government to deny any blame for her killing. "To hear that Ms Bhutto fell from an impact from a bump on a sunroof is absolutely rubbish," Sherry Rehman, a PPP spokeswoman who was with her at the time, said yesterday. "There was a clear bullet wound at the back of the neck. It went in one direction and came out another ... My entire car is coated with her blood, my clothes, everybody - so she did not concuss her head against the sunroof."

Babar Awan, a senior party official, said the sunroof claim was "false". He had seen her body and there were at least two bullet marks, one in the neck and one on the top of the head. "It was a targeted, planned killing. The firing was from more than one side," said Mr Awan.

Although the violence in the wake of the killing is fairly sporadic by Pakistani standards, the country has been paralysed during the three days of mourning declared for Ms Bhutto, ending tomorrow. The government said 176 banks, 72 train carriages and 18 stations had been destroyed, and petrol stations across the country were closed for fear of attack, creating long queues of cars at the few that remained open. Many flights were cancelled, leaving passengers stranded.

With shops shuttered in many parts of Pakistan, there were fears of food shortages. In Karachi, scene of some of the worst outbreaks, the police were authorised to open fire on rioters if they were attacked, and three people were killed in a clash yesterday as food stores were looted. "There was bound to be a reaction to such a tragedy," said Farhat Hayat, a senior Karachi police officer. "Hopefully the situation will calm down over the coming days. We are monitoring things very closely."

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The accusations of Ms Bhutto's close associates, and the reaction of her followers on the streets, are only part of the pressure on President Musharraf, who is facing conflicting demands to quit and to delay the election, scheduled for 8 Janu-



## The tragedy unfolds

From top: Benazir Bhutto waves to the crowd from her car; the gunman takes aim; an injured man looks back at the scene after the suicide bomber detonates his explosives; mourners at Bhutto's grave in Ghari Khuda Baksh ENTERPRISE; AAMIR QURESHI, JOHN MOORE/GETTY IMAGES

## FUTURE OF THE DYNASTY



**ASIF ALI ZARDARI**, 51, Benazir's widower. Married in 1987, they had three children. Like his wife, he is from a Sindh feudal family, though much less prominent. He became known as "Mr 10 Per Cent" during her periods in office, and charges of corruption against him may be revived now Benazir is gone.



**BILAWAL ZARDARI**, 19, Benazir's eldest child and only son, is in his first term at Oxford University. His father says he is too young to succeed, but today he is due to read out his mother's will, which may spell out his future. Significantly, her Karachi residence was named Bilawal House after him.



**SANAM BHUTTO**, 50, the only survivor among Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's four children. Devoted to her elder sister Benazir - she went with her into exile - she has always shunned politics. Her teenage daughter Azadi is regarded as equally unlikely to take up the family mantle.



**FATIMA BHUTTO**, 25, Benazir's niece, shares her intelligence and looks, but accused her aunt of complicity in the death of her father, Murtaza. He had fallen out with his sister, and was shot dead by police in 1996, while she was PM. But Fatima has joined Benazir's mourners, possibly signalling a return to the fold.

ary, which he had hoped would legitimise his increasingly unpopular regime. At the urging of Britain and America, increasingly concerned at the growing strength of Islamist extremism in Pakistan, he had sought a power-sharing deal with Ms Bhutto under which she was allowed to return from eight years in exile.

The loss of the PPP leader, who for all her flaws was the only determinedly secular political leader in Pakistan, leaves Western policy in disarray. The 9/11 attacks the US set aside its criticism of Mr Musharraf, who as chief of the army seized power from Mr Sharif in 1999, and set him up as a bulwark in its "war on terror". Since 2001 Pakistan has received nearly \$1bn (£5.5bn) in American aid, but Mr Musharraf's lack of a democratic mandate has not only made him unable to deal with Islamist militancy but has forced him to compromise with it.

Extremist influence in parts of the military and intelligence establishment of this nuclear-armed state have led some analysts to conclude that Pakistan is now more of a danger to world peace than Afghanistan, from where the 9/11 attacks were carried out. The situation in 2001, when the US, Britain and their allies intervened in Afghanistan to oust al-Qa'ida and its Taliban hosts, has now reversed. Instead of Afghanistan threatening to destabilise the region, it is Pakistan, and particularly its ungovernable tribal areas along the border, where al-Qa'ida and the Taliban have fled, that has become the problem.

The 44,000 Nato troops, 7800 of them British, who are battling to prevent a Taliban resurgence in Afghanistan will never succeed while their opponents have bases across the border from which they can attack with impunity. But intense pressure on Mr Musharraf to deal with the insurgents on his own territory has been of little avail. Not only were the Pakistani army's sometimes half-hearted incursions into the tribal areas bloodily repulsed, with hundreds of soldiers being captured, but Pakistan has paid the price in an upsurge of terrorism.

The country is under assault from al-Qa'ida, which has issued a steady flow of demands for the overthrow of Mr Musharraf, and

local allies. The week before last their target was a former government minister, Aftab Sherpao. He survived a suicide attack on a mosque, but 50 others died. This year, there have been dozens of similar bloody attacks, largely against the military and police, displaying highly sophisticated capability and intelligence. Responsibility for the attempted assassination of Mr Sherpao was claimed, unusually, by a new organisation called Tehreek Taliban-i Pakistan, which is an attempt to unite the Taliban-inspired groups operating in the country. In short, the Pakistani version of the Taliban has fused with al-Qa'ida.

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Benazir Bhutto had promised that if she was elected prime minister, she would have allowed Nato forces to strike across the border against al-Qa'ida and its tribal allies. This clearly made her a target for the extremists, and the attack on her bore all their hallmarks. Yet Pakistan has always been a country where political trust is absent, inflammatory rhetoric is commonplace and conspiracy theories reign supreme.

In this atmosphere, many were sceptical about the government's claim that telephone intercepts showed Baitullah Mehsud, a tribal militant operating from the lawless South Waziristan area, had ordered the killing. He was said to have called afterwards to congratulate those immediately in charge of the operation; a spokesman for the militant leader denied it.

In many respects, this was simply the latest in a series of bombings that have caused increasing tension in Pakistan because no one can be sure who is carrying them out. No official findings have been made public on the perpetrators of the previous attack on Ms Bhutto, in Karachi on 18 October, the day she returned from eight years in exile.

She herself, and many ordinary people in Pakistan, believed that elements of the army and the intelligence agencies are behind the bombings. But security experts think that while there may be rogue officers within the army and intelligence that provide help to militants, the wholesale involvement of the state is improbable. For one thing, it is the army itself that is the main target of the explosions. The Inter-Services Intelligence organisation, often accused of undercover political operations and killings, has been hit by two huge bombs on buses this year that killed scores of its officers as they were going to work.

The MQM, the Karachi-based party which draws its support from Urdu speakers who fled India at Partition, has come under suspicion. It had a history of violent clashes with the Pakistan People's Party in the 1990s, and some believed it could be involved in the attacks on Ms Bhutto. However, while there is evidence that the MQM has been involved in extortion, beatings

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