

Dawn, 1 January 2008

Poll delay for weeks likely

The elections scheduled for January 8 are most likely to be put off for weeks because, official sources said, holding polls in various constituencies would not be possible on that day owing to the situation arising out of the assassination of PPP chairperson Benazir Bhutto. They said that recompilation of the destroyed record of the Election Commission and redeployment of around one million temporary polling staff was an uphill task and the exercise would require 10 to 12 weeks. The sources said it was not possible to complete the printing of ballot papers by January 5 as required by the programme prepared by the Commission.

The Nation, 1 January 2008

Nawaz for polls on 8th

LAHORE-PML-N Quaid Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif on Monday once again re tracked from his decision to boycott the elections and demanded the resignation of President Musharraf, establishment of a national govt and holding of elections under independent Election Commission as key to solve the problems faced by the country. "We have withdrawn the decision to boycott the elections on the request of Asif Ali Zardari, PPP newly announced Co-Chairman and spouse of late PPP Chairperson Benazir Bhutto and will participate in January 8 polls", he said while addressing a hurriedly-called Press conference held at his residence in Raiwind.

Dawn, 1 January 2008

Police team begins carnage probe

A four-member police team started investigation into the assassination of PPP chairperson Benazir Bhutto on Monday. The team, headed by additional Assistant Inspector-General of CID Chaudhry Abdul Majeed, visited the site where Ms Bhutto had been killed. The team is required to submit its report in seven days. The team also visited the DHQ hospital and recorded statements of people injured in the Dec 27 incident. Hair and skin tissues, taken from four human legs and one hand found at the site, have been sent for DNA tests in Lahore.

Dawn, 1 January 2008

US opposes indefinite postponement

The United States on Monday urged Pakistan to hold national elections on Jan 8 if possible, warning that an indefinite delay will further complicate the situation. "If elections can be held in a safe and secure way, and in a positive way, on Jan 8, then that's probably what should happen," State Department deputy spokesman Tom Casey said. Mr Casey said that the US would not object to a short delay if the opposition parties also accepted this or if there were technical barriers on holding the elections as scheduled. "The key here is that there be a date certain for elections in Pakistan," he said.

Dawn, 1 January 2008

'Benazir distanced herself from deal'

Before her death, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto had distanced herself from a US-brokered power-sharing deal between her and President Pervez Musharraf, The

Washington Post reported on Monday. According to veteran Post journalist Robert D. Novak, Ms Bhutto had sent a written complaint to a senior State Department official saying that her camp no longer viewed the backstage US move as a good-faith effort towards democracy. Instead, it was seen as an attempt to preserve the politically endangered Mr Musharraf as US President George W. Bush's man in Islamabad, she wrote. Since her return to Pakistan on Oct 18, Ms Bhutto sent several urgent pleas to the State Department, seeking US assistance for better protection.

Dawn, 1 January 2008

Death of Benazir and after (Kamal A. Munir)

What will the death of Benazir Bhutto mean for Pakistani politics? Political pundits are already trying to outguess each other as to what this event will lead to. Much of the discussion is focusing on the 'inevitable' consequences of this tragic event. However, the assumption that there is any inevitability associated with such events is a flawed one. History is usually presented to us in a simple, linear fashion in which particular events are seen to lead to specific outcomes...And so the battle to construct Benazir Bhutto's death has already begun.

The News, 2 January 2008

Polls may be postponed for over a month

The Election Commission of Pakistan on Tuesday decided in principle to delay the general elections scheduled for January 8 by more than a month. The new date for polling will be announced on Wednesday, it was learnt. Sources at the Election Commission said that no proposal to prepare the election schedule afresh was discussed at the meeting, and only a new date would be announced for the polling. The plan to hold polling for the National Assembly and the four provincial assemblies on the same day also remained unchanged. According to sources, the commission needs at least another fortnight or so to complete the election work, which was badly affected due to violence in the aftermath of Pakistan People's Party Chairperson Benazir Bhutto's assassination.

The Nation, 2 January 2008

Joint strategy if government delays polls

PML-N Quaid Nawaz Sharif phoned Asif Ali Zardari and discussed the overall political scenario of the country, reported a private TV channel on Tuesday. Nawaz Sharif informed Asif Ali Zardari about PML-N's decision to contest elections. Both the political bigwigs agreed that if the elections are postponed, PPP and PML-N will devise a joint strategy to counter the situation and other political parties will also be taken into confidence in this regard. Meanwhile, Nawaz Sharif said the government is trying to avoid elections on January 8 talking to a private TV channel, he said that his party would protest any possible postponement in elections. Nawaz said that in the upcoming elections PML-Q would earn nothing but historic defeat as it had no votebank and political credibility among the people.

Dawn, 2 January 2008

'Benazir was set to file dossier on rigging'

Benazir Bhutto was poised to reveal proof the night she was assassinated that the Election

Commission and a shadowy spy agency were seeking to rig the elections, a top aide said on Tuesday. Senator Latif Khosa, who authored a 160-page dossier with Ms Bhutto documenting rigging tactics, said they ranged from intimidation to fake ballots, and were in some cases unwittingly funded by US aid. Ms Bhutto had been due to give the report to two visiting US lawmakers over a dinner on Dec 27, the day she was killed in a gun-and-bomb attack. "The state agencies are manipulating the whole process," Mr Khosa, a top aide of Ms Bhutto and head of the PPP election monitoring unit, told Reuters. "There is rigging by the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence), the Election Commission and the previous government, which is still continuing to hold influence. They were on the rampage."

Dawn, 2 January 2008

Govt not ready for murder probe by foreign experts

The government is not willing to seek assistance of foreign experts for probe into the assassination of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto. Sources in the government told Dawn that despite the willingness expressed by President Pervez Musharraf to invite international experts the government was not ready to do so. At a press briefing on Tuesday, Interior Ministry spokesman Brig (ret'd) Javed Iqbal Cheema refused to comment on the issue. "I am really unaware of the issue," he told a questioner who had asked him if the government was calling international experts for the probe. Caretaker Interior Minister Lt-Gen (ret'd) Hamid Nawaz has already said that the government has no plan to seek help of international investigators.

Dawn, 2 January 2008

US awards contract for F-16 supply to Pakistan

The US Defence Department has awarded a \$498.2 million contract to Lockheed Martin Corp to supply 18 F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan. The decision is in line with a senior US official's assertion that the Congressional restrictions on providing \$50 million in military aid to Pakistan would not affect the sales of F-16 aircraft. "The F-16 programme is a Pakistani purchase, their money, they're buying them," said Richard Boucher, assistant secretary of state for South Asian affairs. "And our foreign military finance, our military assistance goes for different purposes and is not involved at this point in the F-16 sales." On Monday, the Pentagon released a list of defence contract awards, which include an authorisation for Lockheed to sell 12 F-16C and six F-16D planes to Pakistan.

Dawn, 2 January 2008

Beyond professional hazard (Editorial)

The year 2007 bowed out after causing much anguish around the world. It was by no stretch of imagination a particularly bright or cheerful year for Pakistan. That the Fourth Estate took the brunt of all the negative happenings across the land and in the process lost as many as seven media practitioners was a reflection of the challenges that beset this country in every area of national life. According to figures released by Media Commission Pakistan and the South Asia Free Media Association (Safma), Pakistan topped the 'death table' in South Asia, followed by Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. Seen in the larger context, Pakistan ranks third behind Iraq and Somalia. This is hardly something to do us proud.

Dawn, 3 January 2008

Polls put off to Feb 18

Ignoring opposition's threat of street protests, the Election Commission postponed general elections till February 18 on Wednesday, citing violence that erupted after the assassination of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto as the main reason. "The situation arising out of the tragic assassination of Benazir Bhutto brought the electoral process to a complete halt all over the country, making it impossible to hold election on January 8 as per the previously announced schedule," Chief Election Commissioner Justice (retd) Qazi Muhammad Farooq said at a press conference here after a meeting of the EC and a "confidential process of consultations" with political parties.

Dawn, 3 January 2008

Musharraf agrees to Scotland Yard help in probe

President Pervez Musharraf said on Wednesday that investigation into the assassination of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto would be carried out with the help of Scotland Yard. In his address to the nation, he said British Prime Minister Gordon Brown had accepted Pakistan's request to send Scotland Yard investigators. The president said that confusion relating to the assassination of Ms Bhutto, whom he repeatedly called Shaheed in his 30-minute speech, would have to be removed and that all kinds of photo-clips and witnesses would be examined with the help of British police to arrive at a conclusion. He said Pakistan's law-enforcement agencies would now have all possible forensic and technical support of Scotland Yard.

The News, 3 January 2008

US welcomes new election date

The White House on Wednesday welcomed Pakistan setting February 18 as the 'date certain' for elections postponed after the slaying of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto. "The important thing is that they have a date certain for the elections," spokeswoman Dana Perino told reporters shortly before Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf defended the postponement in a major speech. Washington hopes "now that that has been set, that the Pakistani people be allowed to have a free and fair election where there is the widest possible participation," she said.

Dawn, 3 January 2008

Taliban give two days for pullout from Swat

The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan has given another two days to the government to end the military operation in Swat and pull out all security personnel from the area, and warned that it will expand its actions from Waziristan to Kohistan and settled districts if their demand is not met. Maulvi Omar, a spokesman for the organisation, told Dawn by telephone on Wednesday that an earlier deadline for withdrawal of troops had lapsed on Dec 15, but they did not resume their activities because the entire nation was in mourning following the tragic death of Benazir Bhutto. "Now we extend the deadline for two days and ask the government to withdraw troops and halt the operation in Swat. Otherwise, we will attack the government everywhere and it will be an all-out war," he warned.

The Nation, 3 January 2008

US not convinced of Mehsud's role in BB killing

The United States intelligence analysts are not convinced by the evidence offered so far by Pakistani authorities that Baitullah Mehsud, a Taliban leader linked to Al-Qaeda, was responsible for Benazir Bhutto's assassination, The New York Times reported on Wednesday. Pakistani authorities, working from a single intelligence intercept they collected the day after Ms Bhutto's death in which Mehsud is said to be congratulating a man on a 'spectacular job', have identified the militant leader as the chief suspect behind the attack. But the NY Times quoted an unidentified senior State Department official as saying that they needed more evidence.

The Nation, 3 January 2008

Elections 2008 (Iftikhar Ahmad)

The political scenario in Pakistan is marked by high degree of uncertainty. Neither the politicians nor the people have confidence in themselves. Their minds are on a battery of questions: Will elections 2008 be fair and free? If yes, what will be the outcome in terms of the expectations of all concerned? Will the outcome bring change in the lives of the people? Will the change result in democratisation? Will the change put an end to the culture of violence? Will the change help to stop suicide attacks? Will the elections result in the emergence of leadership that can bring about the desired change to address the needs and concerns of the people and their growing sense of deprivation, insecurity and uncertainty?

The News, 4 January 2008

Benazir's assassination - Musharraf denies agencies' involvement

President Pervez Musharraf rejected any suggestion that the security agencies were behind the assassination of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto and said on Thursday she had been warned about threats from the militants. Musharraf told reporters that authorities were not responsible for a security lapse that led to the killing of the former prime minister. "In the last three months, there have been 19 suicide bombings, most of them were against the military, against the intelligence," he said. "If the same military and same intelligence is using the same people, who are attacking them, it's a joke." Musharraf said Benazir had ignored warnings about the danger of holding a rally at the Rawalpindi park.

Dawn, 4 January 2008

Fahim reiterates demand for UN investigation: 'PPP has not blamed any individual'

Pakistan People's Party leader Makhdoom Amin Fahim on Thursday sought to dispel an impression that the PPP considered President Pervez Musharraf responsible for the assassination of its chairperson Benazir Bhutto. Talking to reporters at the Lahore airport before leaving for Karachi, he said the PPP did not want to blame any individual for the murder. What Ms Bhutto had stated in her letter to her lobbyist in Washington, Mark Siegel, was that she had sent President Musharraf a list of names of persons who could be involved in the Oct 18 blasts in Karachi. Her letter stated that in case the president did not take action on that list he should be held partly responsible for her assassination, Mr Fahim said.

Dawn, 4 January 2008

ICG wants Musharraf to make way for elected govt

For the sake of Pakistan's stability it is necessary that President Pervez Musharraf resigns and a quick transition to a democratically elected civilian government takes place, says the International Crisis Group (ICG), a Brussels-based human rights think tank. "After Bhutto's murder: a way forward for Pakistan", the latest report the ICG released here on Thursday stressed the need for international assistance to investigate Benazir's assassination in a thorough and credible way. It is only possible through an "independent fixed-deadline" probe backed by a United Nations Security Council mandate, similar to the commission examining the killing of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri, the group argues.

Dawn, 4 January 2008

Bush sees Al Qaeda signature in killing

US President George W. Bush said on Thursday that former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's assassination had 'all the hallmarks' of how Al Qaeda operated. He, however, withheld judgment until the facts were determined. The remarks made in an interview to a western news agency, however, strengthen the government's claim that no Pakistani intelligence agency was involved in the attack. "It's in the interest of the world to help Pakistan recover from this terrible incident and have a strong democracy, that's exactly what the position of the US government is," he said. Mr Bush also made it obvious that his administration still considers President Pervez Musharraf a strong ally in the war against terror and wants to continue to work with him.

The News, 4 January 2008

US getting close to Nawaz

The United States has contacted Nawaz Sharif in its bid to review its options and to have close relations with Pakistani leaders after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, sources close to the PML-N leader confirmed to The News on Thursday. The United States will now bank on Nawaz Sharif after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, its supporter on the war on terror, and establish close contacts with him as he is the main opposition leader after the PPP chairperson, a leading US news agency reported earlier on Thursday. Elizabeth Colton, the US embassy spokesperson, confirmed to The News that the US Consul General in Lahore Brine Hunt was meeting Nawaz Sharif and Shahbaz Sharif today (Friday).

The News, 4 January 2008

Why was Benazir Bhutto assassinated? (Shafqat Mahmood)

The easiest explanation is that Al Qaeda or Pakistani Taliban killed her and this is what the government has been pedalling. In twenty four hours, it not only determined the exact cause of Benazir Bhutto death but also solved the case. Baitullah Mehsud, we were told, is the culprit and there are tapes to prove it. I wish the interior ministry had shown similar efficiency in protecting her. While these explanations are convenient let us look at Mr Mehsud's motives. There is little doubt that Benazir Bhutto hated Al Qaeda/Taliban and had vowed a relentless struggle against them. But, how was this any different from what

Mr Musharraf has been saying and doing. What extra measures would she have undertaken that are not being used now.

The News, 5 January 2008

Scotland Yard team begins probe

An eight-member team comprising five experts from the Scotland Yard and three officials of the British High Commission in Islamabad has held an 'introductory session' with a four-member team of Pakistani investigators probing the assassination of Pakistan People's Party Chairperson Benazir Bhutto. However, Interior Ministry Spokesman Brig (ret'd) Javed Iqbal Cheema told The News that no meeting was held with the Scotland Yard team at the interior ministry. "Reports about such meetings are all speculative. The Scotland Yard team did not visit the interior ministry today nor did it have any meeting with the federal interior secretary or any other 'senior official of the ministry' in Islamabad," Brig (ret'd) Cheema said.

Dawn, 5 January 2008

Musharraf asks PM to speed up murder probe

President Pervez Musharraf directed caretaker Prime Minister Muhammadmian Soomro on Friday to speed up the pace of investigation into the assassination of PPP chairperson Benazir Bhutto. According to sources, he expressed concern over what he called slow progress and asked the prime minister to extend full cooperation to the Scotland Yard to complete the investigation as early as possible. The president was presiding over a meeting held to discuss measures taken to maintain peace during Muharram and general elections. The prime minister, chief ministers, the chief of the army staff, interior minister, heads of security and intelligence agencies and senior officials attended the meeting.

Dawn, 5 January 2008

'ICG report meddling in democratic process'

The Pakistan government slammed a Brussels-based think-tank on Friday for meddling "in the country's democratic process" after it issued a report saying President Pervez Musharraf should quit for the sake of stability. The International Crisis Group report, titled "After Bhutto's murder: a way forward for Pakistan" was "patently biased and reflects a complete lack of understanding" of ground realities in Pakistan, a government spokesman said in a statement. He said elements of the report suggesting Musharraf should be persuaded to quit were tantamount to propagating "seditious views against the laws of the country" and advised media in Pakistan to handle such material with care.

Tha Nation, 5 January 2008

Taliban set 7-day deadline

The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan has given 'seven days' to the government to end the on-going military operation in Swat, South Waziristan and other areas, the BBC reported on Friday, quoting group's spokesman Ghazi Ahmed as saying. The spokesman also threatened to carry out retaliatory attacks in NWFP cities, including Peshawar, if their demand was not met. It is pertinent to mention here that certain groups allegedly active in NWFP and tribal areas had constituted Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan headed by Baitullah

Mehsud in December last year.

The News, 5 January 2008

A shadowy role (Editorial)

The role of Pakistan's extensive network of intelligence agencies has come under scrutiny once more in the aftermath of the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. Whereas President Pervez Musharraf has categorically denied any possibility of an agency hand in the killing, fingers continue to be pointed in their direction. One of the reasons for such suspicions, which have also been raised repeatedly in the past in relation to various events, is the fact that so little is known about these organizations and because they have often been used to manipulate election results and do successive governments' dirty work. Though they consume enormous budgets, paid for by taxpayers, the public knows next to nothing about how they operate or, indeed, what their assigned role is.

The News, 5 January 2008

Mediawatch (George Friedman)

The endgame of the US-jihadist war always had to be played out in Pakistan. There are two reasons that could account for this. The first is simple: Osama bin Laden and the al Qaeda command cell are located in Pakistan. The war cannot end while the command cell functions or has a chance of regenerating. The second reason is more complicated. The United States and NATO are engaged in a war in Afghanistan. Where the Soviets lost with 300,000 troops, the Americans and NATO are fighting with less than 50,000. Any hope of defeating the Taliban, or of reaching some sort of accommodation, depends on isolating them from Pakistan. So long as the Taliban have sanctuary and logistical support from Pakistan, transferring all coalition troops in Iraq to Afghanistan would have no effect.

Dawn, 6 January 2008

Risks to economy increasing, says State Bank

All key performance indicators recorded a significant decline during the first quarter of the current financial year and the resulting imbalances could have adverse consequences for the economy, the State Bank of Pakistan said in its quarterly report, released here on Saturday. The July-September report noted that the political uncertainty ahead of the coming elections was impacting on investor sentiment. "Risks to the economy are increasing as it is clear that neither the global nor the domestic economic environment is as benign as in the past years," it added.

The Nation, 6 January 2008

'Govt to miss all projections'

With lingering political instability, upsurge in gas prices and acute energy shortage resulting in possible industrial wheel jam there is all likelihood of missing 7.2 per cent growth target for financial year 2007-08. Rebutting government claims of achieving the annual economic targets despite political and energy embargos, the independent political and economic analysts believe the government will miss all its projections, including 7.2 per cent GDP growth. They said that against last year's growth of 7 per cent the current financial year will end on a growth of 5.5 per cent to 6 per cent. Former Federal Finance

Minister, Sartaj Aziz while talking to TheNation said the GDP growth will be restricted to 5.5 per cent to 6 per cent by the end of the current financial year.

The Nation, 6 January 2008

UK police inspect murder scene

The five-member Scotland Yard team, assisting the Pakistani investigators to probe into the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, Saturday conducted a detailed visit to Liaquat Bagh to inspect the place where Benazir was killed on December 27 when she was leaving the venue after addressing the public rally. The investigation team, led by David Keith, stayed at Liaquat Bagh for more than two hours under tight security arrangements and carried out comprehensive view of the place from different angles. The Scotland Yard team reviewed the site from various perspectives keeping in view the medical report provided by the Medical Superintendent and the head of doctors team which had examined Benazir Bhutto when she was brought to Rawalpindi General Hospital after the fatal attack.

Dawn, 6 January 2008

'People in and outside govt must be probed'

People within and outside the government must be held accountable for the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, says Asif Ali Zardari. In an article published in The Washington Post on Saturday, PPP's co-chairman reiterated his demand for a UN-led probe into Ms Bhutto's death. "I call on the United Nations to commence a thorough investigation of the circumstances, facts and cover-up of my wife's murder," he wrote. "Her murder does not end her vision and must not be allowed to empower her assassins." The investigation, he said, should be modelled on the probe into the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik al-Hariri.

The Nation, 6 January 2008

Massive military operation in Waziristan on the cards

A large-scale military operation is on cards in the restive tribal belt of Waziristan to stamp out the 'local Taliban' led by Baitullah Mehsud, who is blamed by the government for most of the recently carried out suicide blasts including one that killed the former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. 34-year old militant commander Baitullah Mehsud, as his name suggests, belongs to the Mehsud tribe in South Waziristan, a troubled region, which is now considered to be the safe haven for al-Qaeda and Taliban. Baitullah Mehsud, according to security officials here, has played a major role in the expansion of militants' writ and control in Waziristan besides, extending support to the militants in other tribal areas as well as the district of Swat.

The News, 7 January 2008

Pakistan rejects CIA operations in tribal areas

Pakistan on Sunday rejected reports that the US was considering giving the CIA powers to launch covert actions in hunt for alleged al-Qaeda elements in the tribal areas of the country. The military reacted angrily to reports that US President George W Bush is considering covert military operations in the country's volatile tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. "It is not up to the US administration, it is Pakistan's government who is

responsible for this country," chief military spokesman Major General Waheed Arshad told AFP.

The News, 7 January 2008

'They're trying to kill me,' Benazir had said in interview

Former Prime Minister and late Chairperson of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Benazir Bhutto was featured on a cover of a US magazine, 10 days after her assassination, and in the accompanying story she warned that her enemies wanted her dead. "I am what terrorists most fear, a female political leader fighting to bring modernity to Pakistan," Bhutto, who interviewed her weeks earlier in her hometown of Larkana, said. "Now they're trying to kill me."

The News, 7 January 2008

Democrats repeat anti-Pak tirade

Pakistan on Sunday once again said that its nuclear assets are completely safe and secure under fully indigenous, multi-layered, institutional security and command and control structure. Responding to Hillary Clinton's statement about safety of Pakistan's nuclear assets, the foreign office spokesman Muhammad Sadiq said that there is vagueness about what she meant to say, whether the interest was sharing the information about safety of Pakistan's nuclear assets or something else. The spokesman said, "regardless of the meaning of Senator Hillary Clinton's remarks, it must be clearly understood that Pakistan alone is, and will be responsible for security of its strategic assets."

The News, 7 January 2008

Investigators inspect Benazir's vehicle, collect information

Even on Sunday the visitors from Scotland Yard continued their work, sifting through the available evidence in their investigation of the assassination of Pakistan People's Party Chairperson, Ms Benazir Bhutto. According to the Rawalpindi Police sources, the Scotland Yard team, along with the Pakistani investigators spent a long time inspecting the bullet-and-bombproof Land Cruiser jeep in which Ms Bhutto was travelling at the time of her assassination. "They (Scotland Yard team) visited the Police Lines in Rawalpindi where Ms Bhutto's vehicle is parked and spent over a couple of hours minutely inspecting it. They inspected the vehicle inside out, asking questions and taking photographs," the sources told The News.

The News, 7 January 2008

Forces close in on militant strongholds in Swat

The security forces on Sunday moved towards the strongholds of militants after gaining control of several areas which were earlier considered as their hideouts. After their arrival, the security forces set up checkpoints in Chuprial, Wenaipul and Shangwatai towns. A spokesperson for the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) in Swat Colonel Mohammad Nadeem told The News that forces in a convoy of 100 vehicles started moving towards Gat Peochar and Shawar, the suspected strongholds of rebel cleric Maulana Fazlullah-led militants. He said the armoured personnel carriers (APCs) and engineers accompanied the advancing troops.

The Nation, 7 January 2008

Over to Fahim and Zardari (Nadeem Syed)

After the tragic exit of Benazir Bhutto, the PPP's top leaders have managed the affairs of the party quite intelligently. All the big decisions taken so far by the party central leaders made a lot sense and so widely accepted across the country. As the PPP leaders backed the decisions, we are yet to find any bickering in the party to be exploited by the government and political opponents. The decision to take part in elections 2008 despite the loss of Benazir was admired everywhere, though it surprised official circles. What was disappointing was the government decision to delay the elections. For the PPP leaders, elections could do a lot of good to the party in the changed circumstances in which everybody is sympathising with the PPP.

The Nation, 8 January 2008

Musharraf denies hand in Benazir's killing

President Pervez Musharraf has firmly denied any hand in the killing of the former premier and said nobody should be assigned any blame until investigations are over. Musharraf, who was interviewed on CBS news' Sixty Minutes show, maintained that he had personally told Ms. Bhutto that she was under threat and that under the circumstances, the PPP leader should not have done the things she did on that fateful day in December. "This is unfortunately a very baseless allegation," Musharraf said of the possibility that he had a hand in the killing of Bhutto.

The News, 8 January 2008

Nine peace brokers shot dead in S Waziristan

Suspected militants including Uzbeks on Monday killed nine pro-government peace brokers in surprise attacks in Wana and Shakai of South Waziristan Agency (SWA). The attacks targeted two offices of 'Amn Committee' (peace committee) run by a pro-government Taliban military commander Maulvi Nazeer late Sunday. He had led a faction of Taliban militants and Wazir tribesmen against Uzbek fighters several months ago. The Uzbeks, affiliated with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and commanded by Tahir Yuldashev, had to abandon the Wana area after suffering losses and relocate to tribal territory controlled by Taliban Commander Baitullah Mahsud.

The Nation, 8 January 2008

Operation to capture Mehsud on the cards

Caretaker Interior Minister Hamid Nawaz Khan has said that a major operation is being started in Waziristan to arrest leader of Al-Qaeda Baitullah Mehsud while strategy in this respect have been devised. Baitullah Mehsud is involved in terrorist and extremist activities and we have strong evidence about his presence in Waziristan, Hamid Nawaz said this while talking to media men on Monday. A major operation to capture leader of Al-Qaeda is being started, the minister said, adding that, operation would be launched soon after revealing his hideout in Waziristan.

Dawn, 8 January 2008

Govt will not back request for UN probe, says minister

The government would not support the PPP's request for a United Nations investigation

into the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, caretaker Interior Minister Hamid Nawaz said on Monday. The minister said that the Scotland Yard team helping the government's investigating team was very competent and there was no need to bring in the world body. A team of PPP leaders, led by Senator Farooq Naek, has drafted a letter for the UN to be put up before Asif Ali Zardari for approval on Tuesday. Its approval was delayed when Mr Zardari recently left for Dubai. According to Attorney-General Malik Mohammad Qayyum, since the UN deals with states and not individuals, it will not entertain any request from the PPP without support from the government.

Dawn, 8 January 2008

Renewed US threat (Editorial)

American threats to intervene in Pakistan militarily have become a routine affair. This time, however, the threat has come after some gap and has evoked the usual response by the Foreign Office spokesman. Islamabad, he said, would not allow America to intervene militarily in Pakistan, because fighting terrorism in Fata and elsewhere was the government's responsibility. One does not know who to pick up first for some plain speaking. The naivety being shown by the Bush administration is amazing. Its stand suffers from a fundamental flaw: it wants quick results without having a full grasp of the intricacies of the situation.

The Nation, 8 January 2008

Crisis and opportunity (Javid Husain)

here is no denying the fact that Pakistan is passing through one of the darkest periods of its history. As if it were not enough to be saddled with a military rule which has destroyed various institutions of the state in its quest for absolute power, the nation now has to contend with the dangerous consequences of Benazir Bhutto's tragic assassination. It is difficult to believe that we have in this country such ruthless forces of darkness which do not desist from killing a popular female leader embodying the hopes and aspirations of the millions of her followers. One is at a loss to find words to condemn this heinous crime which has cut down a leader with so much promise in the prime of her life.

Dawn, 9 January 2008

Poll rigging to break up country: Bilawal

Benazir Bhutto's teenage son and political heir warned on Tuesday that Pakistan could disintegrate unless fair elections were held, as he defended his appointment as his assassinated mother's successor. In a packed first full press conference since taking over as chairman of the Pakistan People's Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari vowed to continue her legacy and pledged to give hope to a new generation of Pakistanis. While the 19-year-old said his immediate priority was to resume his studies at Britain's prestigious University of Oxford, he insisted the threat of being assassinated himself had not put him off leading the PPP.

Dawn, 9 January 2008

Pakistan's N-assets could fall into wrong hands: ElBaradei

The head of the UN atomic watchdog Mohamed ElBaradei has voiced concern over the possibility that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal could fall into extremist hands, in statements

published on Tuesday. "I fear that chaos... or an extremist regime could take root in that country which has 30 to 40 warheads," ElBaradei told the pan-Arab daily Al-Hayat in an interview. He stressed that he was "worried that nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of an extremist group in Pakistan or in Afghanistan." There has been worldwide concern over the security of Pakistan's estimated 50 nuclear warheads since President Pervez Musharraf imposed a state of emergency in the country in November.

The News, 9 January 2008

Musharraf gives free hand to UK investigators

President Pervez Musharraf said on Tuesday his government was committed to finding the truth behind the assassination of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto. He vowed to punish her killers. The president met the Scotland Yard team on Tuesday and said the government was committed to "unearthing the evidence, finding out the truth and bringing those responsible for this heinous crime to justice". Musharraf declared the assassination of Benazir Bhutto a national tragedy and assured the Scotland Yard team of full cooperation and assistance not only by the government but also by the country's investigation agencies.

Dawn, 9 January 2008

Nawaz briefs EU poll mission on govt's rigging plan

A four-member European Union Election Observer Mission called on PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif at his Raiwind residence here on Tuesday. Mission head Michel Galle told the media after the meeting that opposition parties had provided them some evidence of the alleged rigging plan which had been forwarded to the "competent authorities". He said the mission would monitor election activities until the polling day (Feb 18) and release its preliminary report within 48 hours after the announcement of poll results. A detailed account would be made public two months after the Election Commission of Pakistan declared the final results, he added.

Dawn, 9 January 2008

US likely to retain its Pakistan policy despite election

Despite the usual rhetoric that accompanies all elections, there does not seem to be a major difference in how the current administration deals with Pakistan and how those contending for the 2008 presidential elections in the United States plan to deal with it. Key opposition politicians and US government officials both say that Pakistan needs more democracy and that the United States should reach out to the Pakistani people and not confine itself to individuals. But both groups also want President Pervez Musharraf to stay in power, although they do want him to share power with opposition politicians.

Dawn, 9 January 2008

A post above politics (Editorial)

In urging President Musharraf not to take sides in the run-up to the Feb 18 polls, the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency has highlighted countrywide apprehensions that the integrity of the elections would be compromised by partisan attitudes. This concern is justified on the grounds of President Musharraf's close links with the PML(Q) that is widely regarded as an establishment party. Indeed, much

mutual back-scratching has been witnessed in their relationship. The party has frequently given statements in his support and organised rallies for him to address.

Dawn, 10 January 2008

ElBaradei's remarks on N-assets rejected

Pakistan on Wednesday hit back at IAEA chief's remarks about the safety of country's nuclear arsenal and said the country's strategic assets were secure and the head of the UN atomic watchdog "ought to remain within the parameters of his mandate". "His remarks ignore the fact that the strategic assets of Pakistan are fully secure and under multi-layered safeguards and controls exercised by the National Command Authority," Foreign Office spokesman Mohammad Sadiq said at his weekly press briefing.

Dawn, 10 January 2008

A floundering Fata policy

What could be a starker acknowledgement of our floundering Fata policy than the fact that in less than three years, the NWFP has seen the exit of three governors? From Lt-Gen (retd) Syed Iftikhar Hussain Shah to Commander Khalilur Rehman to Lt-Gen (retd) Ali Mohammad Jan Aurakzai, all three governors of the NWFP had to bow out of office, all trying to grapple with an increasingly difficult and complicated situation in Fata. And it wasn't just the governors; political agents and several other senior civil officials, were all tried and tested and then shown the door in what has now become a predictably unceremonial manner. All these changes, indicating a faltering policy if there ever was one to rein in a growing militancy in tribal borderlands, ironically, had similar causes.

Dawn, 10 January 2008

Senator says rigging to prompt tough US action

A senior member of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee has warned of 'serious consequences', including a shift in the American policy towards Pakistan, if fair and free elections are not held on Feb 18. "While there will be further division in Pakistan, there will be certain action against Pakistan by Congress if polls are not held in a transparent and fair manner," Senator Joseph Lieberman said at a news conference here on Wednesday. "In fact there will be serious consequences for both countries if elections are rigged as is being alleged by some political parties."

Dawn, 10 January 2008

'US military has no intention to cross into Pakistan'

So far the US-led forces in Afghanistan have no plan for crossing into Pakistan to target Al Qaeda or Taliban hideouts, says a senior US military commander. Brig-Gen Joseph Votel, the deputy commanding general for operations for the Combined Joint Task Force in Afghanistan, acknowledged that terrorist activities along the Pak-Afghan border had decreased recently, but said that the enemy also had learned to better coordinate its actions in that region. "Right now we do not plan or really have any vision for operations with our forces into the Fata or into Pakistan," Brig-Gen Votel told a teleconference at the Pentagon.

The Nation, 10 January 2008

PPP fears crackdown

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has alleged that 50,000 FIRs have been registered against 400,000 political workers and polling agents of PPP and the government plans to arrest them before the polling day. Addressing a Press conference after a meeting of Election Monitoring Cell (EMC) here on Wednesday, EMC Chairman Latif Khosa claimed that fake cases have been lodged against the PPP polling agents and workers and the government wants to hold them before the polling day. He said that the EMC strongly condemn the arrest of political workers and Pakistan Lawyer Forum (PLF) would send teams for legal aids of these workers to different provinces.

The News, 10 January 2008

Fazlullah denies report of his death

Rebel cleric Maulana Fazlullah on Wednesday denied reports about his death in military action on a suspected hideout in Manja, Kabal Tehsil, where he was reportedly chairing a meeting of his commanders. Despite widespread rumours, military authorities, however, kept themselves aloof from reports that the most-wanted man in Swat had been killed along with his eight other commanders in an operation conducted a day earlier. Maulana Fazlullah, who called the BBC Urdu Service in Peshawar from an undisclosed location, said he was safe and there was no truth in reports that declared him dead in a military action.

Dawn, 10 January 2008

Afghans favour US attacks in Pakistan: Al Qaeda sanctuary

Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders operate 'outside the country'. The war on terror 'should know no borders.' The international community should address the 'root causes of terrorism - wherever they are.' Afghan officials weave hints and suggestions, but their meaning is becoming increasingly clear: Afghanistan would be more than happy for US forces to attack Taliban and Al Qaeda safe havens in Pakistan. After the bloodiest year since the 2001 US-led invasion, some analysts say the US and Nato won't make lasting progress in Afghanistan unless the militants' ability to command and control the insurgency from across the border is tackled.

Dawn, 11 January 2008

Suicide attack on police mows down 24 in Lahore

A suicide bomber struck near the Lahore High Court on Thursday morning, killing at least 24 people and injuring 73 others. Police boots, riot shields and helmets littered the street. The bomber walked up to a police contingent at GPO Chowk, on Ustad Allah Bux Road, ahead of a lawyers' protest march and blew himself up. Most of the victims were policemen. An official list put the death toll at 19 - 16 of them policemen. Sixty-two people were injured. The Edhi Trust and Rescue 1122, however, put the death toll at 24.

The News, 11 January 2008

PPP seeks formal request for UN probe

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) on Thursday asked the government to request the United Nations Security Council and the UN secretary-general to constitute a UN commission to probe into the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. "We would like the

government to request the UN to form a UN commission to be known as Ms Benazir Bhutto Inquiry Commission," said PPP Co-Chairman Asif Zardari while speaking at a press conference here at the Bhutto House after chairing a meeting of the central executive committee of the party.

The News, 11 January 2008

US rejects conspiracy theories amid new revelations

The US embassy in Islamabad has termed the reports connecting Washington to an international conspiracy behind Benazir Bhutto's assassination 'completely outrageous and unfounded' amid fresh revelations that the slain leader had established indirect contacts with Dr AQ Khan and Lt-Gen (retd) Hamid Gul shortly before her death. US embassy spokesperson Elizabeth Colton, in response to written questions sent by The News on Wednesday, described the assassination as a tragedy for Pakistan and the whole world and said, "The suggestion of US involvement is completely outrageous and unfounded."

The News, 11 January 2008

Fazlullah denies hand in Benazir assassination

Rebel cleric Maulana Fazlullah, who was accused by President Pervez Musharraf of masterminding the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, on Thursday said he was not involved in the murder of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader. "Benazir Bhutto's killing was a part of power politics. We have nothing to do with her and her family members know the killers well," said Sirajuddin, a spokesman for Maulana Fazlullah, who called The News from an undisclosed location. President Musharraf blamed Baitullah Mehsud and Maulana Fazlullah for assassinating Benazir outside Liaquat Bagh in Rawalpindi on December 27.

The News, 11 January 2008

IAEA seeks to soothe Pakistan ire over ElBaradei comments

The UN atomic watchdog attempted on Thursday to smooth over a spat with Pakistan over recent comments made by IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei on the issue of nuclear safety. A spokeswoman for the International Atomic Energy Agency insisted that ElBaradei's comments were intended to "call attention to the need to bolster nuclear safety and security measures, not only in Pakistan, but also everywhere in the world where nuclear materials or facilities exist." ElBaradei and the IAEA "follow closely all situations that could have a potential impact on nuclear safety and security anywhere," said the agency's spokeswoman Melissa Fleming.

The Nation, 11 January 2008

CIA and Pakistan (Dr Ijaz Ahsan)

Over a period of many decades, the US has destabilised one country or the other in furtherance of its own objectives, specially in Latin America. Now it appears it is Pakistan's turn. According to reports, the US is considering giving its Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) powers to launch covert actions in the hunt for alleged Al-Qaeda elements in the tribal areas of the country. The Pakistan military has reacted angrily to reports that US President George Bush is considering covert military operations in the country's

volatile tribal areas bordering Afghanistan.

Dawn, 12 January 2008

Musharraf says he will quit if opposition tries to impeach him: US warned against intervention

President Pervez Musharraf has warned that the US troops will be regarded as invaders if they cross into Pakistan to hunt Al Qaeda militants and has said he will resign if opposition parties try to impeach him after next month's elections, according to an interview. President Musharraf told the Straits Times that the US or coalition troops would not be welcome unless invited for a particular reason, such as hunting Al Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden. "Nobody will come here until we ask them to come. And we haven't asked them," he said in the interview which was published on Friday.

The Nation, 12 January 2008

Qaeda in Pakistan matter of grave concern: US military chief

Al-Qaeda's use of Pakistani tribal areas as safe havens is a 'grave concern' but it is up to Pakistan to address the problem directly, US military chief Admiral Michael Mullen said Friday. Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the safe havens have had a 'significant impact' not only on the security situation in neighbouring Afghanistan, but in Pakistan itself. "There are concerns now about how much (Al-Qaeda) have turned inward, literally, inside Pakistan, as well as the kind of planning, training, financing and support that (Al-Qaeda's) worldwide effort" demands, he said.

Dawn, 12 January 2008

Scotland Yard mandated to determine cause of death

The Scotland Yard team assisting local investigators in the probe into the assassination of PPP chairperson Benazir Bhutto is mandated to determine the precise cause of her death, according to the terms of reference for the team released by the British High Commission on Friday. The high commission said that the local authorities remained the principal investigators. It made the terms of reference public after UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband's commitment in the House of Commons regarding publication of the terms of reference.

Dawn, 12 January 2008

Pakistan cautions conditional US aid may impede war on terror

Pakistan cautioned on Friday that any attempt to link the US aid to certain conditions could impede its role in the war on terror and hurt bilateral ties. "Our role in war on terror would continue irrespective of whether or not there are any conditionalities attached to aid, because Pakistan is participating in it for its own interest, but we believe that unhampered assistance, provision of equipment and intelligence sharing is essential," said Foreign Office spokesman Muhammad Sadiq. He rejected a call by US Senate majority leader Harry Reid to make aid conditional to restoration of democracy and a UN-led inquiry into the assassination of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto.

The Nation, 12 January 2008

Musharraf's party open to share power

Pakistan Ambassador to the United States Mahmud Ali Durrani says that Pakistan Muslim League-Q, which is allied with President Pervez Musharraf, will be prepared to work with any other parties to form a government after the Feb 18 parliamentary elections. The party 'does not rule out any coalition' after the vote, Durrani told reporters and editors during a visit to The Washington Times. His remarks were published on Friday. The Times said the slain PPP leader Benazir Bhutto had told its staff shortly before her death that her PPP would not consider entering a coalition with the PML-Q.

The Nation, 13 January 2008

No bucks, no fight

President Pervez Musharraf has rejected the possibility of United Nations probing into the assassination of former premier Benazir Bhutto. He said this in an interview with a French newspaper Saturday. President Musharraf said that he is expecting a report before the February 18 polls from the Scotland Yard team after the detectives have completed their probe into the killing on the former prime minister. He told Le Figaro that Pakistan is handling the investigation with its own institutions and with the help of British police from Scotland Yard.

Dawn, 13 January 2008

No unilateral action in Pakistan: US

The US State Department and the Pentagon have both assured Pakistan that the United States has no plan to take unilateral military action inside its tribal territory. The assurance followed President Pervez Musharraf's strong warning, given in an interview to a Singapore newspaper this week, that if US troops entered Pakistani territory without permission they would be considered invaders. "Certainly, anything that the United States has done and anything the United States will do will be in full cooperation with the Pakistani government," said the department's deputy spokesman Tom Casey.

The Nation, 13 January 2008

Terror attacks part of rigging plan: Zardari

Former premier Benazir Bhutto's husband Asif Ali Zardari has said he thinks recent terrorist attacks in the country are part of efforts to either rig or postpone next month's parliamentary polls. "I consider (the attacks) a part of the rigging campaign. I consider this a part of the harassment campaign so that people would not come out in mass numbers to vote," he said. "This is a way of again diverting people's attention and trying to either postpone the elections or making sure that the (ruling PML-Q) wins," Zardari told the 'Voice of America'.

Dawn, 13 January 2008

PPP to approach United Nations for investigation

The Pakistan People's Party will on its own send a request to the UN for setting up a commission to probe Benazir Bhutto's assassination. Sources told Dawn here on Saturday that a 48-hour ultimatum given to the government by the PPP for submitting the request had expired. The party said it had not received any reply from the government. The party sources said President Pervez Musharraf, in an interview to a French newspaper, had clearly said the government would not request the UN for a commission.

Dawn, 14 January 2008

Al Qaeda assassinated Benazir: report

Evidence amassed by Scotland Yard detectives points towards Al Qaeda militants being responsible for the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, Sunday Times said quoting British officials. But the ST report also quoted Scotland Yard insisting that its task was not to establish who killed her but only how she died. Even that is not straightforward. They cannot examine the body, and the crime scene and Bhuttos vehicle were both scrubbed within hours, said the author of the report Christina Lamb. Ms Lamb recalled that Musharraf's interior ministry had released a transcript of a purported telephone conversation between Mehsud and a militant cleric in which, though Bhuttos name was not mentioned, he appeared to congratulate him on the death, saying: Fantastic job. Very brave boys, the ones who killed her.

Dawn, 14 January 2008

Bhootani ready to hold talks with tribal leaders

Caretaker Chief Minister of Balochistan Sardar Mohammad Saleh Bhootani has said that he is ready to hold dialogue with political and tribal leaders of the province to resolve all issues. Speaking to journalists at the meet the press programme of the Quetta Press Club on Sunday, he said the government planned to hold dialogue with recognised tribal elders to ensure peace and order in the province. It is my desire to meet all tribal elders who are really heading their tribes to promote love and brotherhood among the people, he said. He said the law and order situation in the province had improved to a large extent with the help of the masses. He said the situation would be improved further with the cooperation of the elders and youth.

Dawn, 14 January 2008

Two Uzbek fighters killed in Waziristan

Two Uzbek militants were killed and one was captured during clashes between rival groups in the volatile South Waziristan Agency on Sunday, officials and residents said. Also on Sunday, anti-Uzbek militant commander Maulvi Nazir survived a roadside bomb attack. The clash took place in the Shakai valley when six Uzbek militants came across supporters of Malik Khanan, a close associate of Maulvi Nazir. Officials said the Malik's men exchanged fire with the Uzbeks and killed two of them and captured one in wounded condition. The other three foreign militants managed to escape.

The Nation, 14 January 2008

PPP to resist national govt ahead of polls: Farzana Raja

Information Secretary of Punjab PPP Farzana Raja Sunday said that her party would strongly resist the formation of any national government ahead of polls and warned that another poll postponement would not be tolerated at any cost. The demand for national government is from those political orphans who are unable to take part in elections, she said while addressing a Press conference in PPPP media centre flanked by Nazir Dhoki and Wasif Ali. She said that PPPP co-chairman's statement regarding national government was misinterpreted. The co-chairman of the party has made it clear that a government representing all strata of society will be framed after elections so that a national

government could be formed, she remarked.

The News, 14 January 2008

Musharraf terms election dates change reports baseless

President Musharraf says the caretaker government is in control of conducting free, fair, transparent elections, and all allegations regarding a change in election date are baseless. Addressing the Sindh cabinet, the president said that the polls would be conducted peacefully. He said no persons or groups would be allowed to disrupt the electoral process. Earlier at the Governor's House, President Musharraf addressed the wheat crisis and said smuggling was the main cause of the issue he said the smuggling of wheat and flour was in the process of being stopped.

Dawn, 15 January 2008

Terrorists strike factory zone in Karachi: 9 dead

At least nine people, two of them children, were killed and 52 others wounded when an explosive device believed to have been fitted to a motorcycle went off in Landhi on Monday night. The blast occurred at a time when President Pervez Musharraf was in the city. The bomb exploded at around 8pm near the Gul Ahmed Chowrangi, where labourers returning home from nearby factories were buying fruit and vegetables, a police official said. "A middle-aged man parked his motorcycle close to vegetable carts, enquired about the prices of different items and soon melted into the darkness. A few seconds later, an explosion took place, causing chaos as people ran for cover," Ahsan Khan, an eyewitness, said at the Jinnah Hospital, where he was looking for an acquaintance.

Dawn, 15 January 2008

Musharraf rules out national govt

President Pervez Musharraf on Monday ruled out any possibility of formation of a national government and any change in the election date. At a meeting with members of the Sindh cabinet, he said that the wheat and flour crisis would soon ease and there would be an improvement in the situation in near future. Briefing the media after the meeting, president's spokesman Maj-Gen (ret) Rashid Qureshi said the president rejected rumours about a national government and a change in the election date. "There is no truth in such reports and the president is very firm on holding the elections under the caretaker government," he said. The president reiterated his commitment to combating and eradicating terrorism from the country.

Dawn, 15 January 2008

Six UK experts leave to analyse evidence

Six investigators of the Scotland Yard team helping the local authorities in investigation into the assassination of Pakistan People's Party chairperson Benazir Bhutto left for the United Kingdom on Monday to analyse evidence collected so far, official sources said. "They have gone back to the UK to analyse whatever they have collected from here and are expected back on Jan 27," the sources said. Four members of the team who have stayed here will resume their work after a day's break on Wednesday. The investigators took to the UK with them samples of human tissues, evidence collected from the site of

the blast and brain matter from Ms Bhutto's car. They will analyse the material collected from the car.

Dawn, 15 January 2008

PPP says it may work with Musharraf

Pakistan People's Party said on Monday it may work with President Musharraf after elections next month despite his apparent unpopularity and allegations that elements within his government may have played a role in PPP leader's assassination. The comments highlight the fluid nature of the country's politics ahead of the polls, which the United States and other western nations hope will usher in a period of stability. The PPP and the other main opposition parties have intensified their calls for President Musharraf to resign since Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in a gun and suicide bomb attack on Dec 27. But a spokesman for PPP said 'all options are open' when asked whether it would cooperate with Gen (ret'd) Musharraf.

The Nation, 16 January 2008

Eight suspected militants arrested

Caretaker Federal Interior Minister Hamid Nawaz Khan has said that eight suicide bombers, along with explosive material, have been arrested from Sargodha and Mianwali. "Five suicide bombers have been arrested from Sargodha along with 37-kg explosive material whereas 3 along with 30-kg explosives are held from Mianwali," said Hamid Nawaz while talking to the media at the inaugural ceremony of the new building of Tarnol Police Station here on Tuesday. The Minister further said that the perpetrators behind the Karachi and Rawalpindi blasts of last year have also been arrested. However, he refused to share further details about these arrests.

The Nation, 16 January 2008

Taliban should be recognised: Musharraf

President Pervez Musharraf has said the best strategy against the Taliban is to recognise them and try to change them from within. He sought a change of strategy in Afghanistan, favouring 'political overtures' to win over the majority Pashtun. President Musharraf said this in an interview with German magazine Der Spiegel on Tuesday. "When I came on the scene in 1999, I told everyone, including President Bill Clinton that the best strategy against the Taliban is to recognise them and try to change them from within. Nobody agreed." "Then they came the problems with Osama bin Laden. Everybody asked me to help the West to get him arrested or deported, but by then it was too late. I sent four or five missions to Mullah Omar to resolve the problem," he added.

The Nation, 16 January 2008

PPP to approach UN directly for BB probe

PPP Co-Chairman Asif Ali Zardari has reiterated his party's stance that the probe into the assassination of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto should be conducted by the UN. "As the government has claimed the involvement of Al-Qaeda, an international terrorist organisation, in BB's murder therefore the UN should be asked to investigate this heinous crime", he said. In a press conference in Karachi on Tuesday, Asif Zardari said that he had met with the Scotland Yard team along with senior PPP leaders and provided

evidence to them.

The Nation, 16 January 2008

Pak-US talks to avert incursions

Taking seriously threats of US troops' incursions in tribal areas in hunt for Al-Qaeda militants, Islamabad is engaged in intense negotiations with Washington to prevent it from any such act, which Islamabad believes could inflict irreparable loss to Pakistan's stability. With leading American media organisations coming up with reports on possible US incursions in Waziristan and other restive tribal areas quoting unnamed senior officials, Pakistan's security brass is not taking such threats lightly. "Intense negotiations are underway between Pakistani officials and Bush administration to avert any strike from outside on suspected terrorist hideouts in the tribal belt," said a senior official here on Tuesday on condition of anonymity.

The Nation, 16 January 2008

Militants slip out of Pakistan control: NYT

Pakistan Tuesday rejected a report carried by New York Times, claiming that Islamabad had lost control over some of the militant groups in the country. Foreign Office spokesman Muhammad Sadiq said NYT is becoming a laughing stock for quoting unnamed sources in a baseless report and by rehashing the same story again and again. "Therefore, it was not even worth reacting to," he added. Meanwhile an ISPR spokesman, when contacted also rejected the report by describing it as totally baseless. Special Correspondent from New York adds: Pakistan's premier military intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), has lost control of some of the networks of Pakistani militants it has nurtured since the 1980s and is now suffering the violent blowback of that policy, The New York Times reported on Tuesday.

Dawn, 17 January 2008

Militants overrun paramilitary fort: Militia suffers heavy casualty; 40 militants killed, claims ISPR

Hundreds of militants captured a paramilitary fort in South Waziristan on Tuesday night after killing 22 militiamen and taking several others hostage, credible sources told Dawn. The sources said that 600 to 700 militants attacked the fort in Sararogha, manned by the South Waziristan Scouts, at around 9pm on Tuesday, firing rockets and mortars. Thirty-eight paramilitary soldiers and six civilians, including cooks, barbers and orderlies, were in the fort when it came under the assault. "Soldiers put up a good fight, but couldn't hold out for long in the face of an overwhelming militant force," a source said.

Dawn, 17 January 2008

Nawaz calls for national govt, new EC

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif has demanded formation of a government of national consensus without President Pervez Musharraf and reconstitution of the Election Commission with Justice Rana Bhagwandas as its chief, to give credence to the electoral process. The Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) leader alleged at a press conference here on Wednesday that the caretaker government was an extension of the PML-Q. He said free and fair polls were not possible under the current chief election commissioner. He

said he would not object to a postponement of polls for a couple of weeks if his demands were met.

Dawn, 17 January 2008

Army claims success in Swat operation: Militancy almost wiped out

The army claimed on Wednesday success of the military operation it had launched in the Swat valley to eradicate armed militants. However, the militants' chieftain Maulana Fazlullah and some of his fighters were still holed up in a remote mountainous area and troops were hunting for them, Director-General Military Operations Maj-Gen Ahmad Shuja Pasha said at a press briefing here. He said the district administration was gaining confidence as the writ of the government had been established. He expressed the hope that peace and normal life would soon return to the valley once regarded as the best tourist resort in the country.

Dawn, 17 January 2008

US to play greater role in fighting terrorists

Increasing violence inside the country has forced Pakistan to seek greater US cooperation in fighting terrorists in the tribal region, a top US commander said on Wednesday. Admiral William J. Fallon, head of US Central Command, which covers the region that includes Pakistan, said the US military would now play a greater role in training Pakistani forces. The US military would also provide technical advice to Pakistani troops. Talking to reporters in Florida, Admiral Fallon said he believes the security situation in Pakistan has encouraged its leaders to be more receptive to a greater US role in the fight against terrorists.

Dawn, 17 January 2008

PPP letter seeks UN investigation commission

Pakistan People's Party co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari on Wednesday formally sent a letter to the United Nations Secretary General, urging the world body to set up an international commission for investigation into the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. According to Senator Farooq H. Naek, copies of the letter addressed to UN Secretary-General Ban Kimoon have been sent to five permanent members of the Security Council because the government refused to forward it to the world body as requested by the PPP. The letter requests the UN to "bring the perpetrators, organisers, financiers and sponsors of this reprehensible act of terrorism to justice".

Dawn, 18 January 2008

Teenage bomber wreaks havoc in Peshawar: 12 worshippers dead, 25 injured

At least 12 people were killed and 25 others injured, three of them critically, when a suicide bomber blew himself up in an imambargah here on Thursday. Police said that the teenage bomber carried out the carnage at the crowded Mirza Qasim Baig Imambargah in Mohalla Janghi, Kohati. "A young man barged in, fired three shots and blew himself up when some people tried to overpower him," said a witness. Witnesses said the bomber was wearing white shalwar and black shirt. "He pushed the security guards aside and rushed in," said another witness. "Immediately afterwards, we heard an explosion."

Dawn, 18 January 2008

Another Waziristan fort falls to militants

Over three dozen paramilitary soldiers are reported to have abandoned a fort in South Waziristan on Thursday before it was attacked by militants. Pakistan Tehrik-i-Taliban spokesman Maulvi Umar claimed that about 60 paramilitary soldiers had surrendered without putting up resistance. He said the militants had taken away weapons and hoisted a white flag at the compound. "The soldiers surrendered without firing a shot and, therefore, the Taliban Shoorra decided to set them free," Maulvi Umar told Dawn. Official sources said that the Siplatoi fort manned by about 40 personnel of the Frontier Corps (FC) was vacated on Wednesday night after reports were received that the militants were planning to attack it.

Dawn, 18 January 2008

US watching strategy to root out militants

A senior US official has said that the United States follows Pakistan's strategy for dealing with militants in the tribal area and will continue to do so as the situation develops. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told a briefing in Washington that in 2006, President Pervez Musharraf devised a strategy aimed at rooting out the militants in Waziristan and trying to integrate those regions into Pakistan. The strategy gave more freedom to tribal elders to deal with the militants, allowing them to make their own arrangements with the extremists if they agreed to give up militancy.

Dawn, 18 January 2008

US must change policy to stabilise Pakistan

The United States should work with China to develop a joint strategy for stabilising Pakistan, speakers told a US congressional panel. "The United States should consider engaging other states, such as China, that share many of US interests, albeit not all, and which has increasing influence in Pakistan's domestic affairs," said Lisa Curtis, a former CIA analyst and ex-senior State Department adviser on South Asia. Other speakers, including several lawmakers, also emphasised the need to develop a new approach that puts as much stress on building stable, free and moderate institutions as it does on fighting terrorists.

The News, 18 January 2008

Musharraf vows to defeat conspirators

President Pervez Musharraf on Thursday blamed internal and external elements for conspiring to destabilise the country but said the nation has the resilience to defeat all such elements. "We can surmount all difficulties, [but] we need to have confidence in ourselves and faith in our abilities and we have to defeat such elements," President Musharraf said at PTV's weekly interactive programme 'Aiwan-e-Sadr Sey' on the "Challenges confronting Pakistan and the way forward." He was commenting on the lawlessness following the Dec 27 assassination of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto that caused a loss of over Rs 100 billion to the nation.

The News, 18 January 2008

Shahbaz admits political dialogue with Brig Niaz

PML-N President Mian Shahbaz Sharif has confirmed that during his meeting with the trusted friend of President Pervez Musharraf, Brig (retd) Niaz, shortly before his arrival in Britain, both had discussed "important political matters" of Pakistan, but no secret message was delivered to him from the presidency. In an exclusive interview with The News after his arrival in London, Shahbaz said he had visited the residence of Brig Niaz, as he was not only their family friend but a well-wisher too. Explaining the nature of his meeting which triggered reports that perhaps once again Brig Niaz was out to bridge the gap between his common friends, the Sharif brothers and Musharraf, Shahbaz said he had visited his house to pay a courtesy call.

Dawn, 19 January 2008

Over 80 militants killed in clashes; army retakes fort: 22 paramilitary soldiers still missing

Army troops recaptured the Siplatoi fort in South Waziristan on Friday, a day after paramilitary soldiers had abandoned it, sources said. Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement that over 80 militants were killed in two separate clashes in the Mahsud area on Friday. In the first incident, militants attacked a convoy on the Jandola-Wana road in Chagmalai at 12.30pm. Troops returned fire and between 20 and 30 assailants were killed. Four security personnel were injured and two vehicles were damaged. Also on Friday, security forces attacked a large number of militants who had gathered to attack the Laddah fort and killed up to 60 of them, the ISPR said.

The Nation, 19 January 2008

Musharraf fears crisis after polls

President Pervez Musharraf has brushed aside speculations about the formation of a national government, at least, before the general elections to be held on February 18. The real political crisis could begin after holding of the general elections when the opposition, most probably, would not accept the results. He expressed this fear while briefing a group of editors of the national newspapers at the Presidential Camp Office, Rawalpindi. To a question about the formation of a national government, the President ruled out any such arrangement before the general elections. However, he said, a broad-based national consensus government could come into being if no single party gets a clear majority in the polls.

Dawn, 19 January 2008

CIA blames Baitullah and Al Qaeda: Assassination of Benazir

The CIA has concluded that members of Al Qaeda and allies of tribal leader Baitullah Mehsud were responsible for the Dec 27 assassination of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, the agency's director said. In a 45-minute interview to The Washington Post, Director CIA Michael V. Hayden also warned that Al Qaeda and its allies do not just want to destabilise the Musharraf government but they also want to harm the Pakistani state. "It is clear that their intention is to continue to try to do harm to the Pakistani state as it currently exists," he said. This is so far the most definitive public assessment of Ms Bhutto's murder by any US official which, Mr Hayden said, is based on CIA's own findings and not on the information forwarded by the Pakistani government.

The Nation, 19 January 2008

Al-Qaeda calls for fresh attacks

TWO major Al-Qaeda operatives in Pakistan's tribal areas near Afghanistan have called upon their followers to intensify their war against security forces and seize control of Islamabad, reports DPA. "Jihad is compulsory in Pakistan as it is compulsory in Afghanistan," Qadri Tahir Yaldeshiv, chief of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the chief of Uzbek militants in North Waziristan, was quoted as saying by Italian newswire Adnkronos International (AKI) Thursday. He also encouraged Muslims to avenge the army operation at the Red Mosque in July 2007 that led to the killing of more than 100 militants and hardcore students of an adjoining seminary.

Dawn, 20 January 2008

Boy, key suspect held in BB murder plot

A teenaged boy arrested on Friday told investigators he was the next in line to kill former prime minister Benazir Bhutto had the Dec 27 attempt failed, a security official told Dawn on Saturday. "He appears to be part of the group that had planned the assassination, but not directly involved in it," the official said in Peshawar. The 18-year-old Aitzaz Shah, a native of Battal, in Mansehra district, used to live and study in Karachi. Aitzaz, according to the security official, also told the interrogators that he had been recruited by a cleric in Karachi and was sent to South Waziristan to train as a suicide bomber. He said that he had trained in Makeen, South Waziristan, and knew about the group that had planned the assassination.

Dawn, 20 January 2008

Attempt to strike Karachi processions foiled: Suspected assailants held

Police on Saturday arrested five suspected terrorists who planned to mix cyanide with the water distributed at Sabeels (kiosks) during Ashura processions. The Sindh police chief, Azhar Ali Farooqi, told a press conference that the arrests, made in different parts of the city, had averted a big disaster. "But the threat of suicide attacks is still there," he added. The suspects were also making plans to carry out suicide attacks on the processions. He said three hand-grenades, six kilograms of explosives, six detonators, 500 grams of cyanide, a remote-control generator, a frequency generator, two kilograms of ball-bearings, one kilogram of nails and two TT pistols had been recovered from the suspects, one of whom was training to become a suicide bomber.

Dawn, 20 January 2008

Jets bomb Militant positions in Waziristan

Fighter planes on Saturday bombed several suspected militant locations and security forces claimed that they had found 10 bodies of assailants and captured 40 others in Chagmalai, South Waziristan, on Friday night. Local people said that PAF planes had dropped bombs on different positions in Laddah, Spika Raghzai, Gorogoray and Asman Manza, causing damages to a number of houses and infrastructure. Heavy artillery shelling was also reported in other areas of the troubled region. Officials claimed that an outpost of militants in Laddah was targeted. The building of a government degree college was also bombed in the same area. However, no casualty was reported.

Dawn, 20 January 2008

Troops claim gains in Swat

Security forces on Saturday took control of more strategic locations in upper Swat, pushing the militants to snow-capped mountainous areas of Kabal and Peuchar tehsils. Over 20 militants were arrested and explosives, ammunition, vehicles and Pakistani passports seized as the security forces resumed a search and cordon drive against the hardcore militants loyal to cleric Maulana Fazlullah in Loe Namal area on Saturday morning. However, there was no report of any casualty. Officials and residents said law-enforcement agencies personnel swept the area without any resistance as the militants had left before their arrival. Only 10 of the militants were apprehended by the troops.

Dawn, 20 January 2008

'Talks possible if free, fair polls ensured': Shahbaz discusses patch-up in UK

Contrary to the stance taken by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, his younger brother Shahbaz Sharif, has expressed qualified readiness to hold talks with President Pervez Musharraf provided he makes sure that the elections will be free and fair. "If Musharraf becomes neutral and promises to hold the polls in a free and fair manner, talks can be held with him," the Pakistan Muslim League-N president said in an interview broadcast by the BBC Urdu Service on Saturday. Mr Shahbaz has been in London since Jan 16 for a medical check-up while President Musharraf is also scheduled to reach there shortly.

Dawn, 20 January 2008

CIA has evidence of Al Qaeda hand: paper

The CIA chief's claim that Baitullah Mahsud directed the attack on former prime minister Benazir Bhutto is based on 'powerful' evidence the agency has collected, two major US newspapers reported on Saturday. The New York Times also reported that the Bush administration is currently considering proposals to step up covert actions against the Al Qaeda network in Pakistan's tribal region. The report identified Mahsud as "a militant tribal leader in hiding" and noted that he has ties to Al Qaeda as well.

The News, 21 January 2008

Pakistan nuclear assets are completely safe: Musharraf

President Pervez Musharraf has said Pakistan nuclear assets are completely safe under the most reliable control and command system, which is foolproof from every point of view. Addressing a gathering of Pakistani community here he said, "Pakistan nuclear assets are in safe hands and even any nuclear attack cannot destroy our nuclear assets." Musharraf vowed that the election would be democratic, and said the goal of his trip was "correcting perspectives" in Europe. "There will be free and transparent elections," he pledged at the meeting in a Brussels hotel, lauding what he said were improvements in the economy and security under his rule.

The Indian Express, 21 January 2008

Musharraf begins EU tour

President Pervez Musharraf has embarked on a four-nation European visit to bolster Pakistan's image amid a demand from Amnesty International that he take immediate measures to end human rights violations in Pakistan. Musharraf arrived on Sunday in

Brussels, capital city of Belgium and met members of the Pakistani community. His official programme starts on Monday as he is scheduled to visit Britain, France and Switzerland. "The eight-day visit to Brussels, Paris, London and Davos is a wholesome package, with focus on improving Pakistan's image and removing certain misperceptions," Musharraf said shortly before his departure from Islamabad on Sunday.

Dawn, 22 January 2008

Musharraf decries West's 'obsession' with democracy

Fielding tough questions on upcoming elections, curbs on media freedom and his failure to rein in religious militants, President Pervez Musharraf on Monday vowed to hold free and peaceful parliamentary polls next month but insisted that Western governments must understand Pakistan's difficult political environment and stop their 'obsession' with democracy and human rights in the country. In a 70-minute question and answer session with international reporters, think-tanks and Belgian business leaders, he said that Pakistan's nuclear assets were in safe military custody, that Pakistan would not allow foreign forces to enter its territory in pursuit of terrorists and that Pakistan army had Al Qaeda 'on the run'.

Dawn, 22 January 2008

Baitullah warns govt against entering his area

As troops continued their attacks on militants' positions in South Waziristan Agency, chief of the so-called Pakistan Tehreek-i-Taliban Baitullah Mehsud warned of serious repercussions if the military operations were not stopped. A man, who identified himself on telephone as Maulvi Umar and claimed to be Baitullah's spokesman, said: "The government wants to enter the Mehsud area by force. But it must take into account the consequences of such a harsh action." He accused security forces of 'killing innocent people' and 'damaging their homes' and warned that the government would have to 'pay a heavy price'.

Dawn, 22 January 2008

US mission was next on list: BB murder suspect

A boy said to be a would-be suicide bomber, who was arrested in Dera Ismail Khan on Friday for his involvement in the assassination of PPP chairperson Benazir Bhutto, told interrogators on Monday that his next target was the US Consulate in Karachi. Informed sources told Dawn that Aitzaz had confessed during preliminary interrogation that he had been asked to attack Ms Bhutto in Karachi in the event of her escaping the attack in Rawalpindi. But, after Ms Bhutto's assassination, Aitzaz had been directed to move to Karachi to target the US Consulate, the sources said.

The News, 22 January 2008

Musharraf cannot protect Pakistan, Zardari tells Rice

PPP Co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari has told US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that the ability of the Musharraf regime to secure and protect Pakistan is consistently eroding, notwithstanding the draconian powers accumulated under the garb of emergency, especially after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto and the recent spate of suicide bombings and violence across the country. In a three-page letter to Ms Rice, Zardari

expressed his fears that "the PPP is now concerned that without the strong and undivided attention of the international community, particularly of the US government, the now postponed elections will not be transparent, free and fair and will only be used to validate a regime that has lost all legitimacy."

Dawn, 22 January 2008

US helping Pakistan tackle extremism 'in its own way'

The United States is working to help Pakistan deal with extremism 'in its own way,' a top US diplomat for the region said here on Monday. US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard Boucher was responding to a question about reports that the United States could send troops into the Pakistan tribal belt bordering Afghanistan to root out extremists, including from Al Qaeda, based there. Pakistan has said any unauthorised military strike by international forces against Al Qaeda militants on its soil would be considered an 'enemy act' and tantamount to an invasion.

The News, 22 January 2008

Al-Qaeda threatens Pak stability: Pentagon

A top US military commander has underlined the need for greater cooperation with Pakistan in tackling al-Qaeda and Taliban militants in tribal areas, saying the 'threat challenges the stability of both Pakistan and Afghanistan'. "We want to cooperate very closely with the Pakistan military to try to help them to be even more successful, to build their capacity to deal with this; because it is a threat that challenges the stability in both Pakistan as well as in Afghanistan," Admiral William Fallon, the commander of the Central Command (Centcom) said. Maintaining that the writ of the government 'is pretty thin' in tribal areas, Admiral Fallon said it is difficult to make a differentiation between Pakistan and Afghanistan on the kind of overlap that exists in the restive area that has attracted al-Qaeda and Taliban militants.

Dawn, 23 January 2008

Militants launch fierce attacks in Waziristan

Five soldiers were killed and seven others were wounded when militants attacked an observation post and the Laddah fort in South Waziristan on Tuesday, the ISPR said. At least 37 militants were killed when the security forces repulsed the attack, Reuters quoted the army as saying. The military had said earlier that militants had suffered heavy casualties in the attack. It later said it had determined through communication intercepts and its own sources that 37 militants had been killed. Also on Tuesday, Baitullah Mehsud, the amir of the so-called Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan and head of the Mehsud militants, warned of attacking the headquarters of intelligence agencies and sensitive installations in Islamabad if the military did not stop the operation in Waziristan.

The Nation, 23 January 2008

Pakistan not a failed state, says President

President Pervez Musharraf on Tuesday won pledges of support from French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who called for free, transparent and safe elections next month in the nation hit by unrest. Musharraf met with Sarkozy on the second leg of a European tour aimed at shoring up his battered image after months of turmoil and the assassination of

opposition leader and former prime minister Benazir Bhutto last month. "France will continue to provide its full support in the fight against terrorism, because France and the world have an interest in stability, unity and democracy-building in Pakistan," said Elysee spokesman David Martinon.

Dawn, 23 January 2008

'Osama less of a threat than Taliban remnants'

President Pervez Musharraf said on Tuesday that it's more important to battle the remnants of Afghanistan's former Taliban militia than chase after top Al Qaeda leaders. That Osama bin Laden and his top deputy, Ayman al-Zawahri, are still at large "doesn't mean much," President Musharraf said in Paris while on an eight-day swing through Europe. He suggested that those men - wanted the world over and whom he hasn't been able to catch over the past six years - are less of a threat to his regime than the Taliban running roughshod over a part of his country.

Dawn, 23 January 2008

US not satisfied with quality of information about tribal areas

The Bush administration is not satisfied with the quality of information it is getting about terrorist groups operating in Pakistan's volatile tribal area, a senior US official said on Tuesday. Despite the shortcomings, the United States will not carry out military strikes on its own inside Pakistan unless President Pervez Musharraf's government requests direct support, said Dell Dailey, the State Department's counter-terror chief. "There are gaps in intelligence," Dailey said during a breakfast meeting with journalists. "We don't have enough information about what's going on there. Not on Al Qaeda. Not on foreign fighters. Not on the Taliban."

The News, 23 January 2008

Rice urges Musharraf to promote democracy

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said on Tuesday the Bush administration would fight efforts to curb billions of dollars in American aid to Pakistan but warned President Pervez Musharraf he must support and promote democracy. Before talks with Musharraf in Switzerland on Wednesday, the highest-level, face-to-face US contact with the Pakistani leader since last month's assassination of Benazir Bhutto, Rice said it was critical that February legislative elections be free and fair.

Dawn, 23 January 2008

Thaw with India not to hurt ties with Pakistan, says China

China assured Pakistan on Tuesday that its traditional friendship would not be hurt by warming ties with India. The assurance came in the wake of Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit earlier this month. Foreign ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu said improved ties with New Delhi were in the interests of the region. "China and India are both big developing countries. To improve relations and strengthen cooperation is in the interests of both countries and in the interests of regional stability, prosperity and development," she told a news conference. Closer cooperation, which included a first joint anti-terrorism exercise last month and bilateral trade that soared 56 per cent to \$38.6 billion last year, would not leave Pakistan out in the cold, Ms Jiang said.

Dawn, 24 January 2008

Troops advance with tanks for major assault: Clashes continue in S. Waziristan

The army sent reinforcements, for the first time with tanks, to the troubled South Waziristan tribal region on Wednesday after clashes between security forces and militants intensified in the Mehsud area. Official sources and local people said that the infantry, backed by tanks and heavy artillery, were seen heading towards the Spinkai Raghzai fort from a base in the adjoining Frontier Region of Jandola. Infantry units comprising 600 troops reached Spinkai Raghzai from Jandola amid fierce clashes. "For the first time the movement of battle tanks has been seen in the area," a security official said.

The News, 24 January 2008

Rice stands behind Musharraf

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called on President Musharraf here Wednesday afternoon and reiterated her country's support against terrorism and for complete democracy. During the meeting, Rice said President Musharraf has indeed taken some solid steps for rooting out the menace of terrorism and extremism and transition towards democratic set-up, diplomatic sources told APP. She expressed confidence that moderate political forces will emerge as a result of the forthcoming general elections. Rice also emphasised the need for more close cooperation between Pakistan and the US in fighting terrorism and maintaining economic progress.

Dawn, 24 January 2008

US senators urge steps for genuine democracy

A number of influential US senators have written a letter to President George Bush calling upon him to take certain immediate steps for promotion of legitimate democracy, reconciliation and stability in Pakistan. They stressed the need for a UN probe into the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, restoration of pre-Nov-3 judiciary and formation of a neutral election commission. According to a message received here, the senators said that the tragic assassination of the PPP chairperson and the ensuing crisis required the US to act quickly. They said that an international investigation into Ms Bhutto's vicious murder, in full cooperation with the authorities in Pakistan, was the best way to bring about reconciliation and win support of the people.

Dawn, 24 January 2008

Taliban, Al Qaeda now focused on Pakistan, says US general

A top US general warned on Wednesday that the Taliban and Al Qaeda militants have postponed their spring offensive in Afghanistan as they want to focus on their efforts to destabilise the Pakistani government. Major-General David Rodriguez, who commands US forces in eastern Afghanistan, said the militants' change of plan could already be seen in the areas bordering Pakistan where Taliban infiltrations have reduced significantly. "I don't think there'll be a big spring offensive this year," he said.

Dawn, 24 January 2008

Scotland Yard team 'free' to conduct full probe

Despite limited evidences, short investigation time and a mandate to determine only the cause of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's death, given to the Scotland Yard team, the government is reported to be trying to put the responsibility of complete investigation of the case on the British team. Now the government is giving an impression that the foreign experts who have returned to the UK with whatever evidences were available can investigate the case from all angles to unveil the persons involved in Ms Bhutto's murder. However, the earlier stance of the government was that the British experts could only determine the cause of her death.

The Nation, 24 January 2008

No deviation from Kashmir policy

Pakistan on Wednesday asked for the settlement of Kashmir dispute in accordance with the UN resolutions saying that President Pervez Musharraf's four-point proposal or other suggestions for "out of the box solutions" was not a shift in Islamabad's principled stance on the core issue. "Islamabad extends political, diplomatic and moral support to Kashmiri people and favours a solution to the core issue through the UN resolutions," said the Foreign Office Spokesman Mohammad Sadiq while addressing his weekly press briefing.

Dawn, 25 January 2008

Army says some areas cleared of militants: Clashes in S. Waziristan

The army has claimed wiping out militants from several pockets in the Mehsud area of the troubled South Waziristan tribal region and killing 40 militants in clashes since Wednesday. The Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement that troops had cleared Spinkai Raghzai, Nawazkot and the adjoining area of Tiarza and taken over some strongholds and hideouts of the militants. Forty militants were killed and 30 arrested, many of them injured, it said. However, militants' spokesman Maulvi Umar refuted the army's claims and said that 25 soldiers had been killed and 40 injured. He also claimed that 20 to 25 soldiers had been captured. He said only seven Taliban militants had been killed in the fighting.

The News, 25 January 2008

US willing for joint anti-Al-Qaeda action in Pakistan

The United States is "ready, willing and able" to conduct joint combat operations with Pakistani troops against insurgents in Pakistan if Islamabad agrees, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Thursday. Gates said he was not aware that Pakistan has requested additional US military assistance but said it was part of an ongoing dialogue. "First of all, we remain ready, willing and able to assist the Pakistanis and to partner with them to provide additional training, to conduct joint operations, should they desire to do so," he said.

The Nation, 25 January 2008

Bid to assassinate Nawaz foiled

The law enforcement agencies Thursday foiled an attempt to assassinate former prime minister Mian Nawaz Sharif by recovering a bomb planted under Malik Saad Shaheed flyover, just moments before his arrival, SSP Operations Syed Imtiaz Shah here told TheNation. The PML-N Leader was scheduled to pass the flyover to reach Peshawar

High Court for addressing Peshawar High Court Bar Association. The SSP said that the recovered bomb was locally made weighing 400 grams. Police have registered FIR and started investigation.

Dawn, 25 January 2008

US to enhance training for Pakistan troops

The United States plans to significantly expand its counter-insurgency training to Pakistani armed forces, US officials said. The plan includes providing new equipment to Pakistan for fighting militants in the tribal areas and elsewhere in the country. The plan is attributed to Admiral William Fallon, head of the US Central Command which covers the area that includes Pakistan. On Wednesday, a top US commander, Major-General David Rodriguez, warned that the Taliban and Al Qaeda militants are now focused on destabilising Pakistan and have postponed their spring offensive in Afghanistan. The Fallon plan for providing new training facilities and equipment to Pakistan is part of a five-year \$2 billion US defence aid package for Pakistan.

Dawn, 25 January 2008

Nisar hits out at Indian navy chief

Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Nisar A. Memon has said that India should close down its so-called information centres in Afghanistan because their involvement in acts of terrorism in Pakistan cannot be ruled out. Addressing a press conference during a brief visit to Quetta on Thursday, he said that terrorism had come into Pakistan through the Afghan channel and India had opened around a dozen information centres close to the Pakistani border without any justification. If India wanted to improve relations with Pakistan it should close down these so-called information centres, the minister said.

Dawn, 26 January 2008

Troops on the offensive in Darra, occupy militants' stronghold

Troops, backed by tanks and helicopter gunships, launched an operation in Darra Adamkhel on Friday after local militants refused to hand over army's four ammunition trucks they had seized on Wednesday. The militants are also holding hostage five Frontier Corps personnel they had kidnapped a fortnight ago. The operation was launched after failure of talks held with the help of a jirga for the retrieval of the trucks and release of the hostages. Also on Friday, the militants occupied the famous Kohat FC Fort.

Dawn, 26 January 2008

Foreign troops must not enter Pakistan, says Musharraf

President Pervez Musharraf kicked off his three-day visit to the UK here on Friday with an hour-long talk on "Vision for Pakistan and Regional Harmony" at a prestigious think tank as small groups of flag-waving and slogan-chanting people of Pakistani origin staged demonstrations against him outside and at the hotel where he and his entourage are staying. He said the man in the street in Pakistan would see any attempt by foreign troops to enter Pakistan to fight the terrorists as an attack on Pakistan's sovereignty. He said Pakistan would be happy to receive training for their troops by the Americans and even their intelligence help but not their physical intervention.

Dawn, 26 January 2008

US ready to 'partner with' Pakistan troops in Fata

The United States remains "ready, willing and able" to assist Pakistan and partner with the Pakistani armed forces as they take on Al Qaeda, says US Defence Secretary Robert M. Gates. Mr Gates and Admiral Michael G. Mullen, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, discussed the situation in Pakistan at a Pentagon news conference on Thursday, noting that the Pakistani government now understands the threat extremist groups in the tribal areas pose. "We remain ready, willing and able to assist the Pakistanis and to partner with them, to provide additional training, to conduct joint operations, should they desire to do so," said Mr Gates.

Dawn, 26 January 2008

President seeks more market access to be able to fight root causes of terrorism

President Pervez Musharraf said here on Friday that Pakistan was not going to disintegrate. "It is here to stay and stay as a vibrant force on the world spectrum," he told delegates of the World Economic Forum (WEF) at a breakfast meeting. He called upon European nations to provide greater market access to Pakistan in order to make it economically stronger and able to fight poverty and illiteracy which were root causes of terrorism and extremism. Mr Musharraf said Pakistan was facing multi-dimensional challenges due to the fallout of the Afghan war. Instead of leaving the country alone after a 'good job done' during the Afghan war, he said the West should have helped it to combat terrorism and extremism.

Dawn, 26 January 2008

PPP vows to form national govt after gaining majority

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has said it would form a national government with like-minded political forces, even if it won two-thirds majority in the parliament in the forthcoming general elections. Speaking at a seminar on "Political parties' manifesto for election 2008", organised by the Pakistan Liberal Forum, PPP Punjab secretary information Farzana Raja said it would be done to ensure collective efforts for the well-being of the people. She said there would be no room for the PML-Q and religious parties in the national government. Farzana Raja said elections were inevitable to steer the country out of the crisis and the government must not be provided any justification to further put off the polls.

Dawn, 27 January 2008

Troops close in on Darra after fierce clashes

Security forces killed 26 militants who had assembled near the Friendship Tunnel, on the Indus Highway, in a fresh offensive on Saturday morning, senior officials said. In two days of clashes, 59 militants and four soldiers have been killed, the officials said. Locals said that heavy artillery shelling and firepower from Cobra helicopters rocked the Darra, the largest illicit gun-manufacturing town in the region. The town is surrounded by three garrisons - Peshawar, Kohat and Cherat. It has become the hub of militants' activities for the past one-and-a-half years. Political Agent Kamran Zeb said the forces used a helicopter gunship to secure the tunnel.

Dawn, 27 January 2008

Jets bomb militants' positions in Waziristan

Jet fighters and ground forces bombed suspected locations of militants in Touda Cheena and other parts of the South Waziristan Agency on Saturday, killing one tribesman and wounding eight others, sources said. The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) claimed that troops had started the mopping up of militants' strongholds in Laddah. A statement said that security personnel had also cleared the Nawazkot area of militants. The security forces backed by helicopter gunships and tanks had launched an offensive in the Mehsud-dominated areas on Tuesday to purge the area of militants. Infantry units also took part in the operation.

Dawn, 27 January 2008

Security at nuclear facilities boosted

An official in charge of strategic weapons gave an unprecedented presentation to foreign media in Islamabad on Saturday to allay fears that nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of terrorists. The briefing by retired Lt-Gen Khalid Kidwai, director-general of the Strategic Planning Division (SPD), came hard on the heels of assertions by President Pervez Musharraf in Europe that such scenarios were impossible. "We have instituted command and control structures and security measures in a manner so as to make these foolproof," said Kidwai, who retired from the army in October but not from his position heading the SPD. "We are capable of thwarting all types of threats whether these are insider, outsider, or a combination."

Dawn, 27 January 2008

Musharraf assures Altaf of fair polls

President Pervez Musharraf reassured MQM chief Altaf Hussain here on Saturday that coming elections would be fair, free, transparent and peaceful. Mr Hussain called on the president at his hotel at around 12 noon and remained there for nearly two hours. He was accompanied by Imran Farooq and Mr Anwer. The president was aided by Gen Shafqat. The president further assured Mr Hussain that the government would be handed over to the majority party and if there was a hung parliament then a coalition government would be formed. He said the future prime minister would be the chief executive of the country.

Dawn, 28 January 2008

Security forces regain control of Kohat tunnel

Security forces took positions on hilltops around the town of Darra Adamkhel and the Friendship Tunnel on Sunday as 24 militants and five soldiers were killed in clashes. Sources said firing continued near the tunnel on Saturday night and several blasts were heard in the city. Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said security forces had cleared the area and regained control of the Kohat tunnel and adjoining areas after fierce fighting. The tunnel connects the southern parts of the province with Peshawar through the Indus Highway. The ISPR claimed that 24 militants had been killed and many others had fled leaving arms and ammunition.

Dawn, 28 January 2008

50 militants held in Swat

Fifty militants, including a local commander, were arrested during a military operation in Sambat, Bodigram and Matta areas of Upper Swat on Sunday. Officials and local people said that a Taliban commander, identified as Sher Mohammad Khan, and about 30 of the detained people were hardcore militants loyal to cleric Maulana Fazlullah and wanted by the authorities. According to the officials, the commander, a close aide of the cleric, was involved in attacks on security forces, government installations and several cases of killings. The Media Information Centre in Mingora said a large quantity of arms and ammunition, including detonators, Kalashnikovs, rifles, pistols, shotguns and live rounds had been seized.

The News, 28 January 2008

Pakistan rebuffs US plan for CIA build-up: NY Times

President Pervez Musharraf this month rebuffed US proposals to let the CIA have greater latitude to operate in tribal areas where al-Qaeda, the Taliban and other militant groups are active, The New York Times said in Sunday editions. The paper cited U.S. and Pakistani officials who spoke to the Times in recent weeks about US-Pakistani talks that included the two top U.S. intelligence officials, who travelled secretly to Pakistan. It said Pakistan and Washington were now discussing other joint efforts. These include increasing the number and scope of missions by armed Predator surveillance aircraft over tribal areas, and identifying ways that Washington can speed information to Pakistan about suspected militants, the Times said.

Dawn, 28 January 2008

Army to keep out of poll process, says ISPR

A spokesman for the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) has said that the conduct of elections in accordance with the Constitution is the sole responsibility of the Election Commission and the army will not be involved in the process. However, he said, the army would be available for maintaining law and order during the elections, along with other law-enforcement agencies. It may be mentioned that the army had been supervising elections in the past, but this time it appears it does not want to get involved in view of the political situation in the country.

The Nation, 28 January 2008

Musharraf, Zardari 'held meeting'

President Pervez Musharraf had held a detailed meeting with Co-Chairperson of Pakistan People's Party Asif Ali Zardari in recent past and reportedly sought unanimity of views on host of issues, the sources privy to the development disclosed to TheNation Sunday. However, spokesmen from both the sides denied the development and said that no such meeting had taken place. The sources further disclosed that the meeting was held in Karachi before President's recent visit abroad and both President Musharraf and Co-Chairperson of PPP Asif Ali Zardari discussed possibility of cooperation between the two sides in pre and post-elections.

Dawn, 29 January 2008

School hostage standoff ends; children freed: Gunmen given safe passage

Gunmen took over 60 schoolchildren and eight teachers hostage in a school on Monday but freed them unharmed after local elders prevailed upon police to provide safe passage to the hostage-takers and save the lives of the students and teachers. About eight militants, who had kidnapped a senior health official and his driver in Karak, took the children and teachers hostage in the high school of Walizar Kallay in the Domel area of Bannu. The militants released the kidnapped men and entered the school. They held the students and teachers at gunpoint to avert a police action. The six-hour standoff ended when the elders persuaded police officers to avoid an armed action and provide safe passage to the gunmen.

Dawn, 29 January 2008

Talks for new peace deal in N. Waziristan

Security forces have released seven tribesmen as a goodwill gesture amid reports that the government and militants are inching towards an agreement for restoring peace in North Waziristan. Officials said the tribesmen had been held under the collective tribal responsibility clause of the Frontier Crimes Regulations and they were not militants. Reciprocating the government's move, the militants extended till Feb 10 a ceasefire they had announced earlier and returned the weapons they had snatched during attacks on security forces, a tribal negotiator told Dawn on Monday.

Dawn, 29 January 2008

Troops regain control of FC fort in Swat

Security forces on Monday regained control of the Durshkhela fort in Matta's Bagh Dheri area which had fallen to militants loyal to cleric Maulana Fazlullah three months ago. The militants occupied the fort after over 100 besieged troops of the Frontier Constabulary (FC) had surrendered. The FC men were later released in groups. Despite the security forces' claim of controlling 99 per cent of the area, the tehsil of Matta with a population of over 800,000 remained tense. The tehsil headquarters hospital, basic health units, district courts, administration offices, public health department, water management, other offices of public importance and educational institutions remained closed.

Dawn, 29 January 2008

Tense calm prevails in Darra Adamkhel

Darra Adamkhel was calm but tense on Monday as security forces consolidated their positions on hilltops in the area. Militants who had occupied a Frontier Constabulary checkpoint in Kotal and parts of mountains near the Kohat tunnel escaped, leaving behind an anti-aircraft gun with live rounds and 30kg of explosives. Meanwhile, 70-member bomb disposal squad of the army cleared the two kilometre long tunnel with the help of metal detectors and 20 sniffer dogs. Despite success in the operation, authorities remained clueless about the four ammunition trucks which had been seized by militants on Wednesday, which was the major reason for launching the ongoing operation.

Dawn, 29 January 2008

Mass exodus as clashes continue in South Waziristan

A large number of people moved out of the conflict-hit areas of South Waziristan as fierce clashes between security forces and militants continued on Sunday night and

Monday, officials and local people said. The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that one soldier had been killed and nine others wounded in gun battles in various areas of the region. Helicopter gunships were also used. Information gathered from different sources indicated that hundreds of displaced families, mostly women, children and elders, were migrating to the adjacent Tank district and North Waziristan.

Dawn, 29 January 2008

Baitullah is on his own, say Afghan Taliban

The Taliban in Afghanistan have distanced themselves from Pakistani militants led by Baitullah Mehsud, saying they don't support any militant activity in Pakistan. "We do not support any militant activity and operation in Pakistan," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told Dawn on telephone from an undisclosed location on Monday. The spokesman denied media reports that the Taliban had expelled Baitullah Mehsud, the head of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan. "Baitullah is a Pakistani and we as the Afghan Taliban have nothing to do with his appointment or his expulsion. We did not appoint him and we have not expelled him," he said.

Dawn, 30 January 2008

Policemen and militants killed in fierce clash: Raid on hideout in Karachi's Shah Latif Town

Five people, two of them policemen, were killed and six others injured on Tuesday after a raid by the law enforcers on a house in Shah Latif Town turned into a fierce gun battle with militants. Police believed the militants belonged to Jandullah, a banned outfit. Officials confirmed the killing of two militants, but sources said three armed men were gunned down in two encounters in Landhi and Bin Qasim towns. "We have reports that there have been suspicious activities around the house and the police party raided after complete preparation," said Brigadier (Retd) Akhtar Zamin, the Sindh home minister, after arriving at the scene.

Dawn, 30 January 2008

12 die in Mirali missile attack

Twelve suspected militants were killed in a missile attack on a house in Mirali tehsil in the troubled North Waziristan tribal region on Monday night, officials and witnesses said. The missile hit a house in Khushali Torikhel village, about three kilometres off Mirali town. It landed in the guestrooms and killed the 12 people. Residents said the two guestrooms of the house were destroyed. Local tribesmen immediately took the bodies in possession and buried them. The attack caused anger among tribesmen and students staged a protest in Miramshah. They chanted slogans against the government and the United States.

Dawn, 30 January 2008

Darra largely cleared of militants; arms seized

Army and paramilitary troops, backed by tanks, patrolled the Darra Adamkhel town on Tuesday and seized arms and ammunition in different areas. Because of a curfew in the town, residents remained confined to their homes. The security forces claimed on Tuesday to have captured the hilltops around the town. They said that Sheraki area,

considered to be a stronghold of militants, was under curfew, although most of the local people had left the area for safe places. During a search operation, troops seized a truck with heavy weapons in Zarghunkhel area, and a large quantity of arms was found in bunkers vacated by the militants.

Dawn, 30 January 2008

Elections first, judiciary issue later, says US

A senior US official on Tuesday declined to support demands for the restoration of judiciary and a UN-led probe into the murder of PPP chairperson Benazir Bhutto. Appearing before a congressional panel, Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher made it obvious that the Bush administration still trusts President Pervez Musharraf but stopped short of calling him indispensable. Mr Boucher faced scores of grilling questions on the US refusal to endorse the demand for the restoration of the previous Supreme Court in Pakistan but avoided getting involved in the controversy. Mr Boucher said that Pakistan could deal with the dispute involving the judiciary after the elections as it's important to hold the elections first.

Dawn, 30 January 2008

Pakistan, UK agree to bolster defence ties

Pakistan and the United Kingdom agreed to forge closer cooperation in the war on terror at the ninth meeting of the Pak-UK Defence Cooperation Forum held here on Tuesday. The meeting was co-chaired by Defence Secretary Kamran Rasool and the British Under-secretary of Defence Bill Jaffrey. Mr Jaffrey stressed the need for developing a wide-ranging strategic relationship and said Pakistan and UK had shared interest of security and stability in the region and cooperation between the two sides needed to be increased. He appreciated the role played by the security forces of Pakistan in the war on terror. The Pakistan side dwelt on the steps taken for the socio-economic uplift of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

The Nation, 31 January 2008

13 soldiers killed in Darra clashes

The bodies of 13 personnel of the security forces were recovered from Kotal mountains, connecting the narrow tribal strip of Darra Adamkhel with Kohat on Wednesday. Though the officials at Darra Adamkhel announced the recovery of the bodies, sighted by some tribesmen, yet the NWFP Governor Owais Ghani on Tuesday last apprehended killing of all the 13 persons who, according to him, had been abducted from a communication tower. "Such people were having no links and association with the operation," the Governor remarked during a function at Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industries.

Dawn, 31 January 2008

Justice Iftikhar lashes out at Musharraf

Deposed Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry has written an open letter to world leaders, rejecting the allegations levelled by President Pervez Musharraf during his recent tour of Europe. "I've no other purpose than to clear my name and to save the country (and perhaps others as well) from the calamity that stares us in the face. We can still rescue (Pakistan) from all kinds of extremism: praetorian and

dogmatic," he said in the letter handed out to the media by advocate Athar Minallah at the Islamabad Bar Association on Wednesday.

Dawn, 31 January 2008

PML-N, PPP agree on joint strategy

The Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) and Pakistan Peoples Party on Wednesday criticised what they called misuse of government resources in the election campaign by PML-Q candidates in Sindh and Punjab and demanded an end to the measures being taken to steal the coming polls. The two parties expressed their views during a meeting between PML-N president Shahbaz Sharif and PPP co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari held here. Sources said that the two sides discussed the overall political and security situation in the country and US's support for President Pervez Musharraf, and agreed to work out a joint strategy to counter 'machinations' of the government. "The caretaker set-up is in fact an extension of the Musharraf regime," they said.

Dawn, 31 January 2008

Mehsud tribal jirga meets Maulana Fazl

A jirga of the Mehsud tribe met JUI-F leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman on Wednesday as part of efforts to contact politicians of the NWFP for ending the military operation in South Waziristan. "We are trying to contact all those who can help stop this genocide of the Mehsud people," former Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (F) legislator Maulana Mairajuddin told Dawn after meeting Maulana Fazl in Dera Ismail Khan. Maulana Mairaj, who was one of the leading figures who had brokered a peace agreement between the government and militant commander Baitullah Mehsud, said they planned to mobilise public opinion in favour of ending the military operation.

Dawn, 31 January 2008

Indian oil minister due in Feb to revive project

Indian Oil Minister Murli Deora is expected to visit Islamabad in early February to revive the multi-billion dollar gas pipeline deal, The Hindu newspaper said on Wednesday. In a related development, Iran has suggested Feb 12 or 13 as dates for holding talks with India and Pakistan in Tehran to settle the \$7 billion deal, the paper said. The Hindu quoted highly placed sources as saying that Pakistan's former Minister for Petroleum and Natural Resources Amanullah Khan Jadoon had invited Mr Deora to pay a visit for sorting out issues pertaining to the project during their meeting in London late last week.