

NEWS WRAP

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The assassination of Benazir Bhutto in Rawalpindi on 27 December 2007, was followed by four days of violent rioting, by Pakistan People's Party (PPP) sympathizers, in the southern province of Sindh, from where the Bhuttos hail. Benazir Bhutto was never an able administrator. She never passed any major legislation during her first twenty months (from 1988) of prime minister of Pakistan. During her two periods in power (till 1996), she never legislated on any of the liberal causes she supported in the Western media. There is an inter-connection between Pakistan's industrial, military and landowning classes. The poor are scarcely benefited. Bhuttos are feudal landowners. For the deprived in Pakistan, there is barely any justice, and the government education system is in a creaking state. As and when elections take place in Pakistan, the political leaders nominate their feudal friends and allies for the parliamentary seats. The landowners ensure that their peasants vote for the nominees. Elitist interests continue to thrive between military government and democracy. Elective feudalism drives the poor to the armed fundamentalists.

Similar to the opulence of the Shah of Iran in the 1970s, Benazir Bhutto's government was declared one of the most corrupt nations. She and her husband have been charged with money laundering, no less than \$1.5 billion through Swiss bank accounts. Rise of Islamist extremists in Pakistan has been accelerated by the corruption of the elite, and the failure of the government to ensure justice. Fighting westernized elite powers, the Islamists have assumed the mantle of champions of social justice. They have become a force to counter the landowners and their military brethren. They control a major partion of West Pakistan, and have an increasing share of the votes. Pakistan's nuclear stockpiles are believed to be stored in several aeas, with the nuclear cores kept separate from the detonators, needed to operationalize them. The different nuclear locations are guarded by about 10,000 elite troops. It is a matter of conjecture as to how long the nuclear arsenal could be safe guarded from suicide terrorists. According to the International Panel on Fissile Materials, Pakistan is the least stable nuclear state, possessing sufficient nuclear material for about sixty nuclear bombs.

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Electoral frauds and violence have accompanied elections in Africa, where incumbents generally win. Hundreds died in the elections of April '07 in Nigeria, which observers declared a fraudulent poll. The main opposition leader has been exiled in Congo, after the peaceful elections of October 06. More than 200 protestors died in Ethiopia, after the 2005 flawed elections. In the 27 December 06 parliamentary vote in Kenya, president Mwai Kibaki's ruling party was routed. Even then in the presidential vote, Mr Kibaki emerged victorious over the opposition candidate Mr Raila Odinga. Election monitors were turned away, and election irregularities occurring in the central provinces (the heartland of Kibaki's Kikuyu tribe) and Nyanza (stronghold of Odinga's Luo tribe). Following president Kibaki's swearing in, tribal violence has led to hundreds being killed, 80,000 displaced, and widespread gang rapes and mutilations. Electoral coup and

violence has been a surprise in Kenya, with a tradition of elections, political culture, free press, and a structured economy.

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Kandhamal district, in Orissa, has an area of 8,021 sq kms, with and fifteen police stations, a sanctioned strength of about 647 police personnel. As per 2001 Census, the district has a population of 648,201. Following an attack on a local Hindu religious leader, Swami Laxmananda Saraswati, by alleged Christian tribal groups on 24 December 07 in Daringbadi block. Kandhamal district witnessed severe riots, in which Christian families suffered the most. About 800 houses have been damaged in the violence; and 580 families, including 336 families belonging to "Below the poverty line" affected. On Christmas Day, Khage Mallick of Barakhamba was killed, and over a dozen churches burned. The majority community tried to stop the minority Christians from Mass prayers on Christmas in Churches. A few temples in Jalespata, Baliguda and Tumudibandha have also been vandalized. Scheduled tribes comprise 3.36 lacs of 51.96 percent, of Kandhamal's 6.48 lac population; while scheduled castes comprise 1.05 lacs or 16.89 percent.

Though rich in graphite, manga-nese, bauxite and coal deposits, there is scarcely any industrial investment in Kandhamal. As per the Orissa Human Development Report of 2004, the per capita income of the district is Rs 4,743 per annum, against the Orissa state average of Rs 5,264. Religious conversions and foreign funds have been causes for strife for long. Christian leaders allege that the Orissa Freedom of Religious Act (OFRA), which distinguishes between legal and illegal conversions, is being used selectively to promote re-conversion of Christians into Hindus. Orissa has a history of violence on Christians. Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons were burnt alive in a jeep at Manoharpur in Keonjhar district, by Hindu activist Ravinder alias Dara Singh and his associates. In July 99, Father Arul Doss was murdered in Jamabani, village, by Dara Singh. Two members of the Missioneries of Charity were attacked. A church in Deogarh district was attacked and a nun assaulted in 2003 in Deogarh district. In May 2004, seven Christian Women in Killipala Village of Jagatsinghpur district, were forcibly tonsured. During an attack on a Church in Raikia town of Kandhamal district in August 04, a Bible was burnt and a statue of Virgin Mary smashed. □□□