

SIMUN VII

PNA STUDY GUIDE

Introduction to the Committee

The National Assembly of Pakistan stands at the heart of the country's democratic system — a place where the voices, struggles, and hopes of millions of Pakistanis come together. Created under the 1973 Constitution, it serves as the lower house of Parliament and represents the people's mandate across every province, city, and community. Each elected member carries not only political responsibility but also the immense weight of public trust, tasked with shaping laws, guiding the nation's direction, and holding those in power accountable. More than just a legislative body, the National Assembly has always been a symbol of Pakistan's resilience.

Through decades marked by political instability, martial law, and constitutional crises, it has remained a forum for debate, dissent, and democratic expression. Its chambers have witnessed passionate speeches, fierce arguments, and moments of unity that have defined Pakistan's political journey. In 2007, this Assembly found itself in one of the most critical moments in the nation's history. The assassination of Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan's first female Prime Minister and a symbol of democratic struggle, has shaken the country to its core. The Assembly must now act not only as lawmakers but as guardians of national stability — to seek justice, restore public trust, and prevent the collapse of democracy. Within this committee, delegates will stand in the shoes of those very leaders, facing the same impossible questions: how to protect Pakistan, preserve peace, and honour the ideals for which Bhutto gave her life.

Agenda: The Situation in Pakistan (2007): Investigating the Assassination of Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and Its Implications for International Peace and Security.

Introduction to the Topic

After the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan became a key U.S. ally in the War on Terror, a partnership that intensified internal divisions. Many Pakistanis viewed Musharraf's pro-Western policies and military crackdowns as betrayals of national sovereignty. By 2007, political unrest, economic hardship, and religious extremism had combined to push the country towards a crisis. Musharraf's suspension of the Chief Justice and imposition of a state of emergency in November 2007 further alienated the public and united opposition forces against him. Amid this turmoil, Benazir Bhutto decided to return to Pakistan after nearly eight years in exile. Her return, facilitated by the National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) — a deal between Musharraf and the opposition which intended to pave the way for elections and the restoration of democracy. Her arrival in Karachi on 18 October 2007 was met by jubilant crowds of supporters, but celebration quickly turned to horror when a suicide bombing targeted her convoy, killing more than 130 people. Bhutto survived, yet she publicly stated that she had been warned of threats from extremist networks and elements within Pakistan's security agencies. She even sent a letter to Musharraf, naming individuals she believed might plot against her.

Despite these dangers, Bhutto pressed ahead with her campaign. Her mission to defeat extremism, end military dominance, and rebuild democratic institutions, resonated across Pakistan but also made her a target for multiple enemies. On 27 December 2007, after addressing a rally in Liaquat Bagh, Rawalpindi, Bhutto stood through her car's sunroof to wave at supporters. Moments later, shots were fired, followed by a suicide explosion that ended her life and that of over twenty others. The assassination plunged the nation into mourning and chaos. The crime scene was washed down within hours, destroying key forensic evidence. Public suspicion turned toward the government, the ISI, and militant organizations. Musharraf's administration blamed the Pakistani Taliban, claiming that Baitullah Mehsud, a militant commander in South Waziristan, orchestrated the attack. The United Nations Commission of Inquiry, established in 2009, later concluded that the government had failed to provide adequate security, the police deliberately mishandled the investigation, and evidence was systematically destroyed.

Historical Context

The assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on 27 December 2007 was not an isolated tragedy but the culmination of decades of political instability, military dominance, and ideological conflict that had shaped Pakistan since independence.

Since 1947, Pakistan's political history has been marked by an uneasy struggle between civilian democracy and military rule. Frequent coups in 1958, 1977, and 1999 undermined democratic institutions and concentrated power in the hands of the armed forces. Civilian governments, even when elected, often ruled under the shadow of military influence. Against this turbulent backdrop, Benazir Bhutto emerged as a symbol of democratic resistance. The daughter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Pakistan's first elected Prime Minister and founder of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), she inherited both her father's populist legacy and his political enemies. Educated at Harvard and Oxford, Bhutto represented modernity and reform in a country still struggling with patriarchal traditions and religious conservatism.

Bhutto's term as Prime Minister (1988 to 1990) and again (1993 to 1996), were groundbreaking but fraught with challenges. She faced intense political opposition, accusations of corruption, and persistent interference from the military and intelligence establishment. Both her governments were dismissed before completing their terms. In 1999, General Pervez Musharraf overthrew Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in a coup, turning Pakistan once again to military rule. Facing corruption charges, Bhutto went into self-imposed exile, during which she campaigned internationally for democracy and civilian governance.

Initial Investigations

As investigations unfolded, five alleged militants; Rafaqat Hussain, Hasnain Gul, Sher Zaman, Aitzaz Shah, and Abdul Rashid were arrested in 2008 for allegedly aiding the suicide bomber, a teenage recruit linked to the Taliban. They were accused of planning logistics and destroying evidence. However, after years of trial delays and weak prosecution, All five were acquitted in 2017 by an anti-terrorism court due to insufficient evidence. Two senior police officials, Sahibzada Muhammad Chaudhry and Khilat Faiz Rasool, were convicted of negligence for hosing down the crime scene but later released on bail. Meanwhile, Pervez Musharraf himself was charged in 2013 with murder and conspiracy to facilitate Bhutto's assassination. Musharraf denied all charges, claiming the case was politically motivated. He was declared a fugitive in 2017 after leaving Pakistan for medical treatment in Dubai and never returned. He died in exile in 2023 without facing trial. To this day, no one has been definitively convicted of Bhutto's murder. The alleged gunman, identified as Bilal alias Saeed, died instantly in the blast, and investigators claim that the attack was coordinated by Taliban militants under Baitullah Mehsud, who was later killed in a U.S. drone strike in 2009. The failure to bring the masterminds to justice continues to haunt Pakistan's political conscience.

Current Situation (Immediate Aftermath — 2007)

The aftermath of Benazir Bhutto's assassination was one of grief, anger, and utter chaos. The moment the news broke on 27 December 2007, a wave of shock swept across Pakistan and beyond. Her death felt deeply personal to many Pakistanis, especially women, who saw in her the possibility of a more progressive and inclusive future. Within hours, sorrow turned into rage. Cities across Pakistan, particularly in Sindh, Bhutto's home province, descended into turmoil. Streets that had just days earlier echoed with chants of "Jeay Bhutto!" ("Long live Bhutto!") were now filled with smoke and flames. Angry crowds took to the streets, smashing vehicles, burning buses, and attacking railway stations and government buildings. The railway system was crippled, hundreds of shops were looted, and major highways were blocked. Karachi, Hyderabad, and Larkana — her political heartlands, witnessed some of the worst violence in decades. For several days, daily life across the country came to a complete standstill. Schools and businesses closed, fuel stations ran dry, and communication networks broke down.

The government's response only deepened the public's anger. Officials hastily announced that Bhutto had not been shot, claiming instead that she had died after hitting her head on her car's sunroof during the blast. This explanation, given without forensic evidence, was immediately met with disbelief and outrage. Within hours of the attack, the crime scene at Liaquat Bagh was hosed down, washing away vital forensic clues, a move that many saw as a deliberate cover-up. The lack of transparency and the government's contradictory statements fueled widespread suspicion. Many Pakistanis accused President Pervez Musharraf's administration and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of negligence or even complicity. Rumors and conspiracy theories spread rapidly; some blamed Islamist militants, while others believed Bhutto had been silenced for challenging the military establishment. The confusion and mistrust only deepened Pakistan's political crisis.

The international community reacted swiftly. Leaders from across the world, including those from the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union, condemned the assassination and called for calm. The United Nations expressed grave concern, emphasizing that Bhutto's death could destabilize not just Pakistan but the broader region. Under growing international pressure, the UN launched an independent inquiry in 2009, which concluded that the government's security arrangements for Bhutto had been "fatally insufficient" and that the police had "deliberately failed" to conduct a proper investigation. In the days that followed, Pakistan grieved together. Bhutto was laid to rest beside her father in the Bhutto family mausoleum in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh, where tens of thousands of mourners gathered, many weeping openly. Even years later, the scars of that day remain etched into Pakistan's collective memory. Bhutto's assassination marked the end of an era and the beginning of a long struggle for truth, justice, and reconciliation in a country still haunted by the ghosts of its political past.

Impacts of Bhutto's Death

Bhutto's assassination had far-reaching consequences for Pakistan and beyond, shaking the very foundations of the nation's political, social, and economic fabric. Domestically, the tragedy deepened the already widening cracks within Pakistan's political landscape. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP), devastated yet determined, was thrust into the spotlight as the torchbearer of Bhutto's legacy, while rival parties such as the Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N) accused the Musharraf government of gross negligence and demanded accountability. Political polarization reached new extremes, and mistrust between civilian politicians and the military establishment intensified. The general elections scheduled for January 2008 were postponed, as the nation struggled to recover from the shock and chaos that followed Bhutto's death. This delay further fueled uncertainty and fear of political manipulation.

Economically, the repercussions were immediate and devastating. Riots and violence paralyzed the country for days, leading to billions of rupees in damages. Businesses shut down, public transportation halted, and critical infrastructure was destroyed. The Karachi Stock Exchange, once a symbol of Pakistan's growing potential, plunged sharply in the days following the assassination. Investor confidence evaporated, foreign investment froze, and inflation soared. For ordinary citizens, life became harder: fuel shortages, rising food prices, and widespread job insecurity added to the nation's despair.

But beyond the economy and politics, perhaps the most profound damage was to public trust. For many Pakistanis, the state's failure to protect its most prominent political leader and its subsequent mishandling of the investigation, proved that their institutions were deeply broken. The quick washing of the crime scene, conflicting official statements, and the absence of accountability deepened cynicism toward the government, police, and intelligence agencies.

World leaders expressed outrage and sorrow, recognizing the global implications of the attack. Pakistan was, at the time, a key ally of the United States in the War on Terror, and Bhutto had been seen by many Western governments as a moderate, democratic force capable of countering extremism. Her death raised alarming questions about Pakistan's stability, its control over nuclear assets, and the growing influence of militant groups such as the Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

Extremist factions, emboldened by the chaos, sought to exploit the political vacuum. Their attacks grew bolder, and parts of Pakistan's northwest region descended further into violence. The assassination marked a turning point in Pakistan's fight against terrorism an event that exposed how deeply extremism had penetrated the nation's security structure and society.

For millions of Pakistanis, Bhutto's assassination was more than a political event; it was a personal heartbreak. It symbolized the fragility of democracy in a nation still grappling with military dominance, corruption, and extremism. Yet amid the grief, it also reignited the demand for justice and reform. The tragedy became a rallying cry for democracy, pushing Pakistanis to question, once again, who truly governs their country.

Key Stakeholders/Actors

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) – Benazir and Bilawal Bhutto

Benazir Bhutto's assassination deeply affected the PPP by turning her into a martyr for democracy, energizing the party's supporters while also challenging its leadership transition. Her death intensified the party's commitment to democratic values and social justice under Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's leadership. However, the loss created instability within the party and a gap in charismatic leadership, influencing Pakistan's broader political landscape by rallying pro-democracy forces and intensifying rivalries.

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) – Nawaz Sharif

Nawaz Sharif's PML-N faced a politically charged environment after Bhutto's death, with the event underscoring the risks and volatility of Pakistan's politics. The tragedy ultimately allowed PML-N to present itself as a stabilizing force promoting economic recovery and democratic governance. In this period, Nawaz expanded his political influence while trying to appeal to voters seeking continuity and order amid turbulence.

President Musharraf & Military Government – Pervez Musharraf

Benazir Bhutto's assassination critically undermined President Musharraf's military-led government, as it was accused of failing to protect a key political leader and faced allegations of complicity or negligence. The assassination accelerated calls for Musharraf's stepping down and a return to civilian rule, exposing governance weaknesses and diminishing the military's political legitimacy.

Pakistan Army & ISI

The military and intelligence agencies were heavily scrutinized for their role in security failings before Bhutto's killing. This crisis strained civil-military relations, damaged public trust in the army's political role, and intensified debates regarding transparency and accountability. The event challenged the military to recalibrate its involvement in politics under increased public and judicial scrutiny.

Extremist Groups (Taliban, Al-Qaeda)

Extremist groups were emboldened by Bhutto's assassination, viewing it as a blow to moderates opposing their ideology. Though direct involvement remains contested, the tragedy highlighted militants' capacity to destabilize Pakistan and disrupt national governance. This surge in extremist activity fueled further violence and complicated the country's security situation.

Questions a Resolution Must Answer (QARMA)

1. Who should investigate Benazir Bhutto's assassination, Pakistan's own authorities, or an international commission?
2. How can Pakistan pursue justice without allowing the situation to spiral into more political conflict?
3. What steps can be taken to strengthen the country's democratic institutions and prevent similar tragedies in the future?
4. How should Parliament address suspicions surrounding the military and intelligence agencies while maintaining stability?
5. And finally, how can Pakistan balance its sovereignty with the need for international credibility in such a sensitive case?