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*From the Los Angeles Times*

## **Bhutto supporters swell protests in Pakistan**

Her loyalists clash with police. Bush tells Musharraf to hold elections and quit the army.

By Laura King

Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

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ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN — Amid screams, scuffles and clouds of tear gas, riot police on Wednesday beat and drove back supporters of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, as opposition to President Pervez Musharraf's declaration of emergency rule spread from a vanguard of outraged lawyers to a broader base of dissent.

The confrontation outside the Pakistani parliament, in the heart of Islamabad, was some of the worst violence to hit the capital since the state of emergency went into effect Saturday night. It could presage larger-scale clashes if Bhutto and other political leaders bring their supporters into the streets and are met with force by government police and troops.

Inside parliament, pro-Musharraf lawmakers voted to endorse the army general's emergency decree.

The melee, alongside public comments by Bhutto, offered a look at what appears to be a high-stakes strategy on her part to try to pressure Musharraf into rolling back authoritarian measures and allowing the two to resume power-sharing negotiations.

"How many people can they put behind bars?" Bhutto asked, speaking at a news conference at her party headquarters. "We will produce so many that they will not have enough jails."

Spokesman Jamil Soomro said this morning that 800 party members had been arrested overnight in Punjab province.

In Washington, President Bush said he called Musharraf for the first time since emergency measures were imposed. Speaking to reporters after a meeting with French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Bush said his message to the Pakistani leader was "very plain, very easy to understand, and that is the United States wants you to have the elections as scheduled and take your uniform off."

He did not say how Musharraf, who seized power in 1999 in an army coup, responded.

Sarkozy endorsed Bush's call for elections in Pakistan, saying: "Let me remind you that this is a country of 150 million inhabitants who happen to have nuclear weapons. This is very important for us that one day we shouldn't wake up with a government, an

administration in Pakistan which is in the hands of the extremists."

Until Wednesday, most demonstrations against the emergency decree had been organized by lawyers, who are furious with Musharraf for ousting most of the nation's senior judges, including the chief justice. Hundreds of barristers were arrested in protests on Monday and Tuesday; by Wednesday those demonstrations had tapered off.

The lawyers had taken a new tack: boycotting all court proceedings. Courtrooms across the country were nearly empty Wednesday.

Despite government warnings that no big marches would be allowed, Bhutto pressed ahead with a call for a mass protest Friday in the city of Rawalpindi, near the capital -- not coincidentally, the headquarters of the army and the seat of Musharraf's power.

"I request my brothers and sisters to reach Rawalpindi at all costs," Bhutto, 54, told reporters.

The former leader also announced plans for what she called a "long march," a procession by road next week from the eastern city of Lahore to Islamabad.

That trip normally takes about five hours by car, but Bhutto clearly envisioned a slow procession with large crowds lining the route.

Such a scenario would be uneasily reminiscent of her homecoming cavalcade in the southern port city of Karachi on Oct. 18, in which more than 200,000 people turned out to greet her. More than 140 people were killed when a suicide bomber struck the crowded parade route just after midnight.

Even while painting a picture of potentially chaotic and dangerous events, Bhutto left open the door to talks with Musharraf if he rolled back emergency rule.

She has demanded that he restore the constitution, release political prisoners, hold parliamentary elections by early next year as scheduled and lift curbs on the media.

"I think we should all come down as strongly as we can for the restoration of democracy," she said. "And if Gen. Musharraf wants to find a way out, well, the ball is in his court."

In the clash in Islamabad, dozens of Bhutto supporters, many of them women, tried to breach a police barricade in front of the parliament, which like most government installations has been cordoned off and is guarded by paramilitary troops and police.

At least half a dozen of the demonstrators were dragged away, and several were beaten and left bloodied. "Benazir, Benazir!" they chanted.

"It's martial law; what did you expect?" said Sherry Rehman, a close aide to Bhutto,

whose eyes were streaming from tear gas.

One female protester in her 50s who said she was a schoolteacher was nearly knocked off her feet by charging police. Eyeglasses askew, tripping over the scarf that had come loose from her shoulders, she shouted at them: "Shame on you!"

The demonstrators eventually withdrew.

Even before Musharraf's crackdown, Bhutto risked alienating some of her supporters by holding power-sharing talks with a man she had long called a dictator. But she defended the negotiations as the best way to ensure a peaceful transition to civilian rule.

At the time of the emergency declaration, the two had not clinched a deal, but several important elements were in place.

Musharraf last month signed a measure into law granting Bhutto amnesty against corruption charges dating to her two terms as prime minister in the late 1980s and 1990s. And she hoped to win his party's backing to rewrite the constitution to allow her to serve a third term as prime minister -- an amendment that would require two-thirds support in parliament.

The general, for his part, had promised to relinquish his military post before being inaugurated Nov. 15 for another term as president, provided the Supreme Court did not invalidate his Oct. 6 election by national and provincial lawmakers.

The high court appeared poised to do just that, reportedly triggering Musharraf's decision to impose emergency rule.

The emergency declaration was a blow to the Bush administration, which had hoped that Musharraf and Bhutto would be able to strike a deal. Bhutto met Wednesday with the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan, Anne W. Patterson, who also has urged Musharraf to hold elections and give up his military post.

Critics have accused Bush of soft-pedaling his opposition to the crackdown because of Pakistan's central role in U.S. efforts to counter Al Qaeda and the Taliban. They have compared the administration's muted response with its swift condemnation of the Myanmar junta last month for its crackdown on democracy activists.

In Washington, Deputy Secretary of State John D. Negroponte praised Bhutto, saying the former prime minister could "play an important role in the political future" of Pakistan.

"We have encouraged over time, in recent months, the dialogue between the government and Ms. Bhutto," Negroponte told the House Foreign Affairs Committee. "We also remain in close contact with her . . . and needless to say, we stay in touch with the government."

In addition to Bhutto's party, the party of another former prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, has vowed to mobilize protests. But the two longtime rivals are not working in concert; instead, they are quarreling over Bhutto's relations with Musharraf.

Sharif's associates refused to attend a meeting of opposition leaders in Islamabad, for which Bhutto had traveled from her home base of Karachi.

Sharif was deported in September when he tried to return to Pakistan, and his party has said Bhutto must clearly renounce future power-sharing talks with Musharraf before it will have any dealings with her.

Musharraf has told Western officials he will hold free elections and step down as military chief, but has not said when.

His aides said they believed the emergency measures would be lifted soon. "I'm sure it will end in two or three weeks," Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, the head of the ruling party, said in an interview in Wednesday's editions of the Dawn newspaper.

Opponents said they did not believe Musharraf intended to restore fundamental liberties anytime soon.

[laura.king@latimes.com](mailto:laura.king@latimes.com)

Special correspondent Mubashir Zaidi in Islamabad and Times staff writers Henry Chu in Lahore and Maura Reynolds in Washington contributed to this report.