

## Pakistan seeks Saarc help in Bhutto killing probe

Pakistan Thursday sought the cooperation of other South Asian governments in investigating the killing of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto late last year.

'Member states of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) are requested to share any information that can contribute to the probe,' said Rehman Malik, the adviser to incumbent Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani.

The appeal was made at the maiden conference of police chiefs from Saarc countries held in Islamabad to discuss joint initiatives to counter terrorism and other trans-national crimes like drug trafficking.

Malik said Minister for Law and Justice Farooq Naik was working on the formalities to ask for a UN commission to investigate the death of Bhutto in a gun-and-bomb attack in the garrison town of Rawalpindi Dec 27.

The new Pakistani parliament, which is dominated by Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Monday adopted a resolution asking the government to request a UN probe into the attack that also killed at least 20 other people.

Prior to forming a coalition government after winning the Feb 18 election, the PPP had demanded a UN investigation but President Pervez Musharraf refused to contact the world body and instead invited British investigators to aid local authorities.

But the mandate of the Scotland Yard team was limited to reporting on the cause of Bhutto's death, as the then government said the two-time premier died of skull fracture while her party claimed that she was shot.

Scotland Yard concluded that the PPP leader was killed by a severe injury she suffered when her head slammed into her armoured vehicle as a result of the suicide bomb blast, thus supporting the government's version.

Rehman said all investigation reports on Bhutto's assassination were being consolidated to identify the elements behind the incident. Earlier, Baitullah Mehsud, a pro-Taliban militant commander in Pakistan's tribal district of Waziristan, was blamed for masterminding the attack.

According to Rehman, insurgency is plaguing the region where poverty-stricken people are exploited by 'a small group that has made us (South Asia) hostage'.

'We need to eliminate poverty from our country and for this law enforcement and rule of law is very important,' he observed.

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