

Bhutto's accounts de-frozen for deal with Musharraf: reports

The Pakistani government has reactivated some of the bank accounts of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto as a confidence-building measure for a possible deal between her and embattled President Pervez Musharraf, media reports said Monday.

Once bitter foes, the two leaders reportedly held secret talks in Abu Dhabi on Friday to discuss an accord that could ensure the survival of Musharraf in the most serious challenge he faces since he took over in a military coupe in 1999.

Both sides have so far not confirmed the meeting, but local media has consistently cited sources saying it really took place.

Around half of Bhutto's bank accounts frozen under the Musharraf government in connection with investigations into her alleged corruption as premier were reactivated days before the talks, Geo news channel said.

The meeting came at a time when Musharraf's authority had suffered a serious blow owing to the surge in Islamic militancy in the aftermath of the Red Mosque security operation in which 100 people were killed. Islamic militants retaliated with a series of suicide bombings, killing more than 200 people.

His standing was further weakened earlier this month when the rebellious judiciary reinstated the independent-minded top judge Iftikhar Chaudhry he had suspended in a bid to remove a judicial obstacle to his controversial re-election from the existing parliament.

There have also been reports of the growing dissent within the military. The newspaper Daily News claimed last week that Musharraf's top military aides advised him after the restoration of Chaudhry that he should seek 'honourable exit'.

The analysts say in the backdrop of these difficulties Musharraf had no choice but to beg his survival from Bhutto, who chairs the most popular Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP).

Under the possible agreement, the PPP would not resist the president's re-election from the current parliament, while the government would allow Bhutto to contest the next elections by dropping corruption charges against her.

Rest half of Bhutto's bank accounts have been kept frozen just to ensure that she does not backtrack on the deal, Geo reported.

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