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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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Pakistan: Government Likely to Win Local Bodies Elections [Redacted]

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Summary

Municipal and local elections scheduled in Pakistan for 30 November will be the first test of Prime Minister Junejo and his Pakistan Muslim League's (PML) popularity. The elections officially are nonpartisan, but they will directly pit PML against its strongest opponent, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Junejo has sought to throw the PPP off balance by establishing a very short election period that he hopes will limit the PPP's ability to organize. The Prime Minister also calculates that restrictions on party support for candidates will work against the PPP. [Redacted]

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The Prime Minister's gamble will succeed, we judge. The PPP probably holds the upper hand in Sind Province and could do well in the North West Frontier Province, but the election will be decided by results in Punjab Province where most Pakistanis live. The PPP has been badly undercut in Punjab by defections, internal fighting, and poor organization. If the PPP does win the elections, its victory would be a serious but not fatal embarrassment for Junejo. [Redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [Redacted] Pakistan/Bangladesh Branch, South Asia Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Information as of 19 November was used in its preparation. Comments and queries should be directed to Chief, South Asia Division [Redacted]

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In Pakistan's local bodies elections, held every four years, voters elect officials to district (subprovincial), township (subdistrict), and municipal governments. These local government bodies have significant influence because they disburse federal and provincial development funds. They have little authority to raise revenues, however, rendering them subject to the influence of the federal and provincial legislatures as well as to the civil service bureaucracy. Because Pakistani law permits individuals to concurrently hold a local office and a provincial or national assembly seat, the local bodies elections will also serve as an indirect referendum on many provincial and national leaders. The government is not required to hold provincial and national assembly elections before 1990.

All observers agree that the elections will attract large numbers of candidates. One independent provincial assembly member offered a convincing rationale to US diplomats in Karachi; local office is a lucrative position, and there will not be another election soon.

The election shapes up to be a test of strength between the ruling Pakistan Muslim League (PML) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Both are making a major national commitment.

Parties as diverse as the pro-Soviet Awami National Party--not officially participating but encouraging party members to run, according to its Sind Chief--and the conservative religious Jamaat-i-Islami will also assist candidates. They must act circumspectly as candidates who are identifiably supported by a political party can be disqualified. Not all parties are participating. Ghulam Mustapha Jatoi, leader of the moderate National People's Party, has announced his party will not back candidates but will not stand in the way of those who

wish to run. The Movement for the Restoration of Democracy--an umbrella group of opposition parties--has taken no official position on the elections. Several of its minor parties, whose prospects we judge would be poor in any event, have denounced the elections as rigged in favor of the Muslim League.

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The Mechanics: Stacking the Deck for the PML

US diplomatic reporting suggests that the ground rules for the elections have been shaped to favor incumbents, most of whom are members of the PML. Prime Minister Juncjo has sought to throw the PPP off balance by establishing a short election period that he hopes will limit the PPP's ability to organize. Although he repeatedly vowed to hold elections in 1987, the actual 30 November balloting date was announced only at the end of October in most provinces and in early November in Sind, the PPP stronghold.

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The Provincial Chief Ministers, who head the PML in each province, have been empowered to set the rules; those announced for Sind Province are typical. Consistent with previous local elections, the candidates will run on a nonpartisan basis; the use of political party names, flags, symbols, or political platforms is forbidden. Party rallies have been prohibited. Candidates cannot be excluded from the elections because of membership, including holding office, in a political party. Despite these restrictions, the nomination forms require each candidate to indicate party membership, if any.

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Under the regulations proclaimed by Chief Minister Arbab Jehangir for the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), candidates sponsored by any political party will be disqualified. We believe similar restrictions apply in the other provinces. One opposition politician

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recently told US diplomats in Karachi that he thinks Benazir Bhutto's public announcement that the PPP will back candidates is a tactical error because it will facilitate rejection of candidates identified with the PPP. [Redacted]

Embassy, the PPP had decided by this spring that it had no alternative but to reverse its position that participating in the elections would recognize the legitimacy of the government. It decided to contest the elections, even though party leaders fear many PPP candidates could defect to the Muslim League after taking office. (Many PPP-backed candidates who won in 1979 later quit the party, succumbing to government pressure or financial inducements.) The party held a series of internal elections this summer aimed at revitalizing its local leadership. US diplomats report that the elections generally advanced this goal but also exacerbated fighting between moderates and radicals in the party, particularly in Punjab. [Redacted]

We agree with US diplomatic reporting that these restrictions will favor incumbents. Opposition parties, such as the PPP and the Awami National Party--the Muslim League's strongest foe in the NWFP--cannot directly deploy their organizational strength to help their candidates, most of whom are challengers. Office holders, in contrast, can exploit the strength of their positions, and patronage historically is a very powerful tool in Pakistani politics. The US Consulate in Peshawar notes that federal and provincial ministers can pay "official" visits to electoral districts and use the occasion to informally endorse the candidacies of their political allies. [Redacted]

According to the US Consulate in Karachi, the PPP has begun to distribute lists of candidates to its workers that it intends to support but will not release them to the press. The lists are divided into three categories; in descending order of importance, they are "friends of the people," "friends of democracy," and "good citizens." US diplomats in Lahore add that Benazir, contrary to the advice of PPP radicals, is courting the support of locally influential leaders in Punjab, including landlords, religious figures, and biradiri (clan) leaders. Her father pursued a similar tactic in the 1977 provincial and national assembly elections. [Redacted]

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Outlook: A Muslim League Victory

We believe the PML will win the elections. We define such a victory as incumbents or candidates identified with the PML winning a majority of seats in Punjab, which comprises over half of Pakistan's population and is its political center of gravity. Victories outside Punjab would enhance the PML's success but are not essential to a credible showing. We expect a PML majority or plurality in the NWFP and a respectable showing in Baluchistan,

PPP Strategy

The PPP sees the local elections as its best chance to regain the momentum lost after the August 1986 street confrontations with the government. According to the US

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where party labels historically have not been important. The PML recently benefited by an October decision of leaders of the Jamali tribe of Baluchistan to join the Muslim League. We do not expect the PML to do well in Sind. Rural Sind will almost certainly be carried by PPP-backed candidates, while Karachi is likely to be split among ethnic and religious parties. US diplomats report that the PML in Sind is relying heavily on the local clout of provincial and national assembly members which is unlikely to be sufficient to win in Sind. [redacted]

The PPP faces an uphill battle if it is to overcome the PML's advantage. Particularly in Punjab, the party has been weakened by defections of many of its local leaders since it fell from power in 1977, US diplomats report. The most recent setback was the PPP's humiliating defeat in a September National Assembly byelection in Punjab. US diplomats say that the PPP-backed candidate had poor ties to the district and that his candidacy was badly organized and funded. The byelection defeat appears to have accelerated defections from the PPP and other parties to the PML. For example, the former president of the PPP in Karachi and his followers bolted the party for the PML in October. [redacted]

Two facets of the elections will work to the PPP's disadvantage:

--The elections will be fought on local issues and cast largely in terms of popularity contests between local community leaders, thus blunting the coattail effect of Benazir's strong personal appeal.

--Local bodies will depend upon the provincial and federal governments--firmly controlled by the PML--for most of their budgets, increasing incentives to vote for candidates known to

enjoy PML support. Those PPP candidates who do win will be subject to such funding pressures and thereby tempted to join the PML. [redacted] 25X1

In rural Sind, where the PPP retains a strong organization, few supporters have defected to the PML, and alienation against the federal government will likely work to the PPP's advantage there. In the NWFP, although we believe the PPP has gained strength since 1977, US diplomats speculate that it lags behind the PML in organization. Neither party has been strong in Baluchistan. [redacted] 25X1

The best hope for the PPP is that the government may be overconfident. The PML suffers from organizational problems, [redacted] 25X1

We speculate that, if the PPP is defeated, Benazir will seek to minimize the damage by emphasizing the nonpartisan nature of the elections and by charging the PML with an unfair advantage. Even if the PML prevails [redacted] we do not believe that Benazir will attempt to reverse the results through violent demonstrations. She would probably conclude that violence would undercut her longer term strategy of positioning the PPP as a moderate nationalist party that is a legitimate contender in the next national elections. [redacted] 25X1

If the Muslim League Should Lose

A PML defeat would be a severe blow to the prestige of Prime Minister Junejo, particularly if many PML members of the provincial and national

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assemblies are defeated. Junejo might face a parliamentary vote of no confidence, but we believe he would survive it because no strong challenger to his authority has emerged within the PML. [Redacted]

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Bhutto and other opposition leaders would proclaim the elections a national referendum and renew their demands that Junejo resign and hold new parliamentary elections. Junejo, we presume, would counter by stressing the nonpartisan nature of the elections and would attempt to seize the moral high ground by asserting that they demonstrated the democratic nature of his government. We believe that he would resist all calls to resign. [Redacted]

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Benazir would be faced with the difficult choice of taking to the streets to force his resignation or biding her time until 1990. We believe that she would elect to do the latter, fearing that Zia and the Army would rally to Junejo's support and that the public would be unwilling to risk Army bullets to force a shift in government. [Redacted]

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