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ACTION NEA-11

INFO LOG-00 ADS-00 INR-07 EUR-00 SS-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
H-01 NSCE-00 NSAE-00 HA-09 L-03 TRSE-00 PM-10
PA-01 OMB-01 INRE-00 USIE-00 SP-02 SNP-01 PRS-01
P-02 T-01 /050 W

-----040566 180705Z /12

R 181109Z AUG 89
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3243
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMCONSUL KARACHI
AMCONSUL LAHORE
AMCONSUL PESHAWAR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 18000

E.O. 12356:DECL:OADR
TAGS:PGOV, PK
SUBJECT: AUGUST 17 RALLY MAMMOTH AND PEACEFUL

REF: ISLAMABAD 17992

1. (U) SUMMARY. THE AUGUST 17 RALLY TO COMMEMORATE THE DEATH OF PRESIDENT ZIA ULHAQ DREW APPROXIMATELY 200,000 PEOPLE, EXCEEDING BOTH GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION EXPECTATIONS. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ONE INCIDENT FOLLOWING THE PRAYER SERVICE, THE DAY WAS PEACEFUL. THE PLANNED SPEECHES BY POLITICIANS WERE CANCELLED, WITH ONLY THE LEADER OF LAHORE'S BADSHAHI MOSQUE OFFERING A VERY LONG POLITICAL PRAYER PRAISING ZIA AND CONDEMNING THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT.

2. (C) THE LARGE CROWD WILL ENHANCE THE POLITICAL STANDING OF PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER NAWAZ SHARIF, AND WHILE IT MAY NOT CONSTITUTE A VOTE OF NO-CONFIDENCE IN
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THE BHUTTO GOVERNMENT AS SHARIF CLAIMED, IT SENDS A CLEAR MESSAGE TO THE P.M. THAT PUNJAB REMAINS A MAJOR POLITICAL PROBLEM FOR HER. AT THE SAME TIME, THE PPP'S DECISION TO COOPERATE WITH ORGANIZERS OF THE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: ARCHIE M BOLSTER
DATE/CASE ID: 25 MAR 2010 200903400

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PEACEFUL RESTRAINT

3. (U) BOTH SIDES BACKED AWAY FROM THEIR RHETORIC AND OBSERVED THE DAY PEACEFULLY. ACCORDING TO NEWS REPORTS, FEDERAL MINISTERS MET WITH IJI ORGANIZERS TO ESTABLISH GROUND RULES FOR BOTH SIDES. FREE ACCESS TO THE MOSQUE WAS PERMITTED, ALTHOUGH THE REMAINDER OF ISLAMABAD WAS SEALED OFF BY ROCK BARRICADES AND CONTINGENTS OF POLICE AND FRONTIER CONSTABULARY. AMONG THOSE OBSERVED GOING TO THE MOSQUE, THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE OF ARMS. POTENTIALLY INFLAMMATORY SPEECHES PLANNED BY ZIA'S SON IJAZ AND RAWALPINDI MNA SHEIKH RASHID WERE CANCELLED.

4. (U) PPP YOUTH GROUPS, WHO HAD LOST THEIR BATTLE TO CELEBRATE AUGUST 17 AS DELIVERANCE DAY, WERE NOTICEABLY ABSENT FROM THE MOSQUE ROUTE. ONLY ONE INCIDENT OCCURRED IN WHICH A JEEPCLOAD OF YOUNG PPP SUPPORTERS APPROACHED CROWDS RETURNING FROM THE RALLY AND BEGAN ANTI-ZIA SLOGANS. THEY WERE REMOVED FROM THEIR JEEP, WHICH WAS BURNED, AND BEATEN UP BY THE CROWD. POLICE WERE ABLE TO CONTAIN THE CROWD.

HUGE CROWDS, NOT SO MANY VIPS

5. (U) CROWD ESTIMATES VARY WIDELY WITH THE
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GOVERNMENT MEDIA ESTIMATING 50-70,000 AND PRO-IJI SOURCES CLAIMING 400,000. THE MOST RELIABLE FIGURE APPEARS TO BE ABOUT 200,000. THE VAST MAJORITY WERE COMMON PEOPLE, PRIMARILY FROM URBAN PUNJAB, WHO ARRIVED IN BUS CARAVANS.

6. (U) MOST OBSERVERS HAD EXPECTED LARGE NUMBERS OF AFGHANS, INCLUDING AT LEAST SOME OF THE PESHAWAR SEVEN. HOWEVER, THE FEW AFGHANS PRESENT APPEARED TO HAVE COME FROM THE CAPITAL AREA. THE ABSENCE OF REFUGEES AND LEADERS HAS BEEN ATTRIBUTED TO DIVISIONS WITHIN THE AFGHAN LEADERSHIP AND TO ACTIVE INTERVENTION BY GOP OFFICIALS IN THE CAMPS TO DISCOURAGE ATTENDANCE.

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7. (U) PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER NAWAZ SHARIF DOMINATED THE POLITICAL VIPS. HE WAS ENTHUSIASTICALLY WELCOMED AS HE APPROACHED THE MOSQUE IN AN OPEN JEEP ACCOMPANIED BY AZAD KASHMIR PRESIDENT SARDAR QAYOOM. SENATE CHAIRMAN WASIM SAJJAD AND MNA CH. SHUJAAT HUSSAIN WERE AMONG THE FEW ZIA MINISTERS PRESENT. FORMER PRIME MINISTER JUNEJO AND MOST OF HIS CABINET DID NOT ATTEND THE MEMORIAL.

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POLITICAL PRAYING/PRESS CONFERENCE

8. (U) PLANNED POLITICAL SPEECHES, WHICH WOULD HAVE BEEN A VIOLATION OF SECTION 144 RESTRICTIONS ON POLITICAL GATHERINGS IN EFFECT SINCE LAST FEBRUARY IN THE CAPITAL, WERE REPLACED BY A TWELVE-MINUTE PRAYER OFFERED BY THE LEADER OF LAHORE'S BADSHAHI MOSQUE. MAULANA ABDUL QADIR AZAD PRAISED THE LEADERSHIP OF ZIA

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AND CONDEMNED THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT, PARTICULARLY CITING THE LEADERSHIP OF A WOMAN AS A CURSE WHICH HAD BEEN INFLICTED ON PAKISTAN AS A PUNISHMENT FOR THOSE WHO KILLED ZIA. HE CRITICIZED THE PPP GOVERNMENT FOR ITS FAILURE TO SUPPORT THE ISLAMIZATION MEASURES PROMULGATED BY ZIA, FOR ITS POLICY TOWARD INDIA, AND FOR THE ARRESTS OF MNA FAZLE HAQ AND JOURNALIST ZAHID MALIK. HE PRAISED THE FAMILY OF ZIA UL-HAQ AND THE LEADERSHIP OF NAWAZ SHARIF AND SARDAR QAYOOM.

9. (U) IN A POST-RALLY PRESS CONFERENCE, NAWAZ SHARIF PROCLAIMED THE RALLY A VOTE OF NO-CONFIDENCE IN THE BHUTTO GOVERNMENT. SHARIF, CALLING THE PRIME MINISTER "IMMATURE" AND "UNPATRIOTIC", CALLED FOR A JEHAD TO PROTECT THE COUNTRY FROM FURTHER DAMAGE TO
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ITS SOLIDARITY. HE WAS CRITICAL SPECIFICALLY OF THE P.M.'S FAILURE TO PROVIDE JOBS (EXCEPT IN SINDH), FOR HER CONFRONTATION WITH THE PROVINCES, AND FOR ACCEPTANCE OF INDIAN HEGEMONY. HE REFUSED TO SPECULATE ON WHAT TACTICS WOULD BE USED TO REMOVE THE PRIME MINISTER FROM OFFICE, BUT SPECULATED THAT SHE MIGHT RESIGN RATHER THAN FACE NEW ELECTIONS.

COMMENT

10. (C) THE PEACEFUL CONCLUSION OF THE ZIA DEATH ANNIVERSARY IS ONE SMALL SIGN OF POLITICAL MATURITY ON BOTH SIDES. THE OPENING OF LINES OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE PPP AND IJI AT LOWER LEVELS AND THE DECISION (AND ABILITY) TO RESTRAIN THE MORE RADICAL ELEMENTS OF BOTH PARTIES ARE AN IMPROVEMENT OVER THE TENSIONS WHICH HAVE PREVAILED DURING THE PAST FEW WEEKS. THE FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES AND OBJECTIVES OF EACH SIDE REMAIN UNCHANGED AND MAY CONTINUE TO

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11. (C) THE ATTENDANCE AT THE RALLY IS VIVID TESTIMONY TO NAWAZ SHARIF'S ORGANIZATIONAL ABILITY. HE MARSHALLED SIGNIFICANT FINANCIAL AND LOGISTICAL SUPPORT, CALLING PRIMARILY ON LOCAL LEADERS AND RELATIVES IN PUNJAB. (A COUSIN, THE MAYOR OF FAISALABAD, MADE MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS OF TRANSPORT, FOOD, AND BANNERS.) OBSERVERS HAVE NOTED CORRECTLY THAT YESTERDAY'S CROWD, WHILE MUCH LARGER THAN EXPECTED, FELL FAR SHORT OF THE NUMBER WHO ATTENDED THE FUNERAL LAST AUGUST. THIS CROWD CAME IN A FAR MORE ORGANIZED, LESS SPONTANEOUS MANNER, REQUIRING

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VAST FLEETS OF PERHAPS 800 OR MORE BUSES.

12. (C) THE LARGER THAN EXPECTED CROWD IN ISLAMABAD, THE CLOSING OF BAZAARS IN KARACHI AND LAHORE, AND CEREMONIES IN MAJOR CITIES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY MAY NOT CONSTITUTE A REFERENDUM AGAINST THE BHUTTO GOVERNMENT AS CLAIMED BY NAWAZ SHARIF. BUT THEY SHOULD SEND A MESSAGE TO THE BHUTTO GOVERNMENT THAT THERE REMAIN LARGE SEGMENTS OF THE POPULATION, PARTICULARLY IN PUNJAB, WHO RESPECT THE MEMORY OF PRESIDENT ZIA AND ARE NOT YET CONVINCED THAT THEY WILL BE BETTER OFF SUPPORTING THE PPP.

13. (C) AT THE SAME TIME, THE BHUTTO GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO ALLOW THE RALLY AND TO SUPPORT EFFORTS TO KEEP IT PEACEFUL SHOULD HELP ALLAY THE FEARS OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT THE PPP IS TRYING TO SUPPRESS ALL OPPOSITION. CREDIT GOES TO BOTH SIDES FOR KEEPING OPEN THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION, MAINTAINING THE PEACE, AND DEMONSTRATING THE RESTRAINT NEEDED TO MAKE DEMOCRACY WORK. OAKLEY

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