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Paisley's '1977 links to loyalists' discussed

By Eamon Phoenix

THE view that Ian Paisley was "associated with paramilitaries" and that he might be arrested for conspiracy was discussed by senior Stormont officials in 1977.

The remarks about Mr Paisley, who is now first minister, emerge in the confidential minutes of a meeting between the permanent under-secretary of the NIO, Brian Cubbon, and permanent secretaries at Stormont during the United Ulster Action Council strike of May 1977.

At a meeting on May 10 1977 Mr Cubbon stressed the importance of learning the lessons of the strike. The minutes continue: "It was pointed out, however, that the person responsible [Mr Paisley] was associated with and had the support of the Protestant paramilitaries and it was queried whether he ought not to be held for conspiracy." The hope was expressed that when the strike ended there would be no question of a formula being devised "to allow Mr Paisley off the hook".

It was suggested that the DUP leader had a marked facility for finding his own way out of situations but even if he were dislodged from his pinnacle, his followers would not be shaken and would continue to pursue his objectives. For his part, Mr Cubbon thought that Mr Paisley's judgment tended to be faulty on security issues. Officials also noted that public opinion favoured retaining extra British army units, drafted in during the loyalist strike, to deal with the IRA.

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Pakistan left in turmoil after Bhutto murdered

PAKISTAN was in turmoil last night following the assassination of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto in a suspected al-Qaida attack.

Ms Bhutto, twice the country's prime minister, was shot in the neck and body by a suicide bomber who then blew himself up as she was driven from the rally in the city of Rawalpindi.

Up to 20 other people were killed and 56 wounded in the explosion.

Suspicion immediately fell on resurgent Islamic militants linked to al-Qaida and the Taliban who hated Ms Bhutto for her close ties to the west and support for the war on terror.

Ms Bhutto's supporters erupted in anger and grief, attacking police and burning tyres and election campaign posters in several cities.

At the hospital where she died, some smashed glass and chanted slogans against President Pervez Musharraf.

The death of the charismatic 54-year-old put the campaign for the January 8 parliamentary elections into chaos and created fears of mass protests and violence across the nation, a key Western ally.

Last night Taoiseach Bertie Ahern described the killing of Ms Bhutto and her supporters as "an attack on the democratic process in Pakistan".

He said that he hoped the elections would still be held. US president George Bush demanded that those responsible be brought to justice.

British prime minister Gordon Brown said Ms Bhutto had been killed by "cowards afraid of democracy".

He said Ms Bhutto had shown "immense personal courage" and vowed to continue to fight terrorists at



■ **GRIEF:** Mourners carry the coffin of Pakistan's former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, pictured left, from a hospital in Rawalpindi, Pakistan last night

PICTURES: AP

home and abroad.

"This is a sad day for democracy. It's a tragic hour for Pakistan," he said.

Angry supporters took to the streets in the north-western city of Peshawar, chanting slogans against Mr Musharraf.

In Rawalpindi Ms Bhutto's supporters burned election posters from the ruling party and attacked police, who fled.

In Karachi shop owners closed their businesses as demonstrators burned tyres on the roads.

Nawaz Sharif, another former premier and opposition leader sat silently next to Ms Bhutto's body in the hospital. "Benazir Bhutto was also my sister and I will be with you to take the revenge for her death," he said.

He also questioned whether to hold the elections.

Mr Musharraf convened an emergency meeting with his senior staff last night to discuss whether to postpone the next month's election.

"This is the work of those terrorists with whom we are engaged in war," he said in a nationally televised speech.

"I want to appeal to the nation to remain peaceful and exercise restraint."

The attacker struck just minutes after Ms Bhutto addressed thousands of her supporters.

One eyewitness said he was standing about 10 metres from Ms Bhutto's vehicle at the time of the attack.

"She was inside the vehicle and was coming out from the gate after addressing the rally when some of the youths

started chanting slogans in her favour. Then I saw a smiling Bhutto emerging from the vehicle's roof and responding to their slogans," he said.

"Then I saw a thin, young man jumping toward her vehicle from the back and opening fire. Moments later, I saw her speeding vehicle going away."

Ms Bhutto was taken to hospital and into emergency surgery. She died about an hour after the attack at 1.16pm Irish time.

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