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Zardari wanted UN to quiz Rice, Karzai on Bhutto killing

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Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari asked the UN to delay a report on the assassination of Benazir Bhutto as he wanted investigators to quiz four personalities, including former US top diplomat Condoleezza Rice, who had prior information on threats to her life.

Zardari is "said to have quietly given names of four international personalities – US ex-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai, Saudi Arabian intelligence chief Prince Muqrin (bin Abdul Aziz) and the UAE intelligence chief – to the UN inquiry commission to ask them: how did they know the secret in advance that Benazir Bhutto would be killed?," The News daily reported today.

The UN commission has been asked to meet these "four indirect witnesses" before submitting its report on Bhutto's assassination in 2007, the paper quoting its sources.

This new information had also resolved a two-and-half year old mystery about which two countries had warned Bhutto about a possible attack on her life when she returned to Pakistan from self-exile in October 2007, the report said.

It identified the two countries as the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, "whose intelligence agencies chiefs had warned the Pakistan People's Party chairperson (about) threats to her life".

It added that Saudi Prince Muqrin had warned Bhutto about threats to her life.

The report claimed that the UN commission was making contacts with the four personalities to "seek explanations from them as how did they already (know of) threats" to Bhutto's life.

It quoted sources as saying that Zardari believed the "inside information" that could be shared by these four personalities "might greatly help the inquiry commission to identify the real killers whose secret plans somehow reached the intelligence agencies of Afghanistan, the US, UAE and Saudi Arabia, and which turned out to be prophetically correct".

Pakistan's permanent representative to the UN, Hussain Haroon, held talks with UN officials in New York to convince them that it was important to interview these four personalities, the report claimed.

Presidential spokesman Farhatullah Babar has said that Zardari wanted three friendly countries that had warned Bhutto before her return to Pakistan to share information with the UN commission.

Babar did not name these countries but media reports have said they are Afghanistan, UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Babar said one of these countries has shared its views with the UN commission and hoped the other two would also do so.