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## 55 killed in Pak suicide blast

Omer Farooq Khan, TNN, Sep 4, 2010, 06.09am IST

ISLAMABAD: A suicide blast ripped through a rally of Shia Muslims in Pakistan's southwestern city of Quetta on Friday, killing at least 53 people and injuring around 197. Two other blasts rocked Mardan and Peshawar on the last Friday of Ramzan, killing two including one police officer.

The Quetta blast occurred at about 3pm at a gathering of about 2,000 people in Meezan Chowk. The rally was organized by Shia Imamia Students' Organisation to observe Al-Quds Day. Every year on the last Friday of Ramzan, processions are taken out across Pakistan to support Palestinian demand for a homeland.

According to Baluchistan's police chief Malik Iqbal, it was a suicide attack.

After the blast, people at the rally turned violent. Some fired in the air. As smoke billowed from the blast site, people were seen fleeing. Others rushed to take cover to shield them from the gunfire. The injured were taken to civil and police hospitals at Quetta.

"The death toll has touched 53. It could rise as several of the injured are in a critical condition," said Shahban Ali, a senior police officer.

Only two days ago, triple suicide bombings targeted a Shia procession in Lahore killing 39 people and injuring more than 200. The Shia community was observing the death anniversary of Hazrat Ali, Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law.

Both the Pakistan Taliban and the Punjab-based terrorist group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi claimed responsibility for the Quetta blast as they had done for the Lahore attack.

Earlier, Pakistan's interior minister Rehman Malik had warned of possible suicide attacks on religious gatherings. He had asked Shia Muslims to hold their religious ceremonies indoors.

Shia leader Allama Abbas Kumaili appealed to the people to remain calm. "These are attempts to create a divide between Sunni and Shia sects," he told a TV channel. The attacks against minority sects are a fallout of government failure, he said. "Our government makes all efforts to secure VIPs. Common men are not a priority," he said.

Earlier on Friday, one person was killed and four injured when a suicide bomber blew himself up outside a mosque of the Ahmadi sect at Mardan in northwest Pakistan. "The bomber blew himself up when he was intercepted by guards outside the mosque," Mardan police chief said. In Peshawar, one police officer was killed when a bomb exploded near a patrol vehicle.

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