

11 killed in suicide attack at Shia shrine in Pakistan

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Karachi: At least 11 minority Shia Muslims, including six children, were killed and 12 injured when a suicide bomber wearing a burqa blew himself up at a shrine in a village in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province as the worshippers gathered to observe the holy month of Moharram.

The bomber entered the Imambargah, used for religious services, in the remote Chalgari area of Kachhi district at the time of evening prayer and exploded his explosive-laden vest.

"At least 10 people were killed and a dozen others were wounded after a suicide bomber blew himself up at the shrine," Balochistan home minister Sarfaraz Bugti said.

Hours later an injured victim died, increasing the death toll to 11, a security official said.

Bugti said there were six children between 10 and 12 years old among the dead and that some women had also died.

The explosion was heard in a wide area and shattered windows in the nearby vicinity.

Security forces reached the blast site and cordoned off the area.

Police said since the village was in a remote area the rescue workers and paramedical officials were finding it difficult to shift the injured to the only health unit in the area.

"They are now being shifted to Sibi," Bugti said.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack but Sunni extremist groups often target minority Shias.

A local administration official said the suicide bomber appeared to be about 18 years old and was wearing a woman's burqa.

It was the first major attack that targeted the minority Shia Muslims in the holy month of Moharram when they organise special prayers and take out processions to observe the martyrdom of Hussain Ibne Ali, the grandson of the Prophet.

Sectarian violence in particular that carried out by Sunni militants against minority Shia has claimed thousands of lives in the country over the past decade.

The government has taken extraordinary security measures for the two most important days of the month of Muharram with thousands of paramilitary rangers and police deployed in major cities and towns to avoid any terrorist attacks which could trigger off sectarian violence.

Balochistan has been rocked due to violence by extremists and ethnic Baloch militants.

Earlier this week, at least 10 people, mostly daily wage workers were killed in an explosion in a passenger bus in the provincial capital Quetta.

- AP