

**Pakistan Shiites face rising militant attacks**  
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**11 September 2012**

QUETTA, Pakistan — In the Shiite Muslim graveyard of this provincial Pakistani capital, entire sections are dedicated to the hundreds killed by Sunni militants over the past two years, their portraits line the cobblestone entrance, some garlanded with wilted flowers.

There's Abid Ali Nazish, a popular movie star executed by gunmen in the summer. Nearby are the portraits of two brothers who were dragged out of a bus and shot to death on the road as they returned from pilgrimage in June. An Olympic boxer, Ibrar Hussain, has a large portrait, and then a smaller photo on his grave showing him sitting proudly next to American boxing great Mohammed Ali.

Hussain was just leaving Quetta's Ayub Stadium when a motorcyclist drove by and gunned him down last year, said Bostan Kishtmandi, a local Shiite politician, as he strolled past the graves. He "was retired and teaching our young boxers. We loved him," Kishtmandi said.

Pakistan's Shiite minority is feeling under siege as Sunni militants who view them as heretics step up a campaign of sectarian attacks, targeting them with shootings and car bombings. More than 300 Shiites have been killed so far this year, according to Human Rights Watch. The province of Baluchistan, where Quetta is the capital and which has the country's largest Shiite community, has borne the brunt, with more than 100 killed this year, on the way to surpassing the 2011 total of 118.

"I am afraid of terrorists everywhere in Quetta, except here with the dead," said Gulbar Abbas, an elderly man who spends every day in the graveyard, living off donations from visitors as he sits on a dirty quilt on a stone slab and reads the Quran from morning to night.

The sectarian bloodletting adds another layer to the turmoil in Pakistan, where the government is fighting an insurgency by the Pakistani Taliban and where many fear Sunni hardliners are gaining strength. Shiites and rights group say the government does little to protect Shiites and that militants are emboldened because they are believed to have links to Pakistan's intelligence agencies.

The powerful agencies have often been linked to the murky world of militancy, accused of using hardline Sunni Muslim militants against enemy India in the disputed Kashmir region and against U.S. and NATO soldiers next door in Afghanistan.

But the rise in the bloodshed and worries over security slipping out of control are bringing pressure for action. Fearing an all-out sectarian war, the Baluchistan government last week called in the paramilitary Frontier Corps to help the understaffed and underequipped local police.

The judiciary has also become unprecedentedly vocal in pointing the finger at the intelligence agencies. Last week, a panel of three Supreme Court judges, led by Pakistan's Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry, told a packed Quetta courtroom that it had heard testimony that militants were getting weapons and unregistered vehicles from the intelligence agencies. At least two suicide attacks this year in Quetta involved unregistered vehicles, according to the police. The court ordered the government to produce a list of all weapons and ammunition permits issued on the orders of the intelligence agencies, as well as vehicles brought into Pakistan duty free by the agencies.

In a strong and rare rebuke, the judges slammed the security agencies' record against militant activities in Quetta.

"The result is zero. There has been zero accomplished, not against suicide bombings, not against target killings," Chaudhry said.

So far, the intelligence and security agencies have not responded.

Shiites make up around 15 percent of Pakistan's 190 million people. They are scattered around the country, but the southwestern province of Baluchistan has the largest community, mainly made up of ethnic Hazaras, easily identified by their facial features which resemble Central Asian features. They number some 300,000 in Quetta, a city of 1.2 million people.

Sunni extremists consider all Shiites as heretics, and militants have long carried out attacks against the community. But the sectarian campaign has stepped up in recent years, fueled mainly by the radical group Lashkar-e-Jangvhi, aligned to Pakistani Taliban militants headquartered in the tribal regions. The violence has pushed Baluchistan in particular deeper into chaos. The province was already facing an armed insurgency by ethnic Baluch separatists who frequently attack security forces and government facilities. But the secessionist violence has been overtaken by increasingly bold attacks against Shiites.

Militants have packed cars with explosives and driven them into buses carrying Shiite Muslim students to universities and pilgrims returning from holy sites in Iran. Gunmen have walked into shops in Quetta's busy bazaars and slaughtered storekeepers as they tended to customers. They have picked off prominent Shiites as they left their homes for work. They have taken out newspaper ads telling Shiites to leave Quetta and Pakistan and vowing to kill any Sunni who calls a Shiite a friend.

More than 300 Shiites have been killed in Baluchistan alone the past two years, the community here says. Thirty-eight Shiites were killed in just two weeks in Quetta earlier this year, said a liberal political party representing Hazaras. When were these two weeks?

As a result, many Shiites in Quetta have pulled their children from universities, shuttered their shops and rarely step out of the two enclaves in the city where their numbers dominate. There have been a few revenge attacks killing Sunni Muslim clerics.

Lashkar-e-Janghvi, headquartered in Pakistan's Punjab province, has carried out attacks elsewhere in the country as well. On Monday, a car bomb killed 12 Shiites in the Kurram tribal region, the only tribal area where Shiites outnumber Sunnis.

"The situation is worsening day by day," Baluchistan's chief minister, Mohammed Aslam Raisani, told The Associated Press in the Pakistani capital Islamabad. "Of course I am concerned."

Last month police in the eastern Punjab province arrested a leader of Lashkar-e-Janghvi, Malik Ishaq, for inciting hate. But on Monday, he was freed on bail.

That only fueled Shiites' believe that the government has little interest in going after those who attack their community.

"From law enforcement, government or any institution we are 100 percent disappointed," Abdul Khaliq Hazara, leader of the Hazara Democratic Party, said at his home in Quetta.

"We also blame elements with the intelligence agencies that support them (Sunni militants) and give them shelter, show them the routes. It has become a policy it seems for them to bring religious extremism to this area," he said.

The Baluchistan government's move to call in the paramilitary Frontier Corps reflects their struggle with dealing with the violence.

"We decided to call them in for two months because we didn't want to take a chance on human lives," Baluchistan's top bureaucrat and Chief Secretary Babar Yaqoob Fateh Muhammed told The AP. "Right now sectarianism is our biggest threat. We have made some progress. But have we succeeded? No."

"We know it is Lashkar-e-Janghvi and we have to attack them. ... There is no reluctance to conducting a big operation or to going after them in a big way but so far we have not had very useful information," he said.

The Frontier Corps and the police have provided security to Shiite Muslims travelling in Quetta, escorting school buses and local merchants. Few arrests have been made and Hazara said his political party wants the Frontier Corps and the police "to go after everyone involved in the killings."

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