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Al Jazeera

Gunmen kill Shia passengers in Pakistan

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At least 11 Shia Muslims have been killed in a suspected sectarian attack on their vehicle in Pakistan's southwestern Baluchistan province.

Police said unidentified gunmen opened fire on the vehicle as it travelled to the town of Hazara on Saturday.

"The vehicle was passing by a bus stand when gunmen riding in another car opened fire, killing at least 11 people and wounding three," Hamid Shakeel, city's police chief, told reporters.

Shakeel said the assailants ambushed the minibus on the outskirts of Quetta, the capital of Baluchistan, which borders Afghanistan and Iran. One woman was among the dead.

Another police official said it appeared to be a sectarian attack as all those killed were Shia Muslims.

Dozens of Shia protesters briefly blocked a main road and torched two cars and two motorcycles after news of the incident spread, Shakeel said.

Police regained control of the situation with help from local Shia elders.

Local intelligence and administrative officials confirmed the incident, and said the gunmen succeeded in fleeing the scene after the shootings.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but Baluchistan has witnessed separatist movements and sectarian violence. Taliban fighters with links to al-Qaeda have also been active.

Baluchistan is the largest but poorest of Pakistan's four provinces, and home to the country's largest gas and oil reserves. Separatists want a greater share of the money derived from the province's natural resources.

Tit-for-tat attacks

Saturday's attack came a day after eight people were killed and about 25 wounded in two separate bomb and gun attacks in two districts of Baluchistan.

The majority of Pakistanis are Sunni Muslims, with Shia accounting for around 15 per cent of a population of more than 170 million.

Both communities largely live in peace with each other but extremists from the two sides have killed thousands of people in tit-for-tat attacks, and religious tensions have increased in recent years.

Pakistan has seen a surge in violence since al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden was killed by US special forces in a secret raid near the Pakistani capital, Islamabad, on May 2.

The Pakistani Taliban [vowed revenge for bin Laden's death](#) and the group has since launched a series of deadly attacks against government installations.