

Suicide Bomb Kills 13 Worshippers in Pakistan

A suicide bombing at a Pakistani religious center killed 13 worshippers on Friday, the third major attack to test the new government since the Taliban vowed revenge for a U.S. drone strike that killed its deputy commander.

The spate of violence has shattered a period of relative calm after the May election that returned former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to power, and underscores the challenges he will face in restoring stability to the militancy-hit nation.

More than 60 people have been killed in less than a week from attacks that included suicide bombers targeting women students, a hospital and a funeral procession.

Friday's blast tore through a Shi'ite Muslim seminary in the volatile city of Peshawar, killing at least 13 and injuring 40, police said. TV images showed dazed victims in bloodied clothes wandering through rubble and ornate, shattered tiles.

"The bomber was brought by two other persons who shot dead the security guard," city police chief Shafiullah Khan said.

Security forces blamed the Pakistani Taliban for the suicide bombing and for the funeral attack, though the group denied its involvement. An allied radical Sunni Islamist group admitted to the bus and hospital attacks.

Before the election, Sharif suggested he would be willing to negotiate to end four years of war with the Taliban in rugged tribal areas. But the group withdrew an offer of talks after a May 28 drone strike killed deputy leader Wali-ur-Rehman.

"There was no formal session of talks with the government but both sides were making a plan when the drone carried out

missile strikes,” Taliban spokesman Ihsanullah Ihsan told Reuters this week.

The group vowed to “teach a lesson” to Pakistan and the United States for the killing. It believes the Pakistani government cooperates with Washington on drone attacks.

Known as the Tehreek-e-Taliban, the Pakistani Taliban have carried out devastating attacks against the Pakistani military and civilians. It is a separate entity to the Afghan Taliban, though allied with them.

The violence has divided opinion in Pakistan and many in the military are concerned that a political settlement could effectively concede territory to the militants.

Despite the drone strike setback, some level of negotiation seems likely, more so since the United States and Afghan Taliban this week announced plans to talk.

Writing by Frank Jack Daniel, Editing by Mark Heinrich

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