

## **8 killed, 44 injured in suicide attack on church in Pakistan's Quetta**

17/12/2017 05:41 by admin

The attack targeted the church where prayers of Christian community were being held, the Express Tribune newspaper reported quoting Balochistan's Home Minister Sarfaraz Bugti.

### **Suicide bombing at church in Quetta**

**ISLAMABAD:** Heavily-armed terrorists attacked a church during a midday service on Sunday in the southwestern Pakistani city of Quetta, killing at least eight people and wounding 44 others including children and women.

The attack on the Bethel Memorial Church on Zarghoon road in Balochistan capital came just over a week before Christmas.

Balochistan home minister Mir Sarfaraz Bugti said that at least two suicide bombers were involved in the attack on church. "One attacker was killed at the gate by police after an intense gunfight while the other wearing suicide vest entered the church and detonated his explosives," he said.

Bugti said that the terrorists had weapons and it seems they wanted to take hostages inside the church.

"The security forces foiled their plan," he added.

Balochistan's Inspector General Moazzam Ansari said there were 400 worshippers inside the church when it was attacked.

Ansari said that police assigned to the church's security reacted in a timely manner and averted a much larger tragedy.

"Security forces have cleared the church," he added.

Dr Wasim Baig of Civil Hospital said that eight people were killed while 44 others injured, including children and women. He said that nine injured are in critical condition.

According to the church's Facebook page, it had organised different programmes all throughout December to mark Christmas, and was holding a 'Sunday School Christmas Programme' at the time of the attack.

No group took responsibility of the attack but the Taliban militants targeted minorities including Christians in the past.

The Bethel Memorial Church has been the target of a terrorist attack in the past.

Meanwhile, there were conflicting reports about the number of attackers.

Ansari said that three militants were involved. He said one was killed by police and the second was able to detonate explosives. He said there are reports that a third militant fled from the scene and police was searching for him.

Earlier, DIG police Abadul Razzaq Cheema said two more attackers were involved but they ran away after one of the attackers was gunned down by police.

Following the attack, an emergency was declared in all hospitals across Quetta.

Pakistan Interior Minister Ahsan Iqbal condemned the attack, which came a day after Pakistan observed the third anniversary of the Peshawar school attack of 2014 which killed at least 150 people, mostly students.

Foreign Office Spokesperson Muhammad Faisal condemned the terror attack, saying Pakistan's resolve against terrorism cannot be deterred by these cowardly acts of terrorists.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan also strongly condemned the terror attack.

"The govt must ensure special protection for churches as Christmas approaches. My prayers go to the victims' families and for the speedy recovery of the injured," Khan tweeted.

On March 15, 2015, the Taliban suicide bombers attacked two churches in Lahore's Youhanabad neighbourhood, killing 15 people and wounding 70 others.

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