
Pakistan Taliban Kill 20 Shiites in Bus Attack

On Thursday August 16, Pakistani Taliban gunmen in northern Pakistan pulled 20 Shiite Muslims off buses, lined them up and executed them in the latest in a series of sectarian attacks targeting minorities, which the government has seemingly done little to stop.

Police officials have said that at least a dozen militants dressed in military fatigues stopped three buses, checked the identification of the passengers, singled out the Shiites and shot them at point blank range in the Naran Valley in northern Pakistan.

The victims were travelling from Rawalpindi to Gilgit, and were mostly young men returning to their villages for Eid al-Fitr, the Islamic festival that marks the end of Ramadan.

The Darra Adam Khel faction of the Pakistan Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack on the Shiites, according to Reuters. "We have targeted them because they are enemies of Sunnis and conspire against us," Mohammed Afridi, a spokesman for the faction, was reported as saying in a telephone interview. "We will continue such attacks in the future."

There have been several such sectarian attacks in the past by Sunni extremists who do not view Shiites as true Muslims. In February gunmen killed 16 Shiites in the city of Manshera. In April, violence between Sunnis and Shiites killed 14 people in and around Gilgit.

The attacks rarely produce a strong response from the government of this Sunni-dominated country, and the military hardly ever launches military operations in response.

Reena Saeed Khan, an environmental journalist who travelled through the same route, said that she found a lot of anger and resentment among the locals during her visit to several northern towns.

"People are very upset," she said. "They are asking, 'Where is the government? Where is the military?'"

This is yet another example of the Pakistani Government not giving due attention to the increasing violence based on different religious beliefs. WMFI urges Pakistan to be vigilant in upholding law & order and bring the culprits to justice.

Written by: Khalid Akram, Associate, WMFI Research & Correspondence (August 17, 2012)