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## Pakistan militants claim Quetta twin attacks



A Pakistani militant group behind a series of bloody assaults on minority Shiite Muslims has said it carried out attacks on a bus carrying women students and a hospital that killed at least 25. The extremist Sunni outfit Lashkar-e-Jhangvi said a female suicide bomber struck the bus in Quetta, capital of the restive Baluchistan province on Saturday, killing 14 women students. A follow up attack around 90 minutes later on a hospital treating survivors left at least 11 dead and led to a prolonged gun battle between security forces and militants occupying part of the building. The standoff lasted for several hours and ended when security forces stormed the building, freeing 35 people who had been taken hostage, Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar told reporters on Saturday. Abubakar Siddiq, a spokesman for Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), called newspaper offices in Quetta late Saturday to claim the killings. "The suicide attack on the bus was carried out by one of our sisters. She boarded the student bus and blew herself up," Siddiq said. "Then we carried out a second suicide attack at the hospital and our fighters killed several people. We did this because security forces killed our fighters and their wives in Kharotabad." Pakistani security forces on June 6 killed at least three militants and two women during a raid at a house in the Kharotabad neighbourhood of Quetta. Officials said they belonged to Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, with whom LeJ has links. The attacks came hours after a national monument linked to Pakistan's founding father Muhammad Ali Jinnah was destroyed by separatist militants in Ziarat town, 80 kilometres (50 miles) southeast of Quetta. Quetta is a flashpoint for sectarian violence between majority Sunni Muslims and minority Shiites, who account for 20 percent of Pakistan's 180 million population, and the city saw the country's two bloodiest attacks so far this year. A giant bomb planted in a water tanker being towed by a tractor killed 90 Shiite Hazaras in February, while another suicide bombing at a snooker club in January killed 92 others. Both were claimed by LeJ. There was fury in the Pakistani press on Sunday, both at the perpetrators and the security forces for failing to prevent the third major atrocity in Quetta in six months. Dawn, the country's leading English-language newspaper, said the state's shortcomings had been shown once again. "That the state has again failed both at the level of intelligence-gathering and preventing a terrorist attack from succeeding is also obvious," it said in an editorial. "Unhappily, the more obvious these truths, the less likely it seems that anything will be done to address them." The bus targeted in Saturday's attack was from Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University, which is located close to a Shiite Hazara neighborhood in Quetta, and many Hazaras are students. Baluchistan, which borders Iran and Afghanistan, is rife with Islamist militancy and a regional insurgency waged by separatists demanding political autonomy and a greater share of profits from the region's natural resources.