

Monday, 6 May 2013

## Taliban bomb kills 18 at Pakistan election rally



A bomb tore through a political rally in Pakistan Monday, killing 18 people and wounding 55 in the most deadly attack so far during the campaign for historic elections at the weekend. The Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility, saying the target had been a lawmaker elected as an independent but allied to the outgoing government. Officials said the lawmaker escaped unhurt. Monday's bombing brings to 87 the number of people killed in attacks on politicians and political parties since April 11, according to an AFP tally. The device hit a rally by the right-wing Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), a religious party in the outgoing government coalition in Kurram, part of Pakistan's Taliban-infested tribal belt on the Afghan border. "The death toll has now risen to 18," Tashfeen Khan, a senior official in Peshawar, the main town of northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province told AFP. Earlier, Riaz Khan, the top administrative official in Kurram, told AFP that at least 14 people had been killed. "I fear the death toll could rise further because several of the injured are in a critical condition," Khan said. Doctor Najeeb Khan from the main hospital in Kurram tribal district told AFP that 55 injured had been taken to the hospital. The bomb was planted inside a building that was the venue for the rally of two national assembly candidates representing the JUI party led by cleric Fazul-ur-Rehman. The apparent target, Munir Orakzai, escaped unhurt while Khan said the other candidate, Ain u Din Shakir, was slightly injured. It was the first attack on a political party in the tribal belt since campaigning began for what will be Pakistan's first democratic transition of power after a civilian government has completed a full term in office. Interim Prime Minister Mir Hazar Khan Khoso strongly condemned the attack and said one of the national assembly candidates had been injured. Repeated calls for candidates to be granted more security have failed to stop a wave of attacks, most of them claimed by the Pakistani Taliban. "Basically it was an attack on Munir Orakzai, who was a part of the past government for five years," Taliban spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan told AFP by telephone from an undisclosed location. The Pakistani Taliban have condemned Saturday's elections as un-Islamic and directly threatened the main parties in the outgoing coalition, the Pakistan People's Party, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement and the Awami National Party (ANP). "He supported the People's Party and ANP government, which launched several operations against us," Ehsan told AFP. Rehman and his JUI party -- known as JUI-F -- have been mediators between the authorities and the Taliban, blamed for killing thousands of Pakistanis in a domestic insurgency over the past six years. Orakzai is a senior tribal politician who is standing for JUI-F for the first time. The Taliban denied that JUI-F itself was the target. Elections have been postponed in three constituencies where candidates have been killed. Those constituencies are in the southwestern province of Baluchistan, in Pakistan's biggest city of Karachi and in southern Hyderabad.