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## 47 Pakistanis Die in Attack on Shiite Rites

By DAVID ROHDE

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan, July 4 — Suspected Islamic militants, including a suicide bomber, attacked a mosque today, killing 47 Shiite Muslim worshipers and wounding 65 others as they gathered for Friday Prayers in the southwestern city of Quetta, officials said.

Three attackers died, Pakistani officials said. The mass killing, the first sectarian strike here to use a suicide bomber, appeared to be an effort to ignite a cycle of violence between Sunnis and Shiites and destabilize the country, the officials said. They said it was too early to pinpoint which group was responsible.

There were conflicting accounts tonight of the details of the attack. Senior Pakistani law enforcement officials said two attackers were believed to have entered the Hazara Mosque early this afternoon as hundreds of faithful gathered. The Hazara are a predominantly Shiite minority ethnic group in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The officials said one attacker hurled hand grenades at worshipers before detonating a bomb attached to his waist. The other hurled hand grenades and sprayed worshipers with bullets from a rifle, they said.

"The third one was outside, also shooting," said Brig. Javed Iqbal Cheema, a senior Interior Ministry official.

The suicide bomber died instantly, Brigadier Cheema said. The two other attackers were also killed, although the details were not clear. Reports that a fourth attacker had been captured could not be confirmed.

The Associated Press reported that a witness, Zulifqar Ali, who was slightly wounded by shrapnel, said the attackers had first focused on the mosque's security guards.

"First they killed security guards outside the mosque," he said. "Then they moved inside the mosque and started firing on the people."

A guard killed one attacker, Mr. Ali said, adding, "The other attacker blew himself up."

After the attacks, survivors rushed wounded and maimed worshipers to overwhelmed local hospitals, the authorities said.

In an effort to prevent rioting and retaliatory killings by angry Shiites, large numbers of heavily armed policemen and soldiers flooded the streets of Quetta.

Exact casualty figures changed throughout the day. Early tonight, Sheik Rashid Ahmed, Pakistan's information minister, said 31 people had died and 52 had been wounded.

Late tonight, Naeem Ahmed, an official with the Edhi Foundation, a private emergency service that works across Pakistan, said 47 had died and 65 had been wounded.

Pakistani officials said the attack was the third in Quetta in the last month and a sign that religious violence was rising in the country.

President Pervez Musharraf, who was in Paris today completing a four-nation tour that included a visit to Camp David, Md., vowed to pursue extremists.

"It is always unfortunate that this small minority that I keep saying are available to derail or undermine national feeling," General Musharraf said. "I am very clear in my mind that the vast majority of people in Pakistan certainly do not contribute to extremism."

Experts said they believed that the militants were trying to make a statement to General Musharraf and the world as he returned from his trip to the West's most powerful countries, the United States, Britain, France and Germany.

"They wanted to send a message that all is not well in Pakistan," said Prof. Rasul Bakhsh Rais, a political analyst at Lahore University of Management Sciences. "I am afraid this violence is going to take this dirty form."

The attack today was a further reminder of the potential instability of Pakistan, an impoverished, nuclear-armed nation of 145 million people that is an important arena in the United States-led campaign against terrorism. Members of Al Qaeda and former Taliban and other militants are believed to be hiding in the country with the aid of religious extremists.

Pakistan has several Sunni Muslim extremist groups, some of which are believed to have ties to Al Qaeda or the former Taliban.

The Shiite and Sunni sects disagree over who should be considered the true successor of the Prophet Muhammad. Sunnis make up 77 percent of Pakistan's population and Shiites 20 percent. Thousands of people have died in clashes between the sects that beset the country for 15 years, but that had appeared to be ebbing. Today's attack is believed to be the deadliest sectarian strike in the country's history.

Officials expressed surprise that sectarian violence was occurring in Quetta, a city where there had been comparatively few killings. Professor Rais, the political analyst, predicted that Shiites would retaliate, but not immediately.

"Certainly the killing will provoke some retaliation from the Shia community," he said. "It may not be today or tomorrow. They will find soft targets."

Mr. Ahmed, the information minister, said sectarian groups could have been retaliating for recent arrests.

"In Punjab and in Sind there was a crackdown," he said, referring to Pakistan's two most populous provinces, in the east and south of the country. "Day before yesterday, their important people were all arrested."

He and other officials said the sectarian groups were gradually being wiped out by Pakistani law enforcement. One of the groups, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, has been accused of assassinating Shiite doctors in an effort to drive them from the city. Over time, Shiite extremist groups emerged.

Brigadier Cheema, the Interior Ministry official, said the situation was improving.

"I think it had drastically dropped over the last year or so," he said, referring to attacks.