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Musharraf vows to quell violence
Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf has pledged to take firm action to deal with inter-Muslim sectarian violence after a bomb attack on a Shia mosque.

Monday's explosion in the city of Karachi killed at least 19 people and injured another 40.

Police say the city is tense after three people died in overnight violence, ahead of funerals for the bomb victims later on Tuesday.

Army and police are on standby after school attack and businesses were set on fire.

'Serious action'

Thousands of troops and paramilitary forces are on maximum alert to prevent further clashes between extreme Shia and Sunni factions in Karachi ahead of the mass funerals.

The bombing happened in the same area where a senior Sunni cleric, Mufti Nizamuddin Shamzai, was shot dead on Sunday by unidentified gunmen.

President Musharraf said he would take tough measures to restore order in the city - but did not specify what they would be.

"I will take serious action, this is the second incident within 24 hours, following Mufti Shamzai's killing," Information Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed quoted the president as saying.

The minister denied the authorities had lost control of Karachi, and said President Musharraf would soon announce an important initiative to restore law and order.

Sindh police chief Kamal Shah described the violence - which has brought the city to a standstill on Tuesday - as a war between the militants and the police.

"Police are after them and they are after the police. Many of the terrorists have been arrested but it is an ongoing war against terror," he said.

The senior Shia leader Hasan Turabi has meanwhile appealed for calm in the aftermath of the violence, which he said was intended to divide the two main Muslim factions.

"There is no Shia-Sunni conflict and we will never allow the two sects to fight against each other," he said.

Mosque destroyed

Sunni-Shia sectarian violence has killed as many as 4,000 people in the past 15 years in Pakistan.

Monday's explosion was so powerful it knocked down a pillar and one of the side walls of the mosque.

An office building belonging to the trust that manages the mosque also collapsed.



A night of violence followed the

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An emergency was declared at three hospitals and appeals were made for blood donations.

Police had been trying specifically to protect Shia mosques following Mufti Shamzai's death.

Interior Ministry spokesman Abdur Rauf Chaudhry said it was too early to say who carried out the attack but said it appeared to be sectarian violence.



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The authorities were investigating reports that a person pretending to be a worshipper had left a briefcase in the mosque shortly before the explosion.

Its believed that Shia worshippers may have been killed in a suicide attack

But police are now saying there is a strong possibility the blast was caused by a suicide attack.

"We did not find any crater in the mosque, which shows that it was a suicide attack," senior police investigator Manzoor Mughal told the Associated Press news agency.

Police taskforce

A coalition of six fundamentalist parties, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), has called for a nationwide strike on Friday in protest at Mufti Shamzai's killing.

Up to six gunmen ambushed his car, witnesses said.

Sunni Muslims, including his students, rioted at news of his death, attacking a police station and burning cars.

The cleric's death came three weeks after at least 14 people were killed in Karachi when a man, apparently dressed as a Shia cleric, blew himself up in a Shia mosque.

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