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Jamaat-e Islami protest against General Musharraf

A prominent Pakistani religious leader has been shot dead in Karachi.

Dr Athar Qureshi was walking to a mosque to say his morning prayers when three men approached him in a vehicle, police said.

One of the men shot Dr Qureshi, who is a former leader of Jamaat-e Islami (Party of Islam) and a former member of the Sindh provincial assembly.

No one has so far admitted responsibility for the killing.

A Jamaat-e Islami official said it was an "act of terrorism".

"The motive is to create a scare. The government has failed to protect law-abiding citizens," said Munawar Hassan, secretary-general of Jamaat-e Islami.

In recent years, Dr Qureshi had supported calls for Islamic law to be introduced in Pakistan.

Although he was no longer a member of Jamaat-e-Islami, he had always been respected as a scholar, a party official said.

Backlash fear

Karachi has suffered serious violence caused by ethnic, religious and political feuds, with hundreds of people killed in recent years.

On Sunday, supporters of Jamaat-e Islami rallied in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad demanding the resignation of Pakistan's military leader, General Pervez Musharraf.

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Despite a ban on rallies imposed by the 14-month-old military government, the army has been reluctant to be heavy handed against religious parties fearing a backlash.

Jamaat-e Islami attacked General Musharraf for pardoning the former prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, who lost power in a coup in October 1999 and was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Mr Sharif left the country just over a week ago for exile in Saudi Arabia.

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