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Violence between Sunnis and Shias has escalated

Police in Pakistan say 13 people have been killed in sectarian violence in the town of Hangu in North-West Frontier province.

The violence erupted when an unidentified gunman opened fire in a bazaar, killing three Shia Muslim shopkeepers and injuring another.

Officials said those killed in the ensuing gun battles, in which heavy weaponry was used, were Sunni Muslims.

Several shops and cars were set on fire during the clashes.

A curfew is now in force in the area and the roads leading into the town have been blocked.

Special police units have also secured positions in several hills around the town, which had earlier been taken over by various militia groups.



Police have tightened security

No one has claimed responsibility for the killings in the bazaar, and the motive for them is unclear.

Spate of violence

However, they began a day after Haq Nawaz, a leading member of the Sunni militant group Sepa-e-Sahaba, was hanged for killing an Iranian diplomat 10 years ago.

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Mr Nawaz was buried in his home town of Jhang, in the province of Punjab, from where there have been reports of clashes between police and sectarian groups.

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Pakistan has seen a spate of violence between Sunnis and Shias in recent months.

In January, nine people were killed in sectarian clashes in the Orakzai tribal area.

Those clashes were sparked by a dispute over a shrine revered by Shias but located in a Sunni area.

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