

More than 50 killed and scores wounded in suicide blast at political rally in Pakistan

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Security officials cordon off the blast site in Khar, Pakistan, on July 30, 2023. © Global Look Press / Ahmad Kamal

Islamabad, August 1 (RHC)-- A powerful blast at a Sunni JUI-F party convention in the Pakistani town of Khar on Sunday has killed at least 54 people and left many more injured, local officials have said.

Riaz Anwar, the health minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, told AFP that 44 people had been confirmed dead and over 100 were wounded. A large deployment of police has been sent to the blast site, which is now cordoned off, provincial interim information minister Firoz Shah said, adding that the

Pakistan Armed Forces have also been sent to the area.

According to Shah, the number of people injured in the blast exceeds 200. Witnesses told news outlet Dawn that more than 500 people had gathered for a JUI-F convention. "As we awaited the arrival of the central leadership, a sudden and loud bang echoed through the venue," 24-year-old JUI-F supporter Sabeeh Ullah, who was injured in the explosion, told NDTV.

An emergency official told Pakistani media that a local JUI-F Party leader died in the blast. A religious conservative party, JUI-F is part of the current government coalition in Pakistan. Provincial police inspector general, Akhtar Hayat Khan, told Geo TV that the blast was the result of a suicide attack.

Health Minister Anwar also said the incident "was a suicide attack, with the bomber detonating himself in close proximity to the stage." Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has strongly condemned the attack, vowing to "eliminate" the perpetrators, which he called "enemies of Pakistan."

The incident came ahead of Pakistani parliamentary elections scheduled for October or November. The nation's parliament was about to dissolve in the coming weeks, and political parties were preparing for an election campaign.

Pakistan has recently seen a sharp increase in terrorist activities. According to a June report by a local think tank, the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies, the first six months of 2023 saw an "alarming" rise in terror and suicide attacks, which claimed the lives of almost 400 people.

In one of the most high-profile attacks, a suicide bomber blew himself up in a mosque inside a police compound in the city of Peshawar, killing more than 80 police officers.

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