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Al Jazeera

Iran commanders killed

10/18/2009

At least six senior commanders of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards are among about 30 people killed in a suicide attack in southeastern Iran.

The suicide bombing, which occurred early on Sunday morning in the city of Pisheen, in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province, wounded another 40 people, according to the state news agency.

General Nourali Shoushtari, the head of the Revolutionary Guards' armed forces, and General Mohammadzadeh, the Guard's commander in Sistan-Baluchestan, were killed.

The attack, the deadliest in Iran in recent years, occurred as officers were preparing to hold a meeting between locals from Shia and Sunni communities.

Ali Larijani, Iran's parliamentary speaker, confirmed the deaths in an address to parliament.

"We express our condolences for their martyrdom ... The intention of the terrorists was definitely to disrupt security in Sistan-Baluchestan province," Larijani said.

West blamed

A Sunni group called Jundallah (Soldiers of God) claimed responsibility for the attack, according to state media.

The group has been accused by Tehran of launching regular attacks in the province and is strongly opposed to the predominantly Shia government.

Mohammad Marandi, an assistant professor at the University of Tehran, told Al Jazeera that officials suspected the group was linked to Saudi Arabia, the US and Britain.

"Iranian officials are very confident that the terrorist group behind the attack was funded by the Saudis and supported by the Americans and the British," he said.

"I think the greatest blow [from this attack] is to any Iranian trust with regards to the Americans.

"On the one hand the Americans are talking about rapprochement and building a new future, yet at the same time we see the Americans supporting groups in [Iran's] Kurdish regions as well as in Sistan-Baluchestan."

But Washington denies involvement with the group and condemned the attack soon after it occurred.

"We condemn this act of terrorism and mourn the loss of innocent lives," Ian Kelly, the US state department spokesman said in a statement.

"Reports of alleged US involvement are completely false."

Past attacks

Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan region borders Pakistan and Afghanistan and has seen several clashes in the past between security forces and Sunni fighters.



Al Jazeera's Nazanine Moshiri, in Tehran, the capital, said: "Just three weeks before [June's] presidential elections there was a big explosion in that area, where 25 people were killed and more than 100 injured.

"The head of Jundallah said that his group carried out the attack.

"The Iranian's say that they are carrying out a duel war against drug traffickers and Jundallah, which they claim is linked to al-Qaeda."

Moshiri said that there was no suggestion that the blast was linked to the recent disputed presidential elections.

"What is common in this area is kidnappings, explosions and clashes between Jundallah and Iranian authorities," she said.

"But what is very interesting is that this meeting that was about to take place was with senior commanders of the Revolutionary Guard. So this was potentially an extremely important meeting."

The Revolutionary Guards is an elite force fiercely loyal to the tenets of the Islamic revolution of 1979.