

Pakistan bombing kills 24

by UPI

LAHORE, Pakistan -- A suicide bomber set off an explosion Thursday outside a courthouse in Lahore, Pakistan's second largest city, killing 24 people, including 21 policemen. Thursday marked the start of the Islamic new year and the eve of the holy month of Muharram for Shiites. Authorities said the attack was targeted at police officers. It is the latest in a series of deadly bombings and attacks that have plagued the country. On Dec. 27, a similar attack killed former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. No group claimed responsibility for the Lahore attack. Police had been stationed near the courthouse ahead of a scheduled anti-government rally by lawyers. The state-run Associated Press of Pakistan reported those killed included three civilians, two police officers, one head constable and 18 constables. It said the attack also injured 64 others who were taken to nearby hospitals. Police official Aftab Ahmad Cheema said authorities had intelligence reports about suicide bombers having entered the Punjab province, of which Lahore is the capital, and that all possible precautions had been taken, the news agency reported. The BBC reported the attack occurred just before noon when the court is at its busiest. Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and caretaker Prime Minister Mohammad Mian Soomro condemned the attack and vowed to continue the fight against terrorism and extremism. A CNN report said that just in the past three months there have been 20 suicide bomb attacks in Pakistan, which killed 400 people and wounded about 1,000 more. Analysts blame the attacks on pro-Taliban militants with ties to al-Qaida.

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