

## Terrorists Pile The Pressure On Musharraf

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By Ahmed Rashid in Lahore

An attempt to assassinate a senior Pakistani army commander by terrorists yesterday left 10 soldiers and policemen dead, the latest in a wave of attacks to have destabilised the country.

The growing list of bloody engagements with Islamic militants has provoked increasing public anger against the military and President Pervaiz Musharraf who has been preoccupied with attempts to dismiss the elected prime minister.

### Police in Karachi at the scene of a bombing

In yesterday's attack, during the morning rush-hour in the port city of Karachi, at least four gunmen on motorcycles tried to kill the Karachi's corps commander, Lt-Gen Ahsan Saleem Hayat. The general's driver was one of six soldiers and three policemen killed. The other victim was a civilian.

Some of the dead were hit more than a dozen times in an intense gun battle and windows in shops and houses were shattered by gunfire and explosions.

Gen Hayat is one of nine corps commanders, and Karachi is one of the army's key commands. The attack coincided with a renewed upsurge of fighting in the wild tribal borderlands close to Afghanistan.

On Wednesday, militants in the Waziristan region attacked Pakistani army positions, killing about 15 soldiers. In a day-long battle, the army responded with helicopter gunships and heavy artillery, killing 20 militants, including some Uzbeks and Chechens. The fighting was continuing yesterday.

Pakistan has said up to 600 foreign fighters, including Arabs, Chechens and Uzbeks linked to al-Qa'eda, have been hiding out in the tribal areas, protected by local tribesmen.

No group said it was responsible for the Karachi attack but police said it was part of the battle against terrorist groups, including al-Qa'eda and their local sympathisers. "We will have to strengthen our intelligence network," said Rehmatullah Khan, Karachi's mayor .

In the past month in Karachi nearly 60 people have been killed in two suicide attacks by Sunni extremists on Shia mosques, a double car bomb attack on the US consul-general's home and the assassination of a senior Sunni cleric which led to three days of rioting.

The insurgency in the tribal areas is also worrying for the government. After 60 soldiers were killed in a confrontation with some 500 militants in March, the army has been trying to placate the militants with promises of amnesty and forgiveness - much to the chagrin of US military forces based a few miles across the border in Afghanistan, who are trying to halt al-Qa'eda and Taliban attacks from Waziristan.

In Quetta, the capital of the western province of Baluchistan, senior government officials say there is low-level insurgency by several groups of Baluchi nationalists, who are angered by the lack of attention and development by the government to their province.

Baluchi leaders are also incensed that Gen Musharraf appears to be on the verge of sacking his prime minister, Zafrullah Khan Jamali, a Baluchi tribal chief who as Gen Musharraf's nominee, was elected by parliament after the 2002 general election.

Senior generals say they are frustrated with Mr Jamali's failure to provide "good governance" and the corruption of some of his family members.