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Devotees killed in Kashmir attack



A grenade explosion in Indian-administered Kashmir has killed five people, including a politician, and wounded 46 others, police say.

Suspected militants threw the grenade at a crowd of devotees gathered near a shrine in Kulgam, some 60km (37 miles) south of the summer capital, Srinagar.

Former state junior minister Sakina Itoo, who was walking to the shrine, was injured in the attack.

No-one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Former legislator Ghulam Nabi Dar, who belonged to the main opposition National Conference party, was killed in the attack, the police said.

Senior police official Soyam Pani told the BBC that Ms Itoo had received a splinter in the leg and was out of danger.

He said the militants threw a grenade when the former junior minister was walking towards the shrine.

More than 60,000 people have been killed since 1989, when an armed separatist insurgency began in Indian-administered Kashmir. Published in the 16-30 Nov 2004 print edition of MG; [send me the print edition](#)



Former National Conference minister Sakina Itoo leads demonstration in Srinagar on 3 Nov. 04 for probe into an alleged rape by soldiers



Minister for Tourism, Miss Sakina Itoo participating in the Navratra festival at Katra on Wednesday.



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Unfazed by blasts, Sakina Itoo battles bravely

Friday, September 27 2002 11:30 Hrs (IST)

Srinagar: Sakina Itoo, Kashmir's leading female politician, never thought she would drop out of college to join government. And she never thought that she would be Islamic rebels' top target for assassination.

The 30-year-old Itoo, the only woman in the Jammu and Kashmir Cabinet, has already survived four attempts on her life since launching her re-election campaign earlier this month.

The Tourism Minister's seat in Noorabad is in the Southern Anantnag district, which goes to the polls October 1 with three other districts in the third of four rounds to elect the 87-member state Legislature.

Itoo has had two miraculous escapes in mine explosions that targetted her official motorcades. Two security officers and two civilians were killed in the blasts.

Her house has also been attacked twice, injuring four people inside. She was not at home during either assault.

Itoo said she was puzzled as to why she was a top target of Islamic militants, who have vowed to disrupt the election.

"I really don't know why they are only targetting me. There are many others campaigning in this area," she said.

The first attack on her motorcade was claimed by a little-known militant group called Lashkar-e-Jabbar. The second was claimed by Hizbul Mujahideen.

"Our target was not Itoo but her security escort," a Hizbul spokesman told reporters after the September 21 mine attack.

The attacks have, unsurprisingly, scared Itoo, people close to her said. Her house has been fortified, with visitors allowed entry only after a thorough frisking by security forces.

The attacks bring back bad memories for Itoo, whose father Wali Mohammad Itoo, the Speaker of the state Legislature, was assassinated by suspected militants in 1994 in Jammu.

Itoo had planned to become a doctor, but after the assassination she was thrust into politics. She has no brothers, who would have been more likely choices for office in male-dominated Kashmir.

The state's ruling National Conference party fielded her as a candidate in the 1996 Assembly polls.



Saturday, September 28, 2002

Sakina unfazed by militants' threat

Aditi Tandon

Tribune News Service

Noorabad (Anantnag), September 27

Perceiving heavy threat from militants, the security agencies in the Noorabad Assembly segment of Anantnag district today refused entry to vehicles beyond a certain point. The BSF company posted at Damal Hanjipora security camp has disallowed the movement of vehicles beyond the camp area. The forces in Noorabad have long been on the state of high alert to counter imminent threat to NC's Tourism Minister, Ms Sakina Itoo, who lives in Damal Hanjipora.

Itoo has already survived four attacks. Twice a grenade was hurled outside her house, now being guarded by a full CRPF company. Also, the security camp in Damal Hanjipora, comprising one BSF and one RR company, is just a km away from Ms Itoo's residence.

Officials informed that the area beyond the security camp in Damal had

been declared a hard target, following suspected movement of militants. Even a Congress cavalcade moving towards interior Noorabad for campaigning was sent back today. Personnel on duty said the orders to send back anyone proceeding towards Noorabad had been received from the top. "This is being done in the wake of suspected movement of hardcore militants in villages of Noorabad segment, especially in Damal Hanjipora. We are cautioning everyone. Whosoever enters will do so at their own risk", said a security personnel.

It was also learnt that the militants had been moving around in villages, warning people against cutting the corn produce, which they use for hiding. Rued a local, "This is the season for clearing the corn fields, but we have not yet started the work due to militants' threat." No wonder 50,000 voters of this hilly segment with 135 villages get nervous when questioned about voting.

The Tribune team could visit Ms Sakina Itoo's residence only after a senior BSF official granted the "permission to proceed at one's own risk." When contacted, Ms Itoo said that the security situation in Noorabad had never been so bad. She said the militants wanted to repeat the history by eliminating her. In 1994 they killed her father Wali Mohammad Itoo, a former state Assembly Speaker. In 2000, they gunned down her paternal uncle, who was not even a political activist.

Even after surviving two IED blasts and two grenade attacks, Sakina has not stopped campaigning for the third phase. She said, "There is no going back on the political commitment. I have come very far and I know I will go farther." After the killing of her father, Sakina quit the MBBS course she was pursuing in Bhopal to join politics. In 1996, she contested from Noorabad, defeating her nearest JD rival by a margin of 5059 votes. This time she faces a tough contest from Abdul Aziz Zargar, a former NC minister, who joined the PDP after being refused NC mandate from Noorabad. Also in fray are candidates of the INC, the CPI, the

CPM, the BJP and the Awami League.