

Explosion kills 11 in Iranian mosque

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TEHRAN, Iran—Iranian officials on Sunday ruled out an attack as the cause of an explosion that killed 11 people inside a mosque in the southern city of Shiraz.

The explosion ripped through the mosque packed with hundreds of worshippers late Saturday as a cleric delivered his weekly speech against extremist Wahabi beliefs and the outlawed Bahai faith, the semiofficial Fars news agency said.

Authorities said besides the 11 killed, 191 people were wounded, some of them critically, the state IRNA news agency reported.

On Sunday, the deputy interior minister in charge of security, Abbas Mohtaj, said the explosion was "the result of an accident." He didn't elaborate.

The police chief of the southern Fars Province, Gen. Ali Moayyedi, said he "rejects" the possibility of an intentional bombing and "any sort of insurgency" in the blast.

Moayyedi, in comments carried by state IRNA news agency, said the initial investigation found remnants of ammunition from a military exhibition that was held recently at the mosque.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini said Sunday that no group has claimed responsibility for the explosion.

Earlier, the Fars agency quoted a local police official as saying a homemade bomb had caused the explosion and indicated the attack could be religiously motivated. But the agency backed off those speculations on Sunday.

A witness to the blast, Mostafa Nazari, told The Associated Press that some 1,000 worshippers had gathered at the mosque grounds to hear a cleric speak. He said it was fortunate the blast happened at a part of the building far from the podium, around which most of the audience had crowded.

Shiraz, some 700 kilometres south of Tehran and the capital of Fars province, is a major draw for foreign tourists who come to see the ruins of nearby Persepolis, the capital of ancient Persia.