

HERO DIES SHIELDING GRENADE ATTACK FROM FELLOW WORSHIPERS

Amir Mashood, 38, of Model Town, Lahore, along with his brother Nasir Mahmood, 39, were inside Darul Zikr mosque during yesterdays terrorist attacks. Amir said, "around 1.40pm gunshots and bomb blasts were heard outside the mosque". Someone outside shouted for a doctor at which point Doctor Anwar went out to offer assistance. Amir says "The sound of gunfire continued and began getting louder". The Imam then announced all worshipers to come into the mosque and seal the doors. The gunmen then began firing through the windows and broke through the mihrab doors as they were being closed. Three gunmen entered the front of the hall and opened fire. The front lines of worshipers included many elders of the mosque were killed immediately; the imam fell, but miraculously survived. Worshipers began fleeing out of the back of the mosque with many heading towards the basement and the Imam's house. Amir said, "It was difficult for us to approach them because the third gunmen was giving constant covering fire as the first two [gunmen] hurled grenades at us. They were shouting "Allah-o-Akbar" as they moved forward". The gunmen pursued and shot all those that were fleeing before returning to the mosque. Amir stated, "the gunmen had a good knowledge of the layout of the mosque and knew exactly where to go. They would then return to the hall and shoot again at anyone that continued showings signs of life". Amir added, "I remained motionless in a corner surrounded by dead bodies and watched on helplessly as the gunmen would continue shooting people as they ran out; I could see some gunmen going up the minaret and then returning a few minutes after". Most of the remaining people within the mosque had been killed. One helpless, elderly, frail worshiper too weak to escape, hid behind a pillar and was reciting the words "Ya Hafeezu" (meaning "O Protector"), but the gunman showed no mercy and shot dead the man in the head at close range. A hand grenade was also hurled in the direction of where Amir lay hiding resulting in his foot being severely damaged. Amir called his brother Nasir who confirmed he was safe and hiding under the staircase outside. That was the last conversation Amir had with his brother. Around 4.00pm, two of the attackers blew themselves up outside the mosque and it was only until around 5.00pm that Police officers could be heard. The Police shouted in Punjabi "Saray murghay hoon key khoi zinda veh hain?", translated as "Are you all dead or is anyone still alive?". Amir shouted "I'm still alive" and was helped out by the rescue teams. Only one other person also replied. "As we were helped out, all other bodies in the mosque remained motionless and covered in blood". Amir tried to find his brother Nasir but learnt that he had died as he carried away a hand grenade which was hurled towards people seeking shelter under the staircase. Nasir had shielded the grenade blast from others by firmly holding it close to his body. Nasir had sacrificed his life in order to protect many other lives. Amir later found the body of his brother with his hands and face severely burnt. Nasir Mahmood, 38, leaves behind a widow and three sons aged, 6, 9 and 12. Both Amir and Nasir were vice-presidents (Naib Qiads) of the Ahmadi youth association and were respected members of the community. Amir said "I am proud and honoured that my brother has become a martyr but may God give me the strength to take care of his three young sons". Amir asked for Hazoor and all members of the community to remember his family in their prayers.