

Eight Pakistan troops killed in suicide attack: military

AFP – Eight Pakistani troops were killed when a suicide bomber rammed an explosive-packed vehicle into an army enclave, the military said Tuesday, with one local official saying scores of people had been wounded.

The attack in the western city of Bannu comes weeks after Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced a sweeping new campaign to root out militant groups, following a surge in attacks.

The army said early Monday that 10 militants had tried to breach an area housing military facilities, armed forces staff and their families but were thwarted.

They then rammed an “explosive laden vehicle into perimeter wall”, blasting through it and damaging an adjoining building – killing eight soldiers and paramilitary troops.

All 10 militants were killed in the ensuing battle, the military said, giving no indication of the number of wounded.

However, a senior local government official told AFP that 141 people had been injured after five fighters wearing suicide vests “infiltrated the residential area”.

They fought running battles with guns and rocket-propelled grenades for 26 hours, the official said on condition of anonymity.

The area was cordoned off on Monday and the attack was claimed by militant group Jaish-e-Furassan Muhammad, who said in a statement “significant damage was inflicted”.

Bannu, in the border province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is 40 kilometres (25 miles) from Afghanistan.

The military public relations wing said the parent group of Jaish-e-Furassan Muhammad “operates from Afghanistan and has used Afghan soil to orchestrate acts of terrorism inside Pakistan in the past”.

Since the Taliban’s return to power three years ago, Pakistan’s border regions have seen a dramatic uptick in militant attacks.

Last year saw casualties hit a six-year high, with more than 1,500 civilians, security forces and militants killed, according to the Islamabad-based Center for Research and Security Studies.

Sharif announced in June a sweeping counter-insurgency campaign titled “Resolve for Stability” to quash the rising attacks.

Islamabad accuses Kabul’s new rulers of failing to root out militants sheltering on Afghan soil as they prepare to stage assaults on Pakistan.

The Taliban government insists it will not allow foreign militant outfits to operate from Afghanistan, but Islamabad-Kabul relations have soured over the issue.

AFP