Pakistani separatists kill 25 in railway station blast

AFP –A bombing claimed by Pakistani separatists killed 25 people including 14 soldiers at a railway station in the southwestern Balochistan province, police said Saturday.
The blast hit as passengers waited on a platform at the main railway station in the provincial capital Quetta.

“Fourteen army personnel are among the 25 confirmed dead,” said Muhammad Baloch, a senior local police official, raising an earlier toll of 22 provided by the local government.

An AFP journalist saw pools of blood and ripped backpacks at the scene, where a large metal sheet protecting passengers from the elements had been blown off.

A spokesperson for a local hospital said dozens of people wounded in the blast had been brought to the facility, along with multiple dead.

Despite frequent attacks in Balochistan the toll of Saturday’s blast was particularly high for the southwestern province, which borders Afghanistan and Iran.

The train station explosion hit at around 8:45 am (0345 GMT) and was claimed by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), one of the area’s main separatist groups.

The attack “was carried out on a Pakistani army unit at Quetta railway station… after completing a course at the Infantry School,” the BLA said in a statement.

The Associated Press of Pakistan, the official news agency, cited railway officials as saying the blast happened near the ticket booth when two trains were scheduled to depart.

– Resource-rich, poor province –

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif condemned the attack.

“The terrorists who have harmed innocent and unmarked civilians will pay a heavy price,” he said in a statement from his office.

The BLA frequently claims deadly attacks against security forces or Pakistanis from other provinces, notably Punjabis.

At Quetta station, police said they were working to determine the cause of the blast.

“When we reached here, initially it appeared that some explosive had perhaps been hidden or left in the luggage. But now we think it may be a suicide bomber,” Baloch told journalists.

Firefighters, rescuers and passengers were working through abandoned luggage on the platform, guarded by heavily armed members of the security forces.

Militants have in the past targeted energy projects with foreign financing – most notably from China – accusing outsiders of exploiting the resource-rich region while excluding residents in the poorest part of Pakistan.

In August, the BLA claimed responsibility for coordinated attacks by dozens of assailants who killed at least 39 people, one of the highest tolls to hit the region.

AFP