Pakistani Taliban claim deadly suicide attack in Islamabad

AFP:: The Pakistani Taliban claimed a suicide bombing that killed at least 12 people in Islamabad on Tuesday, a rare attack by the militant group on the country's capital.

The first such attack to hit the city in years sent people fleeing in panic, leaving shattered glass and charred vehicles on the road outside district court buildings.

"Judges, lawyers and officials who carried out rulings under Pakistan's un-Islamic laws were targeted," the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) said, threatening more attacks until Islamic law is implemented in the Muslim-majority country.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi said 12 people were killed and 27 wounded when the assailant detonated explosives near a police vehicle.

A lawyer at the scene, Mohammed Shahzad Butt, said there was a "massive blast".

"Everyone started running inside out of panic. I have seen at least five dead bodies lying at the front gate," he told AFP.

An AFP journalist saw paramilitary troops cordoning off the site of the attack, which struck an area that also houses several government offices.

Rustam Malik, another lawyer, told AFP he "heard a loud bang at the gate" as he was entering the complex.

"It was complete chaos, lawyers and people were running inside the complex. I saw two dead bodies lying on the gate and several cars were on fire," said Malik.

The bombing follows the Indian capital Delhi being hit by a car explosion Monday, which killed at least eight people.

The prime minister of Pakistan, Shehbaz Sharif, earlier accused the TTP and separatists from the country's Balochistan region, both of whom have carried out attacks mostly on security forces.

Islamabad has largely been spared major militant violence in recent years, with the last suicide attack occurring in December 2022.

— Cross-border violence —

But the country is facing a resurgence of attacks, which officials attribute mainly to armed groups allegedly sheltered on Afghan soil.

The bombing came as Pakistani security forces battled militants who had holed up in a school in northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Wana district, near the Afghan border.

"There was an attack in Wana as well last night," Naqvi said. "Three people died in that attack. The attacker involved in that attack is an Afghan. Afghanistan is directly involved in that attack."

Recent attacks prompted a bloody clash between Pakistan and Afghanistan in October, their worst fighting across their border in years.

More than 70 people were killed on both sides, including about 50 Afghan civilians, according to the United Nations.

The two countries agreed to a fragile ceasefire, but failed to finalise its details during several rounds of negotiations that collapsed last week. Each side blamed the other for the impasse.

Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said the Islamabad

suicide attack should be seen as “a wake-up call”.

“In this environment, it would be futile to hold out greater hope for successful negotiations with the rulers of Kabul,” he wrote on X.

Islamabad accuses Kabul of sheltering the Pakistani Taliban and other militant groups that launch attacks across a long, porous border, which the Afghan government denies.

AFP