



(From L to R) Pakistani policemen and onlookers gather as a cloud of smoke and flames billow from the burning Marriott hotel following a powerful bomb blast in Islamabad on Saturday. At least 53 people were killed in a massive bomb blast at the hotel; Pak policemen stand by a huge crater left by the bomb blast; Pak employees collect documents at the reception of the devastated hotel; a Pakistani volunteer helps an injured blast victim outside the hotel; Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani consoles a suicide attack survivor receiving treatment at a hospital in Islamabad.

Cancer of terrorism will be eliminated: Zardari

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari on Sunday called terrorism a cancer that the government is determined to eliminate after a suicide attack on the Marriott Hotel killed at least 53 people.

"Terrorism is a cancer in Pakistan, we are determined, God willing, we will rid the country of this cancer," Zardari said in a televised address to the nation, hours after the attack in the heart of the capital Islamabad.

"We will not be deterred by these cowards, Pakistanis are brave and fearless people, they are not afraid of death," he said.

"I promise you that such actions by these cowards will not lower our

resolve," he said.

"I appeal to all democratic forces to come and save Pakistan," he said.

The massive truck bomb appeared to be timed to cause the maximum number of casualties, coming as the hotel was thronged with families holding their evening meal to break the daily Ramadan fast.

"It was a day of festivity and celebration for democracy and the entire nation, but these cowards turned our jubilation into grief," he said.

Zardari, who faces a struggle to rein in al-Qaeda and Taliban militants, delivered his inaugural address to parliament just hours before the bombing and only a few hundred metres away from the hotel.

Zardari, who took office earlier this month, vowed in his parliamentary speech to "root out terrorism and extremism wherever and whenever they may rear their ugly heads."

In his televised address later, he assured families of those killed in the blast that the government would support them.

"All those who embraced martyrdom were our brothers and children. I ask all those sisters who lost their brothers, and mothers who lost their sons to be patient, because these people died with their boots on."

"They were martyred for this country and we will always remember them and support their families," he said.

Pak govt offers Rs 1cr for hotel blast info

CNN-IBN, New Delhi

Pakistan government has announced it would reward Rs 1 crore to whoever provides information about a powerful blast outside a five-star hotel in the heart of Islamabad, which killed at least 53 and injured hundreds on Saturday.

A major portion of the heavily-guarded Marriott Hotel was gutted after a suicide bomber drove a truck loaded with about 1000 kg of explosives straight into the first checkpoint of the hotel. The explosion left a 20-foot-deep crater at the entrance.

In a televised national address, newly elected Pakistan president Asif Ali Zardari vowed to carry forward the fight against terror.

"I promise you that such terror attacks will not break our determination. We will protect and rid Pakistan from this menace," he said.

Pakistan's Information Minister Sherry Rehman too has strongly condemned the blast at the Marriott Hotel.

"We do not just condemn this attack but we stand firm in our resolve. We are committed to fighting and rooting out extremism and terrorism in all its colours and extents from the heartlands and soil of Pakistan. If anyone thinks that they can challenge the government or the state by such attacks they are firmly and sadly mistaken," he said.

Initial reports indicate that a terror outfit called Tehreek-e-Taliban carried out the attack, which is being dubbed as the worst in Pakistan's history.

Those injured include many foreign nationals staying at the hotel. Police sources said the dead include three South Koreans, two Saudis and one American.

Pakistan's Sept 11



It was the most horrible bombing in the history of Pakistan. Many people said that it was a 9/11 for Pakistan. The whole country watched the destruction of a five star hotel live on their TV screens.

It was a big security lapse. All the well-informed journalists and politicians in Islamabad already feared this blast on Saturday.

There were extraordinary security measures in the capital. Security forces were vigilant for the whole day. They were checking all the big vehicles entering in the city because there were reports that at least three vehicles filled with explosives have been entered in the city. Ministry of Interior informed Islamabad police in writing many weeks ago that terrorists from the tribal areas will try to hit the parliament very soon by some truck or oil tanker filled with explosives.

It was not possible for any private car to enter on Constitutional Avenue on Saturday. Due to the extra security around parliament house terrorists decided to hit a comparatively soft target in the evening. They waited for the lift when Marriott hotel was fully packed. Security was also loose at that time because most of the security people were busy in lift.

What a pity. Terrorists decided to hit innocent Muslims at the time when they were breaking their fast. There were no VIP's in the hotel. President, prime minister, army chief, all ministers and members of the parliament were present in a dinner inside PM House just few hundred meters away from the blast site. I saw some British diplo-

omats who were injured but I never saw the dead body of any Westerner.

Terrorists killed only the innocent civilians. Most of them were poor security guards and drivers. I was very close to the blast site and reached on the spot in few minutes. By that time only few police constables from the nearby Frontier House and Baluchistan House reached there and they were trying to rescue the drivers killed in their cars parked outside the hotel on Agha Khan Road. There was total black out on Agha Khan Road because all the streetlights were destroyed. I heard some cries coming out from the rubble of Marriott entrance. I rushed there with another journalist colleague.

A badly injured security guard of a private company was lying in the rubble and shouting in Punjabi "stop the truck stop the truck". He was still holding his pistol in his right hand. It took at least 10 minutes to shift him from the blast site to an ambulance. He was definitely an eyewitness but he was not in his senses.

The initial rescue work was started by some police constables and journalists who were helping out only those who were still alive. We ignored the dead bodies because we were short of people. In next 15 minutes lot of hotel occupants came out from back door. Most of them were injured by broken glasses. I realised that most of the people killed in the blast were standing outside the hotel building and they were poor people who never enjoyed their last meal properly.

I also helped one poor driver Maqsood who was lying injured in his corolla parked outside the hotel. Blood was coming out from

his head but he requested me for a phone call. I gave him my mobile phone. He called someone and said that "I am Maqsood. I am badly injured in bomb blast, I don't think I will come back to Sargodha alive on this Eid. Please take care of my daughter Mariam, please don't inform my mother what happened to me because she will die, I cannot speak more, Goodbye".

Poor Maqsood was shifted to an ambulance in a very bad condition. A journalist friend of mine was getting mad after watching human sufferings. He was abusing the terrorists and saying that "Americans are killing us in the tribal areas, these Taliban killing us in Islamabad, they are two different faces of the same coin, they will not go to paradise they will go to hell".

I don't have the words to express the pain and agony of those women and children who were injured inside the hotel. One woman with her little daughter was not ready to leave the Nadia Coffee shop where the dead body of her husband was lying on a table. The little girl was crying that "papa I am sorry, I forced you to come to this hotel, I am sorry papa, please wake up papa". The papa was not responding.

One cannot ignore the timing of the blast. There was a suicide bombing on September 6 in Peshawar on the occasion of the presidential election. Right after two weeks new president addressed the joint session of the parliament and warned in clear words that his government is committed to wipe out the terrorism from Pakistan. Just few hours after his address President Zardari heard the big bang just few hundred meters away from him, the terrorists gave a response to President Zardari that they are very close to him and he

cannot wipe them out.

Saturday suicide bombing is an alarm bell for the whole Pakistani nation. All the political parties inside the parliament and outside the parliament must sit across the table and try to find out the solution of these growing phenomena of suicide bombings in Pakistan.

Unfortunately the ruling elite have lot of misunderstandings about each other. Some important political figures in the ruling coalition want transparency in the war against terrorism in the tribal areas, they want media access to the areas where military operations are going on, they want answers of some very important questions but non-political players think that nobody should ask questions.

They must create an understanding. They must condemn terrorism not only in the capital of Pakistan but they should also condemn and stop the human sufferings of civilians in the tribal areas. We in the big cities watch bombings twice or thrice a year and now we have declared that Saturday bombing in Islamabad was 9/11 for Pakistan but we don't know how many 9/11's already took place in the tribal areas.

Our tribals are suffering from this kind of destruction everyday. It is now the responsibility of the parliament to discuss the whole situation in detail and decide the ownership of the war against terror. No doubt that these suicide bombers killing innocent Muslims are our enemies but there is also a fact that President Zardari owned the war against terror in his Saturday address but majority of the Pakistanis are not ready to own this war against terror. Parliament must decide that whose war we are fighting.

Islamabad Marriott: A luxury oasis in a troubled city

AFP, Islamabad

The Marriott Hotel was an oasis of calm for diplomats and politicians in Pakistan's capital, but its status as a symbol of Western capitalism made it a repeated target for Islamic militants.

The heavily-guarded hotel, just hundreds of metres (yards) from parliament and the presidency, was left a smoking ruin after a huge suicide truck bombing at the gates of the building on Saturday killed at least 53 people.

Marriott outlets have been hit by extremist violence before -- a suicide bombing at the JW Marriott in Jakarta in 2003 killing 12 people -- but the Islamabad attack was the deadliest yet on the US-based chain.

Bomber had 2 targets: 'Direct and optional'

PTI, Islamabad

The suicide bomber, who struck at the luxury Marriott hotel here killing 53 people, had probably intended to attack Pakistan's Parliament during President Asif Ali Zardari's maiden address there but switched to the 'optional' target after failing to enter the high-security area, officials said.

Rehman Malik, the Prime Minister's Adviser on Interior Affairs, told reporters that authorities had received intelligence reports on Thursday that "some big suicide attempt" would be made on Parliament during Zardari's address yesterday.

Malik said he and the Interior Ministry experts believed the truck

used in the attack tried to enter Islamabad's "red zone" a high security area in which Parliament, Supreme Court, presidency and Prime Minister's House are located at the time of Zardari's speech.

Strict security arrangements put in place along the Constitution Avenue, the central boulevard on which Parliament is located, and orders barring the entry of private vehicles prevented the suicide attacker from entering the area, he said.

Malik said the attacker had two targets, "one direct and one optional", and decided to strike at the Marriott -- which was earlier also targeted by a suicide bomber in January 2007 -- after failing to attack the Parliament house.

News Analysis

Hotel attack warning to Pakistan, US

AFP, Islamabad

The bombing of the Islamabad Marriott is a warning by al-Qaeda and the Taliban that Pakistan and US attempts to eradicate militant hideouts will be met with unprecedented bloodshed, analysts say.

There has been no claim of responsibility for Saturday's attack, which killed at least 53 people and left the luxury hotel in flames, but security officials pointed the finger at the allied Islamist extremist groups.

The militants are under pressure from a Pakistani offensive near the Afghan border and from a rash of US missile strikes, but the

Marriott blast will put the fragile Pakistani government's willpower to the test.

"The attack is a message from al-Qaeda and Taliban that unless Pakistan and America stop attacking their sanctuaries in the tribal areas, they can hit back in Pakistan if not the United States," analyst Hasan Askari told AFP.

Hundreds of militants have been killed in recent weeks the lawless tribal region of Bajaur and in the scenic Swat Valley, until last year a popular tourist destination for its mountains and Buddhist ruins.

The offensives had caused "unnerving damage" to the mili-

tants and made them "furious", said Askari, who teaches at Johns Hopkins University in the United States.

Osama Bin Laden's deputy Ayman Al-Zawahiri, who narrowly escaped a US missile strike in Bajaur in 2006, is known to have a network in the region, while bin Laden himself is believed to be somewhere in the border zone.

But analysts said they expected the militants to intensify their efforts to fight back, mainly by exploiting the economic and political problems of the new civilian government -- as well as a growing rift with the United States.

The Marriott has long been a symbolic target for attacks by Islamist extremists, drawn by the fact that it is the capital's main meeting place for western diplomats and the Pakistani elite.

A security official said the attack bore the hallmarks of al-Qaeda and had similarities to the bombing of the Pakistani federal investigation agency headquarters in the eastern city of Lahore earlier this year.

US-allied President Asif Ali Zardari, who made his maiden address to parliament just hours before the blast, vowed after the attack that the government would fight the "cancer" of terrorism.

World deplores 'disgraceful' blast

AFP, Paris

Western powers condemned the "disgraceful" attack Saturday on an Islamabad hotel that killed at least 53 people, voicing their resolve to support Pakistan in the fight against violent extremism.

Swift condemnation came from Washington, where the White House said the attack in Pakistan was yet another wake-up call about the global threat from extremism.

"This is a reminder of the threat we all face," said national security council spokesman Gordon Johndroe in a statement.

"The United States will stand with Pakistan's democratically elected government as they con-

front this challenge," he added.

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband said: "This latest bombing attack in Islamabad is yet another shocking and disgraceful attack without justification."

It should be deplored by the entire international community, he added.

Police in Pakistan said that a suicide bomber detonated a truck packed with explosives, killing at least 53 people and injuring some 200 others, at the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad.

The attack came just hours after the country's new president, Asif Ali Zardari, delivered his first address to parliament, only a few hundred metres (yards) away.

The president is due to meet US

President George W. Bush in New York next week.

The European Union joined in expressing support for Pakistan, which has long grappled with extremism from al-Qaeda and Taliban militants, especially in the tribal areas along the border with Afghanistan.

"At this difficult time, the Presidency of the Council of the European Union addresses a message of solidarity to the Pakistani authorities, and stands more than ever with them in their fight against terrorism," the presidency, currently held by France, said in a statement from Brussels.

Spain and Italy also issued statements.

Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero extended his "deepest condolences to the families of the victims of this bloody attack", said a foreign ministry statement.

He expressed his solidarity "in these difficult moments" with the Pakistani people and their government, it added.

Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini "firmly condemned" the attack.

Democratic White House hopeful Barack Obama said the attack "demonstrates the grave and urgent threat that al-Qaeda and its affiliates pose to the United States, to Pakistan, and to the security of all nations."

World leaders gather for annual UNGA meeting

AFP, United Nations

World leaders converge here Tuesday for their annual UN summit in an atmosphere clouded by lingering US-Russian tensions over Georgia and global economic woes that threaten to further set back the fight against poverty.

More than 120 heads of state or government are to attend the week-long general debate of the UN General Assembly's 63rd session to tackle issues that include the crisis in Georgia, Iran's nuclear quest, food security, Darfur genocide charges against Sudan's president, Middle East peace and Kosovo independence.

UN chief Ban Ki-moon will open the assembly debate proper Tuesday, but all eyes will be that day on George W. Bush, who will address the Assembly for the last time as US president.

Bush is expected to urge Russia to honor its commitment to fully

withdraw its troops from Georgia. French President Nicolas Sarkozy, whose country holds the rotating European Union presidency and who brokered the Georgia-Russia truce deal, will speak shortly afterward.

The fallout from Russia's rout of Georgian forces in the breakaway enclaves of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in August will also figure in bilateral meetings between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Western leaders.

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili himself is to take the floor Tuesday afternoon and appeal for support in his country's conflict with Russia.

Saakashvili is at loggerheads with Russia after last month's brief war over the Moscow-backed rebel region of South Ossetia, and Moscow's recognition of the two Georgian rebel regions as independent.

Another hot issue will be Iran's dogged refusal to comply with UN

demands that it halt uranium enrichment, seen by the West as a cover to obtain nuclear weapons.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Tuesday will deliver his UN speech in which he is expected to defend his country's right to pursue uranium enrichment.

Foreign ministers of Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States are to meet on Thursday on the sidelines of the debate to weigh prospects for a fourth round of UN sanctions against Iran for its nuclear defiance.

Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence from Belgrade last February is also on the assembly's agenda.

Serbia has said it will submit a draft resolution at the Assembly session demanding an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on whether the move "is in accordance with international law."

37 China miners die from gas inhalation

AFP, Beijing

Thirty-seven miners died from gas inhalation in a coalmine in central China early yesterday, state media said, in the latest disaster to hit the country's notoriously deadly mining industry.

The deaths occurred in the pre-dawn hours in a coalmine near the city of Dengfeng in Henan province, Xinhua news agency said.

The report said 108 miners had been underground at the time of the "gas outburst". Sixty-four of them escaped, and seven others were later rescued.

China's coalmines are among the most dangerous in the world, with safety standards often ignored in the quest for profits and the drive to meet surging demand for coal -- the source of about 70 percent of the country's energy.

Nearly 3,800 people died in Chinese coalmines last year, according to official figures, although independent monitors say the real figure is probably much higher as many accidents are covered up.



Afghan men release doves during a peace march in the streets of Kabul yesterday. A spokesman for Afghanistan's Taliban said the militia would cease attacks on UN Peace Day and would not obstruct a three-day polio vaccination starting Sunday.

'I want to do better' Says Brown at conference

AFP, Manchester

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown admitted yesterday he could do better as he bids to fend off rebels opposed to his leadership at his ruling Labour Party's annual conference.

But he added that voters would not forgive him and his government if it decided to "bail out" of tackling the current economic uncertainty following a week of extraordinary events on world money markets.

Brown, Tony Blair's finance minister for 10 years, argued that he had the "wisdom" and "judgment" to deal with the turmoil, not the main opposition Conservatives who fresh opinion polls Sunday placed well ahead of Labour.

"I want to do better, obviously I always want to do better, my whole ethos, my school motto was 'I will try my utmost', I want to do better always," Brown told BBC television.

"When you have an international financial crisis, I happen to

think I'm better prepared to deal with that than perhaps anyone."

He said he was working with other international leaders including US President George W. Bush in a bid to establish international rules to regulate the financial system more tightly.

Asked whether he would respond to pressure from rebels for a change in leadership, Brown indicated he had no intention of stepping down and quoted 19th century British author Joseph Conrad.

"The best way to deal with that storm is, he said, facing it, facing it. I think all the Cabinet and the government are of the same mind," he said.

"We would be letting people down if suddenly we walked away and said 'we bail out'. What we do is we keep doing what is right for this country."

Brown faces an uphill struggle during Labour's five-day conference in Manchester, north-west England, which got under way Saturday, that he should hang on to his job.