

Three killed as blast hits mosque in Afghanistan

15 people wounded; ISIS-K suspected

AFP, Jalalabad

At least three people were killed and 15 wounded Friday by a blast at a mosque in Afghanistan's restive Nangarhar province, a hotbed of Islamic State activity, officials said.

The blast -- for which no group has yet claimed responsibility -- underscores one of the many challenges facing the new Taliban regime in Afghanistan, with the UN warning the country is also on the brink of the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

It happened during Friday prayers in Spin Ghar district of the eastern province, near the border with Pakistan.

"I can confirm a blast during Friday prayers inside a mosque in Spin Ghar district. There are casualties and fatalities," a Taliban official told AFP.

Walli Mohammed, a local elder and activist, told AFP a bomb appeared to have been hidden in a loudspeaker near the imam's rostrum.

When the speaker was switched on to sound the azaan -- the call to begin the prayer ritual -- the device detonated, he said.

"So far three killed, 15 wounded," a doctor at the local hospital told AFP.

Local residents suspected that Islamic State-Khorasan (ISIS-K) was responsible for the blast.

Islamic State-Khorasan, the local branch of the jihadist group, first emerged in Nangarhar and was formally recognised by the group's central leadership in 2015.

The group had a relatively small but potent presence in Afghanistan, and was responsible for some of the deadliest attacks in the country of recent years, massacring civilians at mosques, shrines, public squares and even hospitals.

But it failed to hold any territory in the region, suffering huge losses because of Taliban and US-led military operations.

Although both IS and the Taliban are hardline Sunni Islamist militant groups, they differ on the issues of religion and strategy, which has led to fierce fighting between the two.

Since the Taliban's return to power in August, IS has claimed responsibility for a series of bloody attacks, including one at Kabul airport as the US and other countries rushed to evacuate their citizens and Afghan allies from the country.



Palestinian protesters run from tear gas fired by Israeli security forces, during a demonstration against the establishment of Israeli outposts on Palestinian lands, in Beit Dajan, east of Nablus in the occupied West Bank yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

1m Afghan children at risk of dying

Warns WHO as acute malnutrition grips the country hit by temperatures drop

REUTERS, Geneva

Around 3.2 million children are expected to suffer from acute malnutrition in Afghanistan by the end of this year, with 1 million of them at risk of dying as temperatures drop, a World Health Organization spokesperson said yesterday.

Aid agencies have warned of famine as a drought coincides with a failing economy following the withdrawal of Western financial support in the aftermath of a Taliban takeover in August. The health sector has been hit especially hard, with many healthcare workers fleeing due to unpaid salaries.

"It's an uphill battle as starvation grips the country," Margaret Harris told Geneva-based journalists by telephone from the capital Kabul. "The world must not and cannot afford to turn its back on Afghanistan."

Nighttime temperatures are falling below zero degrees Celsius and colder temperatures are expected to make the old and the young more susceptible to other diseases, Harris said. In some places, people are chopping down trees to provide fuel for the hospitals amid widespread



shortages, she added.

Harris did not have numbers for the number of children who had already died from malnutrition but described "wards filled with tiny little children", including with a seven-month old baby whom she described as "smaller than a newborn".

Measles cases are rising in the country and WHO data shows 24,000 clinical cases had so far been reported.

"For malnourished children, measles is a

death sentence. We will see so many more deaths if we don't move on this quickly," Harris said.

On Wednesday, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) said as many as 4,000-5,000 Afghans have been crossing into Iran daily since the Taliban seized Kabul in August and hundreds of thousands more are expected to arrive in the coming winter.

The aid group said as many as 300,000 Afghans have crossed the border since the Taliban victory and it called for more international support for Iran, which is grappling with a deep economic crisis of its own.

"Iran cannot be expected to host so many Afghans with so little support from the international community," NRC Secretary General Jan Egeland said in a statement. "There must be an immediate scale up of aid both inside Afghanistan and in neighbouring countries like Iran, before the deadly winter cold."

The shock victory of the Taliban as the last U.S. troops were preparing to leave Afghanistan, prompted a mass exodus of officials and others connected with the former Western-backed government and other vulnerable Afghans.

MOVE TO END BLASPHEMY PROTESTS

Pakistan takes far-right leader off terrorism watchlist

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

Pakistan has removed far-right leader Saad Rizvi from its terrorism watchlist, paving the way for his release from detention under a deal to end weeks of deadly protests by his followers over alleged blasphemy.

The move on Thursday came a week after the government agreed to free 2,000 detained members of his Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) movement, lifted a ban on the group and agreed to let it contest elections.

In return, the TLP has agreed to shun the politics of violence and withdraw a demand to have France's ambassador expelled over the publication of caricatures of the Prophet Mohammad by a French magazine, negotiators have said.

The TLP took to the streets in mid-October, kicking off weeks of protests

and clashes that killed at least seven policemen, injured dozens on both sides and blocked the country's busiest highway.

At the height of the violence, Prime Minister Imran Khan's government banned the TLP, designated it a terrorist group and arrested Rizvi. A government notification said the TLP chief Saad Rizvi's name was "hereby deleted" from the terrorism watchlist after authorities lifted the ban.

It did not go into further details. But legal experts said a removal from the watchlist would be a legal prerequisite for any release. The TLP, which can mobilise thousands of supporters, was born in 2015 out of a protest campaign to seek the release of a police guard who assassinated a provincial governor in 2011 over his calls to reform blasphemy legislation.

Prepare for emergency steps

India's pollution board orders states as Delhi's smog worsens

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's federal pollution control board yesterday ordered states and local bodies to be in "complete readiness" for emergency measures to tackle New Delhi's worsening smog conditions due to a drop in temperature and wind speeds.

A thick haze of toxic smog hung over the Indian capital, exacerbated by a spike in the burning of crop waste in surrounding farmlands.

It reduced visibility and the Air Quality Index (AQI) hit 470 on a scale of 500, according to the federal pollution control board. This level of pollution means the air will affect healthy people and seriously impact those with existing diseases.

According to the pollution board's "Graded Response Action Plan", air quality remaining "severe" for 48 hours must prompt states and local bodies to impose emergency measures that include shutting down schools, imposing 'odd-even' restrictions on private cars based on their number plates, and stopping all construction.

In a circular late yesterday, the board said the government and private offices should reduce the use of private transport by 30% and advised the city's residents to limit outdoor exposure.

Earlier this week, local authorities had ordered a shutdown of brick kilns, increased the frequency of mechanized cleaning and a crackdown on garbage burning and dust. The concentration of poisonous PM2.5 particulate matter averaged 329 micrograms per cubic meter of air.



PHOTO: AFP

East Timorese take to the streets to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Santa Cruz massacre in Dili yesterday, to remember when Indonesian troops opened fire on a peaceful protest at Santa Cruz Cemetery in 1991 during a memorial service for pro-independence activist Sebastiao Gomes, killing more than 250 people.

Nat'l security 'compromised'

India's Congress leader Rahul Gandhi attacks govt over 'Chinese village in Arunachal'

TOI, New Delhi

India's Congress leader Rahul Gandhi yesterday attacked the Centre citing different takes by the ministry of external affairs and Chief of Defence Staff Bipin Rawat on the issue of Chinese village at the border.

"Our national security is unpardonably compromised because GOI has no strategy and Mr 56" is scared," Rahul tweeted taking a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi using his old "56-inch chest" remark made in the run up to 2014 Lok Sabha polls.

"My thoughts are with the soldiers risking their lives to guard our borders while GOI churns out lies," the Congress leader said in another tweet.

The controversy over Chinese village took centrestage after the US Department of Defence, in a report, said that China built a large village inside disputed territory between its Tibet Autonomous Region and India's Arunachal Pradesh in the eastern sector of the LAC.

In an official reaction to the US report, the external affairs ministry

said India has neither accepted China's "illegal occupation of its territory nor any unjustified Chinese claims".

In a weekly media briefing on Thursday, MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said, "China has undertaken construction activities in the past several years along the border



areas including in the areas that it has illegally occupied over the decades. India has neither accepted such illegal occupation of our territory nor has it accepted the unjustified Chinese claims."

However, an hour later, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Bipin Rawat said the controversy about the Chinese coming into the Indian territory and building a new village is "not true",

and that the villages were well within the Chinese side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

He also asserted that China has not transgressed the Indian "perception" of the LAC.

"The present controversy - that has erupted - that the Chinese have come across into our territory and built a new village is not true," Rawat said at "Times Now Summit 2021."

"But what I wish to come out with is that Chinese are building villages possibly for billeting and locating their civilians or for their military in the future all along the LAC, particularly after the recent face-offs that we have had," the CDS added.

Attacking the government over the issue, Congress leader P Chidambaram said it is time defence minister Rajnath Singh drew a line in his ministry and asked the CDS to remain "well within his side of the LAC."

"It is time for the defence minister to draw a LAC in the defence ministry and ask the CDS to remain well within his side of the LAC," the Congress leader said.

Australian PM Scott Morrison denies lying

Rejects French accusation

AFP, Sydney

Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison denied having ever lied in public life yesterday and said he had the thick skin needed to deal with allegations of dishonesty including from French President Emmanuel Macron.

Asked if he had ever told a lie in public life, Morrison told an interviewer on Melbourne's 3AW radio: "I don't believe I have, no, no."

Macron this month accused the Australian leader of outright lying to him over a multi-billion-dollar submarine contract with Australia, which was scrapped without warning in September.

Macron discovered at the last moment that Australia had secretly negotiated a deal to buy nuclear-powered submarines in talks with the United States and Britain.

"I don't think. I know," Macron said when asked by Australian reporters if Scott Morrison was untruthful in their private dealings.

Former Australian prime minister Malcolm Turnbull, a bitter rival from within the same conservative Liberal Party, added to the controversy by saying Morrison had a reputation for lying.

Morrison's truthfulness has become a major point of debate in Australian politics, and a potential point of weakness as he seeks a second term in elections expected next May.

LANCET STUDY Covaxin 'highly efficacious'

AFP, Paris

Covaxin, the first Covid-19 vaccine developed in India, is "highly efficacious" and presents no safety concerns, according to a study published in the Lancet on Thursday.

Covaxin, developed by Bharat Biotech, gained emergency approval from the World Health Organization last week and has already been cleared for use in 17 countries.

The UN body has described it as "extremely suitable for low- and middle-income countries due to easy storage requirements".

Some of the other approved vaccines must be stored at very low temperatures, which throws up logistical and cost problems.

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Sl No	Tender ID	Brief description of Works	Tender Reference No.	Last date & time of selling	Last date & time of submission
01.	621117	Construction of Ambagan new Mosque complex with other associated works at HSIA, Kurmitola, Dhaka.	30.31.0000.401.14.160.21.342 Date-23-09-2021	08-Dec-2021 14:30	09-Dec-2021 15:00

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(A.H. Md Nuruddin Chowdhury)

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