

Suicide car bombing kills 34 in central Ankara

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Ankara: At least 34 people were killed and 125 others were injured when a suicide car bomb rocked a busy square in central Ankara today.

"The blast was caused by a vehicle packed with explosives close to Kizilay square," an official statement said, adding that the square is a key commercial and transport hub close to the city's embassy area.

A senior government official said that police suspect that Kurdish militants carried out the attack, which occurred on Ankara's main boulevard, close to ministries.

At least one of the bombers was a woman, he said. The official spoke on condition of anonymity on the grounds that the investigation was ongoing.

The bombing was the third in the city in five months and came as Turkey is grappling with a host of issues, including renewed fighting with Kurdish rebels, threats from the Islamic State group and a Syrian refugee crisis.

Earlier Sunday, Turkish authorities said they were imposing curfews on two mainly Kurdish towns where Turkey's security forces were set to launch large-scale operations against Kurdish militants. Russia on Sunday also accused Turkey of sending its military across the Syrian border to prevent Kurdish groups there from consolidating their positions.

The attack came just three weeks after a suicide car bombing in the capital targeted buses carrying military personnel, killing 29 people. A Kurdish militant group which is an offshoot of an outlawed rebel group, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, claimed responsibility for the Feb. 17 attack.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan issued a statement vowing to bring "terrorism to its knees" and said Turkey would use its right to self-defense to prevent future attacks. "Our people should not worry, the struggle against terrorism will for certain end in success and terrorism will be brought to its knees," Erdogan said.

At least 19 of the wounded were in serious condition, Health Minister Mehmet Muezzinoglu told reporters. He said that 30 of the victims died at the scene, while the other four died at hospitals.

Interior Minister Ekan Ala said the attack wouldn't deter the country from its fight against terrorism. He confirmed the blast was the result of a car bomb that targeted civilians at bus stops on Ataturk Bulvari close to Kizilay square.

Ala said authorities had obtained evidence pointing to the group behind the attack, but said an announcement would be made after the investigation is completed, most probably on Monday. No group has claimed responsibility.

The attack drew international condemnation in statements issued by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Russian President Vladimir Putin, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, among others.

US State Department spokesman John Kirby reaffirmed Washington's "strong partnership with our NATO ally Turkey in combating the shared threat of terrorism."

The country has also been struck by several bombings in the last year that were blamed on the Islamic State group

after the government joined U.S.-led efforts to fight the extremist group in Syria. The deadliest came in October when a bombing at a peace rally outside Ankara's main train station killed 102 people.

- AP