

## **41 dead, over 239 injured as blasts rock Istanbul Ataturk Airport, ISIS prime suspect**

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**Istanbul:** The death toll from the suicide attack on Istanbul's Ataturk airport has risen to 41, with over 230 others injured, according to a statement by Istanbul city governor.

The governor's office said 109 out of 239 wounded were discharged from hospital. Thirteen of the dead were foreign nationals.

Turkish official says one Iranian, one Ukrainian are among victims of Istanbul airport attack.

The attack on Europe's third-busiest airport was one of the deadliest in a series of suicide bombings in recent months in Turkey, part of the US-led coalition against ISIS and struggling to contain spillover from neighbouring Syria's war.

Gunshots, screams and explosions pierced the air at Istanbul Ataturk Airport in Turkey as three terrorists armed with bombs and guns went on a rampage killing at least 36 people and injuring over 145 in an attack that has sent shockwaves around the world.

Turkey has suffered several bombings in recent months linked to Kurdish or Islamic State militants. The bombings included two in Istanbul targeting tourists which the authorities have blamed on the Islamic State group

Though there was no immediate claim of responsibility, Prime Minister Binali Yildirim of Turkey said that early indications pointed to an operation carried out by the Islamic State.

This was a horrific act of terror targeting innocent civilians, Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said. It showed once again that terrorism is a global threat and defeating it requires global cooperation. All early indications suggest that the IS was behind the atrocity, but the investigation is ongoing.

The attack began shortly before 10 p.m. Tuesday, Turkish officials said, when two gunmen opened fire with automatic weapons at a security checkpoint outside Istanbul's Ataturk airport, one of Europe's busiest. They then detonated their explosives, setting off two fireballs. A third attacker set off explosives in the parking lot.

With Turkey recently reaching out diplomatically to the Islamic State's sworn enemies Russia and Israel, the jihadist group appears to be trying to punish the country by hitting its already beleaguered tourism industry hard, experts say.

Social networking giant Facebook activated its safety check feature for users after the the suicide attack.

The senior official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with government protocol, at first said close to 50 people had already died, but later said that the figure was expected to rise to close to 50.

CCTV cameras captured the moment one of the attackers was shot by a security officer, but still managed to trigger the massive blast.

Yildirim said that so far all indications point to the Islamic State group being behind the attack. He said the attackers arrived at the airport in a taxi and blew themselves up after opening fire.

Asked whether a fourth attacker might have escaped, he said authorities have no such assessment but are considering every possibility.

The victims included some foreigners, he said, adding that many of the wounded have minor injuries but others are more badly hurt.

### **Survivor account**

An American journalist who was returning from his honeymoon with his wife described seeing the attack.

Three women who were travelling together from Barcelona said they could have been caught in the attacks had they missed their connection in Istanbul.

“We were running from Barcelona, got to Istanbul, got there pretty late, almost missed the flight, got a little nervous about almost missing the flight, and then saw the news on the plane, and you know it...we’re really happy to be home,” one of the women said.

Another Turkish official said two of the attackers detonated explosives at the entrance of the international arrivals terminal after police fired at them, while the third blew himself up in the parking lot.

The official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity in line with government protocol and cited interior ministry information, said none of the attackers managed to get past security checks at the terminal's entrance.

Turkish airports have security checks at both the entrance of terminal buildings and then later before entry to departure gates.

Roads around the airport were sealed off for regular traffic after the attack and several ambulances could be seen driving back and forth. Hundreds of passengers were flooding out of the airport and others were sitting on the grass.

The private DHA news agency said the wounded, among them police officers, were being transferred to Bakirkoy State Hospital.

Turkey has suffered several bombings in recent months linked to Kurdish or Islamic State group militants.

The bombings include two in Istanbul targeting tourists that authorities have blamed on the Islamic State group.

The attacks have increased in scale and frequency, scaring off tourists and hurting the economy, which relies heavily on tourism revenues.

Istanbul's Ataturk airport was the 11th busiest airport in the world last year, with 61.8 million passengers, according to Airports Council International. It is also one of the fastest-growing airports in the world, seeing 9.2 percent more passengers last year than in 2014.

The largest carrier at the airport is Turkish Airlines, which operates a major hub there. Low-cost Turkish carrier Onur Air is the second-largest airline there.

There is no report of any Indian among the dead as of now. Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Vikas Swarup has tweeted a series of emergency numbers for Indians looking for help in Turkey.

The numbers are: +90-530-5671095/8258037/4123625/

The first secretary, Embassy of India, Ankara can also be contacted at 05303142203

- (With inputs from AP)