

Quetta hospital blast: 63 lose battle to life; no claim of responsibility

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Quetta: A suspected suicide bombing at a government-run hospital in the southwestern city of Quetta in Pakistan left at least 63 dead and over 100 fighting the battle of life.

Quetta Blast

The explosion that took place at the main gate of the building housing the emergency ward has not been claimed by any of the terrorist groups till yet.

“The blast occurred after a number of lawyers and some journalists had gathered at the hospital following the death of the president of the Balochistan Bar Association Bilal Anwar Kasi in a separate shooting incident early this morning,” said Balochistan Home Secretary Akbar Harifal.

It is suspected that the attack was carried out by a suicide bomber, Balochistan Home Minister Sarfaraz Bugti told DawnNews.

More than 50 mourners were entering the emergency department of the hospital, accompanying Advocate Kasi's body, when the bomb went off, Faridullah, a journalist who was at the scene, told Reuters.

Several lawyers including the former president of Balochistan Bar Association Baz Mohammad Kakar were reported injured in the explosion and aerial firing could be heard at the premises.

Panic tore through the hospital after the incident and emergency has been declared at hospitals in Quetta.

Video footage showed bodies strewn and pools of blood and shattered glass as shocked survivors cried and comforted one another. Many of the dead appeared to be wearing black suits and ties.

A heavy contingent of Frontier Corps and police arrived and cordoned off the area.

Two unidentified men opened fire at Advocate Kasi's car near Quetta's Mengal Chowk on Manno Jan road as he left his home in the morning for work, police officials said.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and President Mamnoon Hussain strongly condemned the blast and expressed his "deep grief and anguish over the loss of precious human lives" in the attack, in which several senior lawyers were also killed.

"No one will be allowed to disturb the peace in the province that has been restored thanks to the countless sacrifices by the security forces, police and the people of Baluchistan," Sharif said in a statement and asked authorities to maintain vigilance and beef up security in Quetta.

Soon after the incident, provincial Chief Minister Sanaullah Zehri called a high-level meeting to take stock of the

situation.

The provincial government has already announced three-day mourning against the incident during which Pakistan's National Flag will remain at half mast on government buildings.

Social networking site Facebook activated its "safety check" feature after the blast in the provincial capital bordering Iran and Afghanistan.

Following the incident, emergency has been declared in hospitals across Quetta. There were no immediate claims of responsibility for either attack. President Mamnoon Hussain and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif strongly condemned the blast, Radio Pakistan reported.

Targeted killings have become increasingly common in Quetta, the capital of a province that has seen rising violence linked to a separatist insurgency as well as sectarian tensions and rising crime. Quetta has also long been a stronghold of the Afghan Taliban. The motive behind Monday's attacks, however, was unclear.

It was also unknown who was behind the killing of the lawyer, Bilal Kasi, who was gunned down on his way to court earlier in the day.