

Egypt targets terrorist bases in Libya after attack on Coptic Christians kills 28

27/05/2017 06:47 by admin

Cairo: The Egyptian army has launched intensive airstrikes against what it said were militant training bases in Libya after suspected Islamic State militants ambushed a bus that killed 28 Coptic Christians south of Cairo, the army spokesperson said.

Announcing the retaliatory attack, the Egyptian army spokesperson Tamer el-Refae posted a clip, which also included footages of army aircrafts while taking off, on his official Facebook and Twitter pages yesterday.

The army operation is still going on, he said in a statement.

Senior Egyptian officials said fighter jets targeted bases in eastern Libya of the Shura Council, an Islamist militia known to be linked to al-Qaida, not the Islamic State. There was no immediate word on damage or casualties.

Sissi vows retaliatory action

President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi announced the retaliatory action hours after the bus carrying Coptic Christians to a monastery south of Cairo was riddled with machine-gun fire on a remote desert road by suspected Islamic State militants riding in three SUVs.

The masked gunmen attacked a bus and other vehicles taking a group of Coptic Christians to Anba Samuel monastery in the Minya Governorate, 250km south of Cairo, the Ministry of Interior said.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the ambush, which came on the eve of the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

“What you’ve seen today will not go unpunished. An extremely painful strike has been dealt to the bases. Egypt will never hesitate to strike terror bases anywhere,” el-Sissi said in a televised address to the nation.

The airstrikes came after the army gathered information that confirms the terrorists' participation in the attack.

The gunmen were riding in three 4x4 vehicles, it said.

Reports said there had been between eight and 10 attackers who were wearing military uniforms.

According to the Ministry of Health, at least 28 people were killed and dozens others injured in the attack.

'Bloodletting of Christians must end', says Trump

U.S. President Donald Trump, in a sharply worded statement, condemned terrorists who were "engaged in a war against civilization" and decried the "merciless slaughter of Christians in Egypt." He said the attack on a bus carrying Christians, many of them children, would steel the nation's resolve to destroy terrorist organizations and expose "their depraved, twisted and thuggish ideology."

Trump, attending the G-7 meeting in Sicily, said the U.S. would stand with Egyptian President, who vowed to strike back at the training bases of Islamic State militants suspected of waging the attacks. Egyptian fighter jets struck militant bases in eastern Libya.

El-Sissi, in his televised address, said of the U.S. president: "I direct my appeal to President Trump: I trust you, your word and your ability to make fighting global terror your primary task."

Trump said in his statement that the U.S. "makes clear to its friends, allies and partners that the treasured and historic Christian communities of the Middle East must be defended and protected. The bloodletting of Christians must end, and all who aid their killers must be punished."

Attacks on Coptic Christians on rise

The ambush of the bus was the fourth deadly attack against the country's Christians since December. The dead included two little girls, ages 2 and 4, local officials said. Twenty-two others were reported wounded.

The country is still under a three-month state of emergency period following twin attacks on Coptic churches on Palm Sunday last month that killed dozens of people, in attacks claimed by ISIS.

There have been a number of attacks on Copts in the country in recent months claimed by Islamic State militants.

The Minya attack is the latest in a series of deadly attacks on Egypt's Christians, following the Palm Sunday Suicide Bombings.

On April 9, two suicide bombers hit Saint George's Cathedral in Tanta and St Mark's Cathedral in Alexandria, killing and injuring dozens in the deadliest attack against civilians in the country's recent history. A total of 29

people died in the Tanta explosion and 18 in Alexandria.

In December last year, an attack on a Coptic church in Cairo killed 25 people.

Coptic Christians, which make up about 10 per cent of Egypt's 93 million population, have faced persecution in Egypt, which has spiked since the toppling of Hosni Mubarak's regime in 2011.

Christians rallied behind el-Sissi, the former head of Egypt's military, in 2013 when he ousted his Islamist predecessor Mohammed Morsi, who hails from the Muslim Brotherhood. Attacks on Christian homes, businesses and churches subsequently surged.

- (With agencies)