Suicide bomber planning to target Grand Mosque in Mecca injures six pilgrims, Saudi says major a

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Riyadh: Saudi security forces foiled a terror plot targeting the Grand Mosque in the Muslim holy city of Mecca, exchanging gunfire with one of the suspects who blew himself up inside a home Friday, injuring six foreign pilgrims, Saudi Arabia's Interior Ministry said. Five people, including a woman, were arrested Friday in security operations in Mecca, the Saudi-owned Al-Arabiya news website said, citing the security spokesman of the Saudi Interior Ministry, Mansour al-Turki.

Pilgrims at the Grand Mosque in Mecca during the holy month of Ramadan

The Interior Ministry said an attack on the mosque was being planned by three terrorist groups, two based in Mecca and a third in Jeddah.

Al-Arabiya said a suicide bomber hiding in a house in the Ajyad al-Masafi neighborhood of Mecca opened fire on security forces and later blew himself up. Five security force members and six other people were injured, the report said.

Four of the pilgrims have already been released from hospital, Interior Ministry spokesman General Mansour al-Turki said.

The incident took place near the Grand Mosque yesterday, where lakhs of worshippers had gathered for early afternoon prayers on the last Friday of this year's Ramadan.

The Grand Mosque houses Islam's holiest site, the cube-shaped Kaaba that Islam's followers pray toward five times a day.

Turki told Saudi television that police "foiled the terrorist plan that targeted the security of the Grand Mosque, pilgrims and worshippers."

He said that police, in early morning raids, arrested five suspects, including a woman, before surrounding the bomber's location around the Grand Mosque. "Unfortunately he started shooting towards security personnel once he noticed their presence in the area, which led to an exchange of fire before he blew himself up," Turki said.

Six pilgrims were injured after the blast partially collapsed the building.

Saudi Arabia has faced numerous terror attacks since late 2014, mostly claimed by the Islamic State group.

Near the end of Ramadan last year, four security officers died in an explosion close in Medina, close the Prophet's Mosque, Islam's second holiest site. Two other blasts took place in the kingdon on the very same day, one in Jeddah and another in Qatif. A total of seven people were believed killed.

This is the first major incident under the interior minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Nayef, who has replaced his uncle Prince Mohammed bin Nayef. As interior minister, Prince Mohammed led the country's counter-terrorism operations for years. He was deposed as Crown Prince and interior minister on Wednesday.

King Salman's son Prince Mohammed bin Salman is the new crow prince, the first in line as the heir to the throne.

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