Double attacks near NATO HQ in Kabul: 8 journalists, 17 others killed; second suicide bomber hits

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In a statement posted on an IS-affiliated website, the Islamic State group said two of its 'martyrdom seekers' carried out the double bombing, targeting the headquarters of the â€œrenegadeâ€• Afghan intelligence services in Kabul.

At least 25, including two journalists, were killed in the blast which took place in the area which houses NATO headquarters and several emabassies. (AP Photo)

Kabul: A coordinated double suicide bombing by the Islamic State group hit central Kabul on Monday morning, killing at least 25 people, including eight journalists, officials said. An AFP photographer and a cameraman for a local TV station were among the fatalities, the police said.

At least 45 people were wounded in the twin attacks, according to Kabul police spokesman, Hashmat Stanekzai, who also added that four policemen were among those killed.

The attack was the latest in a relentless string of deadly large-scale bombings and assaults that have struck Kabul and elsewhere in Afghanistan so far this year.

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Attack in area which houses NATO headquarters, embassies

The blasts took place in the central Shash Darak area, home to NATO headquarters and a number of embassies and foreign offices â€” as well as the Afghan intelligence service.

Stanekzai, the police spokesman, said the first suicide bomber was on a motorbike. The second explosion was meant to hit those rushing to the scene of the attack to help the victims of the first blast, he added.

The second attacker was on foot, in a crowd of reporters that had rushed to the scene of the first attack, pretending to be one of the media, the spokesman said. The bomber then detonated his explosives while still among the reporters, Stanekzai said, adding that the attacker obviously intentionally targeted the journalists.

At least 45 people were wounded in the twin attacks, Kabul police said. (AP Photo)

Agence France-Presse said the news agencyâ€™s chief photographer in Kabul, Shah Marai, was among those killed. AFP said Marai died in a blast that struck journalists who had rushed to the scene of the earlier suicide attack .

A local media watchdog, the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee, said eight Afghan journalists were killed and six were wounded. The group strongly condemned all attacks against journalists.

Sediqullah Tawhidi, an official form the committee, said a cameraman form the local TOLO TV also was among those

killed. Police officer Jan Agha said all the journalists died in the second blast, which also wounded two police officers.

Mayhem all around

Survivors and witnesses recounted scenes of mayhem.

Jawed Ghulam Sakhi, a 28-year-old a taxi driver said â€œwhen the explosion happened, everywhere was covered with dust and fire, it was so horrific sceneâ€• with bodies and body parts â€œthrown about on the street and the pavement.â€•

â€œI saw journalists covered with blood, this time they targeted the media,â€• Sakhi added.

Masouda, a young woman who was with her husband nearby, assailed the authorities. Her husband was wounded and was taken to the Wazir Akbar Khan hospital.

â€œI donâ€™t know who is responsible for all these attacks, every day we lose our loved ones and no one in this government is taking responsibility for the killing of these innocent people,â€• she said.

Afghan President Asharf Ghani strongly condemned the attacks. The presidential palace released a statement saying that attacks targeting innocent civilians, worshippers inside the mosques, national and democratic processes, reporters and freedom of speech all are war crimes.

Kabul chief of police Dawood Amin said the area that was hit was quickly sealed off and authorities were investigating. Mohammad Mousa Zahir, director of Wazir Akbarkhan Hospital, said several people suffering injuries from the blasts were being treated at the hospital.

In its claim of responsibility, the Afghan affiliate of IS, known as Khorasan Province, said the first martyrdom seeker in the attack detonated his explosive vest near the intelligence service in central Kabul, forcing its members to head to the area of the explosion. The statement said the second attacker detonated his explosive vest after that. The statement, which exaggerated the overall death toll as militant claims often do, did not say that journalists were specifically targeted but exaggerated the attacksâ€™ death toll.

The local IS affiliate and the more firmly established Taliban carry out regular attacks around the country, as well as in Kabul, with the Taliban usually targeting the government and security forces and IS targeting members of the countryâ€™s the Shiite minority, whom the affiliate perceives as apostates.

The relentless assaults underscore the struggles that Afghan security forces have faced to reign in the militant groups since the United States and NATO concluded their combat mission at the end of 2014. Both groups want to establish strict Islamic rule in Afghanistan.

Last week, an Islamic State suicide bomber attacked a voter registration center in Kabul, killing 60 people and wounding at least 130 others. There were 22 women and eight children among the fatalities.

And the month before, an IS suicide bomber targeted a Shiite shrine in Kabul where people had gathered celebrating the Persian new year. That attack killed 31 people and wounded 65 others.

- AP