

## **Death toll from ISIL suicide bombing in Afghanistan climbs to 36**

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### **A wounded man is brought by stretcher into a hospital in Jalalabad city, capital of Nangarhar province, east of Kabul, Afghanistan on Saturday**

**Kabul:** The death toll from a suicide bombing against a gathering of Taliban fighters celebrating a holiday cease-fire in Afghanistan has risen to 36, an official said today.

Najibullah Kamawal, director of the health department in the eastern Nangarhar province, said another 65 people were wounded in Saturday's attack.

The bomber targeted a gathering of fighters who were celebrating a three-day truce coinciding with the Eid al-Fitr holiday. No one immediately claimed the attack, but it was likely carried out by the Islamic State group, which was not included in the cease-fire and has clashed with the Taliban in the past.

After the attack, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani announced a nine-day extension of the cease-fire. There was no immediate word from the Taliban on whether they would observe the extension.

The three-day holiday and cease-fire ends Sunday.

The chairman of the High Peace Council, a government body charged with negotiating an end to the nearly 17-year war, called on the Taliban to accept the extended cease-fire and join the peace process.

"We hope that the extension of the cease-fire will be announced by the leadership of the Taliban," Mohammad Karim Khalili told a press conference in the capital, Kabul. He said there had been an "exchange of views" between the government and the Taliban over the past week, without elaborating.

The Taliban have steadily expanded their presence in recent years, seizing a number of districts across the country and carrying out near-daily attacks on Afghan security forces.

But over the past two days Taliban fighters could be seen celebrating the truce alongside Afghan troops and other people in a number of locations, according to photos and videos posted online that appeared to be authentic.

Taliban leaders have at different times expressed interest in holding peace talks to end the conflict. But they have refused to meet with the U.S.-backed government, saying they will only negotiate with the United States directly. They have also demanded the withdrawal of all foreign forces.

- AP