

## **60 killed as IS militants attack army checkpoints in Egypt**

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**Cairo:** Heavily-armed IS militants in Egypt today launched a wave of simultaneous suicide attacks on army checkpoints in the restive Sinai Peninsula, killing at least 60 soldiers in the biggest assault and triggering a massive retaliatory strike by the military using troops and F-16s.

The coordinated assaults in the morning set off fierce fighting between the army and the militants that is currently ongoing, with soldiers and police chasing the attackers using ground and air force, security sources said.Â

The attacks came just two days after Egypt's general prosecutor Hisham Barakat was killed in a car bomb attack here and a day after President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi vowed to step up a two-year crackdown on militants.Â

Today's attack, which occurred in Sheikh Zuweid city of North Sinai, included suicide car bombings and heavy weapons that damaged large parts of the checkpoints, security sources said. "More than 70 terrorist elements waged simultaneous attacks against five security checkpoints in North Sinai," army spokesperson Brigadier General Mohamed Samir said in a statement on his Facebook page.

Egyptian army F-16 jets and Apache helicopters bombarded IS positions in the town of Sheikh Zuweid, where the militants had taken up positions on rooftops and mined streets leading to the police station.

There were conflicting reports of casualty figures, with the sources saying at least 60 soldiers were killed while Samir put the number of those killed and injured so far much lower.

The toll, however, could not be immediately verified in the aftermath of the major attack. Reports said there were civilian casualties too but no exact figure was available as of presstime.Â

Officials said the militants also took soldiers captive and seized weapons and several armoured vehicles.Â The Islamic State's Egypt affiliate, Sinai Province, claimed responsibility for the attacks, it said in an online statement.

"In a blessed raid enabled by God, the lions of the caliphate have simultaneously attacked more than 15 checkpoints belonging to the apostate army," the Sinai-based militant group Ansar Beit el-Maqdes, which changed its name after pledging allegiance to the IS, said.

The group said it attacked over 15 security sites and had carried out three suicide bombings. The outfit has claimed responsibility of many attacks against security forces in North Sinai.

- PTI