

Peshawar blast death toll rises to 95 as rescue operation ends



Most of those killed in suicide bombing at a Peshawar mosque were police, 52 injured people remain in hospital.

Islamabad, January 31 (RHC)-- A rescue and recovery operation has ended in Pakistan after a suicide bombing at a mosque in the northwestern city of Peshawar killed at least 95 people, most of them police officials. Kashif Aftab Abbasi, senior superintendent of police operations in Peshawar, told Al Jazeera on Tuesday that more than 225 people were also injured in the blast a day earlier.

Fifty-two wounded people remained in hospital, with six in a critical condition, Muhammad Asim, a spokesperson for the Lady Reading Hospital in Peshawar, told Al Jazeera. The vast majority of those killed were police officers, he said.

The suicide bombing caused the roof of the mosque to collapse, and rescuers had to remove mounds of debris to recover many of the bodies, authorities said.

Reporting from Peshawar, Al Jazeera's Kamal Hyder said the operation had largely shifted to recovery. "There has been a ceremonial send-off to those policemen who lost their lives, also funerals taking place across the province, because these policemen came from several districts – so there is mourning across the province," he said.

Meanwhile, questions have grown over how the attacker was able to access the heavily fortified area, which includes the headquarters of the provincial police force and a counterterrorism department, while wearing a suicide vest.

That followed "credible intelligence reports" on January 21 that Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) planned a wave of attacks in Peshawar and the wider Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Hyder reported.

Shortly after the explosion, Omar Mukaram Khorasani, the current head of the Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA), a TTP splinter group and a member of the TTP's leadership council, said his group committed the attack in retaliation for the killing last year of Jamaat-ul-Ahrar former leader, Omar Khalid Khorasani in Afghanistan, according to the Long War Journal and the South Asia Media Research Institute.

Khorasani "took responsibility saying this was a revenge attack for the killing of his brother in Afghanistan, which he blamed on the Pakistani security forces," Hyder said. "This is a splinter group, and they joined the mainstream TTP back in 2020, so definitely a group within the TTP."

Nevertheless, TTP spokesperson Mohammad Khorasani distanced the group from the bombing, saying it was not its policy to target mosques, seminaries and religious places. He added that those taking part in such acts could face punitive action under TTP's policy, but did not address Khorasani's claims.

Ghulam Ali, the provincial governor in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, said an investigation was under way to determine "how the terrorist entered the mosque." "Yes, it was a security lapse," he added.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif visited a hospital in Peshawar on Monday and promised to take "stern action" against those behind the attack. "The sheer scale of the human tragedy is unimaginable. This is no less than an attack on Pakistan," he tweeted. He expressed his condolences to the families of the victims, saying their pain "cannot be described in words".

Pakistan has seen a surge in attacks since November when the TTP ended a ceasefire with the government.

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