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## Afghan Taliban launches fresh offensive to reduce gov't pressure in Kunduz province

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Taliban militants who have lost ground in the northern Kunduz province amid government forces mounting pressure, launched major offensive in Baghlan-e-Markazi district of the neighboring Baghlan province on Tuesday to reduce stress on fighters in Kunduz, local observers said.

The surprise and multi-pronged attacks which began at 03:00 a.m. local time Tuesday, according to local media reports, have enabled Taliban fighters to get closer to Police Department of Baghlan-e-Markazi district.

However, Baghlan police spokesman Zabihullah Shuja in talks with media confirmed the clash, but claimed that so far 16 Taliban insurgents have been killed and 27 others injured.

He also said the government forces have been chasing Taliban militants to ensure lasting peace and security in Baghlan-e-Markazi and adjoining areas.

Meanwhile, locals said the road linking Baghlan to the neighboring Kunduz province has been closed down due to the fighting. Taliban fighters don't allow any motorists to pass the area.

Kunduz province with Kunduz city as its capital 250 km north of Kabul has been the scene of fierce fighting since early this year, during which the armed Taliban fighters were able to briefly

capture strategic points including Qala-e-Zal, Khawja Ghar districts and Taluka area outside Kunduz city, but have lost to the government forces.

Government forces backed by aircraft have been fighting to eliminate Taliban militants in Kunduz to ensure lasting peace there.

“Taliban militants in efforts to divert government attention and reduce pressure on fighters in Kunduz province, launched massive offensive in Baghlan-e-Markazi of Baghlan province this morning, triggering heavy fighting,” a local observer Rahmatullah told Xinhua.

Baghlan police chief Ekramudin Sari in talks with media confirmed the clash, but claimed that the government forces have repulsed the attack and Taliban’s design to capture Baghlan-e-Markazai district has been foiled.

The official, however, admitted that four security personnel had been killed and five others injured.

Meanwhile, Zabihullah Majahid who claims to speak for the Taliban outfit, in contact with media, claimed that 13 government soldiers had been killed and fighting continues, a claim rebuffed by Sari as groundless.