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Al Jazeera

Deadly explosion in Pakistan's Khyber region

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A suspected bomb blast near a fuel station in the Jamrud area of Pakistan's northwestern Khyber tribal region has killed at least 29 people and wounded at least 44 others, regional government officials said

"It was huge blast and caused damage to a number of vehicles at the bus terminal," Khan Zaman, a Khyber tribesman from the Jamrud bazaar, around 25km west of Peshawar, said on Tuesday.

Al Jazeera's Kamal Hyder, reporting from Islamabad, said it was not yet clear who was behind the bombing.

"We were told the explosions were packed in a vehicle that was parked in the busy bazaar area of Jamrud. After the explosion there were heavy casualties," our correspondent said.

Shakeel Khan Umarzai, a local administration official, confirmed the blast and said: "We are trying to determine the nature of the explosion; whether it was a planted bomb or what."

The troubled Khyber tribal region serves as the main supply route for NATO forces in Afghanistan and is a stronghold of the Taliban in Pakistan and al-Qaeda-affiliated fighters and other armed groups opposed to the government.

Fighters, particularly linked to the Taliban in Pakistan, have carried out bomb and gun attacks killing more than 4,700 people across the country since July 2007.

But there had been no major attack in Pakistan since a suicide bomber killed 46 people, targeting anti-Taliban fighters at a funeral in the northwestern district of Lower Dir on September 15.

Pakistan has for years battled armed groups in the northwest and the tribal belt, with more than 3,000 soldiers killed in the battle against them.

On Monday Pakistani authorities recovered the bodies of 10 soldiers in an exchange of bodies with Taliban fighters following a clash two weeks ago in the tribal belt.

An official of the military's media wing said the 10 soldiers had been missing in Orakzai district since December 21 when rebels attacked a checkpoint and killed 13 others.

That exchange came four days after the bodies of 15 members of Pakistan's paramilitary Frontier Constabulary (FC) were found in the small northwestern town of Shawa, in North Waziristan tribal region near the Afghan border, almost two weeks after they were kidnapped.