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Bomb hidden in cemetery kills 2 in Afghanistan

By Associated Press
8/19/2012



A bomb hidden in a cemetery in a southern Afghan city exploded Sunday, killing a police official and his brother as they were visiting the grave of a relative, police said.

Seven other family members were wounded in the blast in Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand province.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack but it matched the declared strategy of the Taliban to target government officials and others who align themselves with the government or international forces.

The two men killed in the explosion were brothers of a lawmaker for Helmand province, Abdulwadood Popal, who was not at the cemetery at the time of the blast. The family was visiting the grave after morning prayers for the Eid al-Fitr holiday, which ends the month-long Ramadan fast.

In a speech marking the holiday, President Hamid Karzai on Sunday condemned the repeated insurgent attacks that took place during Ramadan.

"The enemies of Muslims ... during the holy month of Ramadan treated the nation of Afghanistan cruelly: bombs, explosions in mosques, suicide attacks in mosques," Karzai said.

He said that if the Taliban were not responsible for such attacks, they need to disavow them.

"If you are not behind this, it is being done in your name. As Muslims, as Afghans, raise your voice and say that you did not do it," he appealed.

The bomb in Lashkar Gah was buried near the grave the family was visiting, said Helmand Deputy Police Chief Ghulam Rabbani. He said one of the men killed was the police chief for Nawa district, just west of Lashkar Gah. Rabbani did not provide the man's name.

Rabbani said he believed the bomber had directly targeted this family, but did not say if it had been remotely detonated or had been triggered by the visitors.

Afghans commonly visit the graves of relatives on holy days to pay their respects.

In a message ahead of Eid al-Fitr, Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar instructed his fighters once again to avoid killing or wounding Afghan civilians.

"Employ tactics that do not cause harm to the life and property of the common countrymen," he said in an eight-page message released to news organizations last week. The Taliban have said previously, however, that they do not consider those who collaborate with the government to be civilians.

A U.N. report issued earlier this month said 1,145 civilians were killed and 1,954 injured during the first half of the year, most of them by militants.

In the northeast meanwhile, officials said that an airstrike by coalition forces killed a large group of Taliban fighters and a local insurgent leader in Kunar province. At least two dozen insurgents were killed in the attack, said NATO forces spokesman Maj. Martyn Crighton.

Kunar Gov. Sayed Fazlullah Wahidi said as many as 50 insurgents were killed, who had massed in a remote area of the province. He said it was not clear why they had gathered.