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Airport attack ends with killing of 7 bombers

Jun 10, 2013

Triggered by a brazen assault on the Kabul International Airport early Monday morning, clashes between insurgents and security forces ended with the killing of all seven attackers, officials said.

The attackers in a vegetable-lade Suzuki pick-up entered a building under construction near the airport at 4.30am, but fire from security caused the vehicle to explode, Kabul police head Brig. Gen. Ayub Salangi told reporters at the scene.

At 9am, Salangi said the clearing operation had ended and the area had been brought under control with the elimination of all seven guerrillas. Two of the militants blew themselves up while the rest were killed by the security personnel.

The attackers were equipped with suicide vests, rocket-propelled grenades and heavy machine guns, said the Kabul police chief, who added security forces and airport staff had suffered no harm. Only a tent inside the facility was damaged.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Interior said the situation had returned to normal after hours of fighting around the airport. Security forces found five suicide vests and some weapons at the site following the clash.

Heavy explosions and gunfire rocked the military side of the airport, which is also used as an operational base by NATO-led troops. The blasts began from the direction of the military headquarters after the bombers found their way into the five-storey building.

Hashmatullah Stanikzai, Kabul police spokesman, told Pajhwok Afghan News the assailants opened intense fire on the airport, where the ISAF Joint Command (IJC) is located north of the facility. The area was sealed off by security forces.

"We are aware of the attack near the airport, but don't have any additional operational information at this time. Once we have more information, we will release it," the IJC said, adding it was assessing the situation.

Giving a witness account, Rahmatullah said the attackers in border police uniform assaulted a police centre and the airport with light and heavy weapons. Sporadic bursts of gunfire and a series of blasts were heard, as helicopters circled over the site.

Police and air force officials confirmed the target was the airport. Air traffic resumed after staying suspended due to the assault that forced diplomatic missions in the Wazir Akbar Khan neighbourhood to be on a lockdown.

The Taliban claimed responsibility, with the group's spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid saying a number of suicide bombers had struck the airport's portion used by the US military.

"An explosives-packed vehicle was detonated, destroying the checkpoint and letting a large number of fighters reach their target, many security guards and foreign soldiers have been killed," Mujahid claimed.