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Al Jazeera

Taliban claim latest deadly Afghan attack

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Afghan police inspect a suicide car bombing of the police chief's office in Lashkar Gah in Helmand province [AFP]

A suicide bomber has struck police headquarters in the capital of Helmand province, killing 10 Afghan policemen and a child in a city where Afghans have recently taken control of security.

The attack in the heart of Lashkar Gah on Sunday was a reminder of the Taliban's reach, even at a time of stepped up pressure from US and Afghan troops.

Taliban spokesman Qari Yousef Ahmadi claimed responsibility for the attack, according to news

agencies.

Helmand provincial spokesman Daoud Ahmadi said police guarding the gate received the worst of the blast, but three civilians were among the 12 wounded.

"The information given by the crime scene unit of the police is that 10 policemen and a young child have been killed in the attack," said Ahmadi.

"It was a suicide car bomb and was very powerful," he added.

Ahmadi added that the blast happened in front of the heavily-secured office of the police chief as a police vehicle entered the compound.

A wall of the compound also collapsed in the explosion and it was unclear if anyone was trapped underneath, Ahmadi said. People at the site told reporters they saw a police vehicle on fire at the gate.

Taliban stronghold

The latest blast follows an uptick in assassinations in southern Afghanistan in recent weeks, including that of President Hamid Karzai's powerful half-brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, in neighbouring Kandahar province.

It has been less than two weeks since Lashkar Gah was formally handed over to Afghan control in the first stage of a plan to have all of Afghanistan under the oversight of Afghan security forces by the end of 2014.

It is the capital city of a province that has been a stronghold of the Taliban and where US Marines have surged in over the past year to try to turn back their fighters.

The attack comes as Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, tours Afghanistan for a second day.

He has been meeting with military commanders and troops in the south, a region that has been rocked by violence and suicide attacks in recent weeks.