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An eyewitness account of deadly hotel assault

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The outgoing Afghan calendar year (1392) ended on a tragic note, with a deadly suicide attack on a luxury hotel in the heart of central capital Kabul.

Four foreigners and five Afghans, including women and children lost their lives in the brazen assault on the high-end Serena Hotel, where four teenage suicide attackers were also killed after a two-hour clash.

In the heart-rending incident, the two children were shot in the head. The foreigners were from Canada, New Zealand, India and Pakistan. A child, a hotel guard, two Afghan soldiers and a parliamentarian were among the injured.

A Kabul resident, who had been for dinner to the hotel frequented by high-ranking Afghan and foreign officials, told Pajhwok Afghan News there was a small crowd of guests at the time of attack. The ambience was somehow characterised by gloom and silence.

Giving an eyewitness account, he said the attackers sat around a table in the restaurant and remained reticent. Clad in Local dress, they closely watched visitors; they did not look ordinary boys.

“One of bearers asked the guys what they would like to eat,” said the survivor, who did not want to be named. “And pat came the reply: Bring anything you want.”

Afghan journalist Sardar Muhammad was also in the hotel along with his family for dinner. Businessmen, lawmakers, foreigners and a handful of other people were waiting for dinner that never came.

The parliamentarians present included Qais Hassan, Habib Afghan and Farhad Siddiqui. A businessman from southern Helmand province, Haji Abdullah, was also there, according to the eyewitness.

Farhad Siddiqui rose from his seat to bring food, as Habib Afghan and Haji Abdullah talked. All of a sudden, two of the young men opened a volley of fire at them. The trader was killed on the spot while Habib Afghan was injured.

The two other gunmen opened fire on journalist Sardar Ahmad. First, they killed his wife. Ahmad shouted: "I am Afghan, I am Afghan." But the men shot him dead along with his children.

"As the hall echoed with gunshots, the eerie silence ended. Waiters, guests and hotel staff ran pell-mell. Finally, they sought shelter in an underground portion of the hotel," he recalled.

The audacious shooting triggered a fire exchange. "After two hours and a half, the clash ended and we were brought out of the hotel by security forces. But the incident has left deep scars on my mind."