Al Jazeera

'Co-ordinated attacks' hit Afghan city

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Loud explosions and gunfire have been heard in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar, where witnesses say the provincial governor's compound as well as other sites are under a co-ordinated attack.

Sounds of gunfire and explosions were heard coming from near the provincial governor's heavily guarded compound on Saturday, as well as from four other locations in the city. Hospital sources in the city told Al Jazeera that 12 people had been injured in the attacks so far - three of them were members of the police, and the rest were civilians.

Gunmen were holed up in a five-storey shopping mall, and traded fire with security forces at the governor's compound, with the Associated Press reporting that fighting was focusing on the rear of the compound, near the governor's residence.

An Afghan government spokesperson said that in all six suicide attacks had taken place across the city.

"So far there have been 10 explosions in Kandahar today. We have confirmation that six of the explosions have been suicide attacks," Zalmay Ayubi told AFP.

"Small arms fire is still going on. Two RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades] have been fired onto the [governor's compound] so far. The northern and eastern sides of the compound are under direct attack," Ayubi said.

An explosion was heard at governor Tooryalai Wesa's compound, while another was heard several minutes later in the west of the city. Black smoke was seen rising from the compound, a witness told Reuters.

James Bays, Al Jazeera's correspondent in the capital, Kabul, reported that the RPGs landed 300m from the compound. It was not immediately clear whether Wesa was in the compound.

Local authorities have blocked journalists from accessing the site, as fighting is continuing.

Bays reported that shooting had also been reported from near the city's intelligence headquarters, from an Afghan Civil Order Police (ANCOP) compound in the city's eastern District Five, and also from near a jail in the west of the city where the **Taliban had last month helped hundreds of inmates escape**.

Firing was also reported from near a school and police station on the road to Camp Gecko, a US Special Forces base built on the site of Osama bin Laden's former home in Kandahar. That gunbattle was taking place in the northwest of the city, in District Eight.

It was not clear if the shooting near the Kandahar headquarters of the Afghan intelligence service was targeting that building, or the nearby traffic police headquarters.

At the ANCOP compound, police said they shot two would-be suicide bombers, Bays reported.

Ahmed Wali Karzai, the chairman of the provincial council, told Al Jazeera that authorities were attempting to bring the situation under control, but that Taliban fighters were still hiding at some of the attack sites.

'Spring offensive'

Last week, the Taliban announced the start of their "spring offensive" against US-led coalition troops and the Afghan government.

Kandahar, the Taliban's birthplace, has been the focus of military operations for the last year, with commanders saying they have made gains, but qualifying successes by terming them "fragile" and "reversible".

In a message released on Friday, the Taliban warned that this week's **killing of Osama bin Laden**, al-Qaeda's leader, would give their fight against foreign and Afghan forces "a new impetus".

Over the last month, Taliban fighters launched deadly attacks inside the Defence Ministry, at a joint US-Afghan base and at the Kandahar police headquarters. The group was also responsible for the escape of at least 541 inmates from the Kandahar city prison.

Qari Yousef Ahmadi, a Taliban spokesman, told the Associated Press that the group was taking responsibility for Saturday's attacks. He said that the operation had been planned "for the past month or two".