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Al Jazeera

Saudi diplomat killed in Pakistan

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Gunmen have shot and killed a Saudi diplomat in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, as he was driving to his country's consulate, police and Saudi embassy staff say.

Hassan al-Khatani, a diplomat who worked at the Saudi consulate, was shot dead by two gunmen who were riding a motorcycle early on Monday morning, Pakistani police officials said.

"Two gunmen riding on a motorcycle showered the car with bullets," Zameer Husain Abbasi, a police official, said, adding that a 9mm pistol had been used in the attack.

Police say al-Khatani was alone in the vehicle - a silver Toyota Corona - at the time of the attack, which took place about one kilometre from the Saudi consulate. They said he was driving to work from his residence, located nearby.

"The consulate employee died of multiple bullet wounds on the spot," said Fayaaz Leghari, the provincial police chief for Sindh, of which Karachi is the capital.

Sharfuddin Memon, a provincial home ministry official, said al-Khatani was a junior officer at the consulate.

"We condemn this attack. No one who carries out this kind of attack can be a Muslim," Abdul Aziz al-Ghadeer al-Ghadeer, the Saudi ambassador to Pakistan, said.

"We are investigating if it was linked to the Abbottabad operation or was an isolated incident," Leghari said, referring to a May 2 raid by US special forces that killed Osama bin Laden, the al-Qaeda leader, in Abbottabad.

Security levels to be raised

"We trust the Pakistani authorities and hope they will identify the terrorists and bring them to justice," Ambassador al-Ghadeer said.

The Saudi government described the shooting as a "criminal attack", Saudi state media reported. The government also said that the country would be participating in the investigation, alongside Pakistani police.

A Saudi foreign ministry official, meanwhile, told Reuters that security would be raised for diplomats serving in countries deemed to be dangerous, starting with Pakistan.

A statement from the ministry said that Saudi Arabia has asked Pakistani authorities to increase security around the Saudi embassy and consulate in Pakistan.

Prince Saudi al-Faisal offered his condolences to the family of the man who was killed, the statement said.

Yousaf Raza Gilani, the Pakistani prime minister, and Rehman Malik, the country's interior minister, meanwhile, condemned the attack, with Malik saying that "complete security" had been ordered for Saudi nationals stationed in the city.

On Wednesday, unidentified attackers hurled two hand grenades at the Saudi consulate in Karachi, Pakistan's commercial hub. The grenades exploded, but no one was hurt in the attack.

"It would be early to say that [there is a campaign against Saudi interests in Pakistan], even though the Interior Ministry is not ruling that out," reported Kamal Hyder, Al Jazeera's correspondent in Islamabad.

Taliban 'fully supports' attack

Shortly after the attack on Monday, a Pakistani Taliban spokesman said that while his group would not confirm that it was involved in the latest attack, it fully supported it.

"Whoever has done this, has done a very good job because, like Pakistan, Saudi Arabia is also an American slave. In fact, it's two steps ahead of Pakistan. Whichever organisations are engaged in such activities, we fully support them," said Ehsanullah Ehsan, the spokesman, by telephone from an undisclosed location.

Reuters later reported that an unnamed Pakistani Taliban spokesman had confirmed that the group was taking responsibility for the attack on Monday.

"Until America stops chasing al Qaeda and stops drone strikes we will keep carrying out such attacks," it quoted him as saying via telephone from an undisclosed location.

But Ehsan stuck by his earlier statements, telling AFP: "We support the action but we are not afraid. Had we done it, we would have claimed it."