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Al Jazeera

Scores dead in Pakistan bomb blasts

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A suicide attack outside the office of a senior government official in Pakistan's northwest has killed up to 50 people and wounded at least 80 more, government and hospital officials say.

Rasool Khan, the region's assistant political agent, said two bombers struck on Friday after people had gathered around his office, in the Mohmand tribal area along the Afghanistan border.

The attack, which took place in a commercial neighbourhood, follows fresh campaigns by security forces against Pakistani Taliban fighters in recent weeks.

"There were two blasts. The first one was small but the second was a big one," Khan told the Reuters news agency.

An administration official, Mehraj Khan, had earlier described the incident as a suicide attack, but there were no details available on how the second blast happened.

Commercial area

Ikhrum Mullah, a spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban in Mohmand, claimed responsibility for the attack in a phone call to a local TV station.

There was no independent verification of the casualties as Taliban fighters often dispute and reject the official figures.

Hospital officials said nearly 80 people were being treated for multiple wounds, while government officials put the number of wounded at about 40.

Among the wounded were several internally displaced people, who were collecting relief goods near the blast site.

Friday's blasts also damaged several cars and about 30 shops, witnesses said.

Al Jazeera's Imran Khan, reporting from Islamabad, said the Mohmand bombing was a "suicide attack" but that there was "confusion as to whether the attacker was on a motor bike or travelling in a car".

"Rescue efforts are still going on," he said.

"They've brought in heavy machinery to try and dig underneath the rubble. They say there're more bodies still trapped underneath that rubble.

"The dead and the injured are being taken to ... hospital in the nearest big city of Peshawar as a standard operating procedure.

"An emergency has been declared. But this goes to show that this situation in the tribal areas is still very fluid, still very dangerous."

Pakistan launched two major offensives in the northwest last year against homegrown Taliban fighters who have killed hundreds of people in retaliatory attacks across Pakistan, mostly in the northwest but also in major cities.

Two suicide bombers killed at least 42 people in an attack on Pakistan's most important Sufi shrine in the eastern city of Lahore last week.

Pushed out

The Pakistani Taliban, allies of the Afghan Taliban, has lost ground in army campaigns over the past year.

They were pushed out of the Swat valley, northwest of Islamabad, and in October the army began an offensive in the fighters' South Waziristan bastion on the Afghan border.

The offensive was extended to Orakzai in March as many of the fighters who fled the South Waziristan operation took refuge there and in Mohmand.

Hundreds of fighters have since been killed in air raids in the two regions.

Jet fighters killed about a dozen fighters in attacks in Orakzai on Friday, Pakistani security officials said.