

Incident Update

Suicide Blast Strikes Provincial Assembly in Lahore

February 14, 2017

Factual Updates

On the Monday evening, February 13, 2017, an assailant, equipped with a suicide vest strapped to his body, detonated his explosives in the midst of a protesting mob outside the Provincial Assembly of Punjab in Lahore, killing at least 13 people, including two high-ranking police officials, and wounding some 85 others.¹ According to Inspector General Police, Mushtaq Sukhera, six other police officials were also among the dead. The senior police officials among the deceased included Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Capt (Retd) Ahmad Mubeen and Senior Superintendent of Police Zahid Ikarm Gondal, who were negotiating with the demonstrators to end their sit-in and to clear the locality at the time of blast.² According to a witness, the assailant was on foot and he walked up to the place where police officials were engaged in negotiations with the protesters and blew himself up to cause havoc.³ The President and Prime Minister have condemned the incident and praised the sacrifices of slain security personnel. Chief of Army Staff, according to a statement issued by Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), also directed the military commanders and intelligence agencies to provide necessary assistance to civilian authorities in order to apprehend the perpetrators of the blast. Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan – Jamat-ul-Ahrar (TTP-JA) has claimed responsibility for the explosion.

Situational background

The sit-in was staged by pharmaceutical manufacturers to protest against the government in the wake of Punjab Drugs Amendment Bill 2017, passed by Punjab Provincial Assembly. A large group of about 400 protesters were present at the scene of explosion. Apart from the demonstrators, a significant number of law enforcers were also there to avoid any untoward

¹ Imran Gabol, "Senior Police Officers among 13 Killed as Suicide Bomber Strikes Lahore," *Dawn*, February 14, 2017.

² Muhammad Shahzad and Ali Ousat, "Terror Rears Ugly Head in Lahore – Again," *The Express Tribune*, February 2017.

³ Ibid.

incident.⁴ On the other hand, National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) had issued a terror alert on 7 February, 2017, notifying the concerned authorities about a possible terror attack in Lahore. In its notification, NACTA had advised to keep strict vigilance of vital installations, including important buildings, schools and hospitals.

Analysis

The blast took place on Monday which appeared to be a bloody day for security forces across the country as, besides the suicide blast in Lahore, three security personnel were killed in a bomb blast in South Waziristan, while two others died when they were defusing an explosive device, implanted by unidentified assailants, at Sariab Road in Quetta. The suicide blast in Lahore has come after a long lull in militancy related violence across the country. Though the prolonged military operations have remained successful, to a considerable level, in establishing writ of the state in tribal region – a hub of Islamist militants in the past – and the security situation in rest of the country has become comparatively better, the recent attack highlights the growing operational capacity of the militant outfits as, despite the heightened security measures, they have caused disaster before Provincial Assembly in Lahore. The militants chose a sensitive target which put a question mark over the competence of law enforcement agencies, which remained unable to check the infiltration of militant elements regardless of the prior alert.

On the other hand, TTP-JA, while claiming responsibility of the incident, has mentioned that the attack was part of its operation “Ghazi,” a newly adopted strategy by Islamist militants operating in Pakistan. The terrorists have also vowed to target security and government installations in their afresh launched operation across the country. Although, following the persistent military operations, the security forces have managed to oust the militant outfits from the country and have successfully dismantled their sanctuaries in tribal region, the radical groups have managed to establish their safe havens across the border in Afghanistan, from where they use to infiltrate in Pakistan to stage terror attacks. It seems that militant outfits are reorganizing and reviving their operational capacity in order to intensify their maneuverings in the country. Moreover, Khan Said Sjana, during an interview with a field research of FATA Research Centre in October 2016, had claimed that they had not been defeated by Pakistan military; rather, they had

⁴ Imran Gabol, “Senior Police Officers among 13 Killed as Suicide Bomber Strikes Lahore,” *Dawn*, February 14, 2017.

performed Hijrat (Urdu for migration) as a tactical strategy. In this context, it can be said that the militants used past one and half year, a relatively peaceful period, to reorganize their cadres and strengthen their operatives. Hence, there is a need to intensify the security measures, while keeping in view the new designs devised by the unified militant outfits.

Implications

The incident came at a time when the government was endeavoring to develop a soft image of the country at international level, while accentuating the efforts carried out by security forces in ousting the militant outfits and ensuring peace in the country. On the other hand, the authorities were also planning to conduct the final cricket match of Pakistan Super League in Lahore in order to welcome the international cricket in the country after a gap of about eight years and, in turn, to strengthen its soft image in the international community. However, following this militant attack, the probability of this cricket match to be held in Lahore have diminished. In this context, the involvement of foreign intelligence agencies in the recent attack cannot be ruled out as they are trying to sabotage the image of Pakistan and isolate it at international level. Keeping in view the reorganization of militant outfits and resolve of governmental authorities against militancy, an escalation in security swoops, both by military and civilian law enforcement agencies, cannot be ruled out.

Location Map

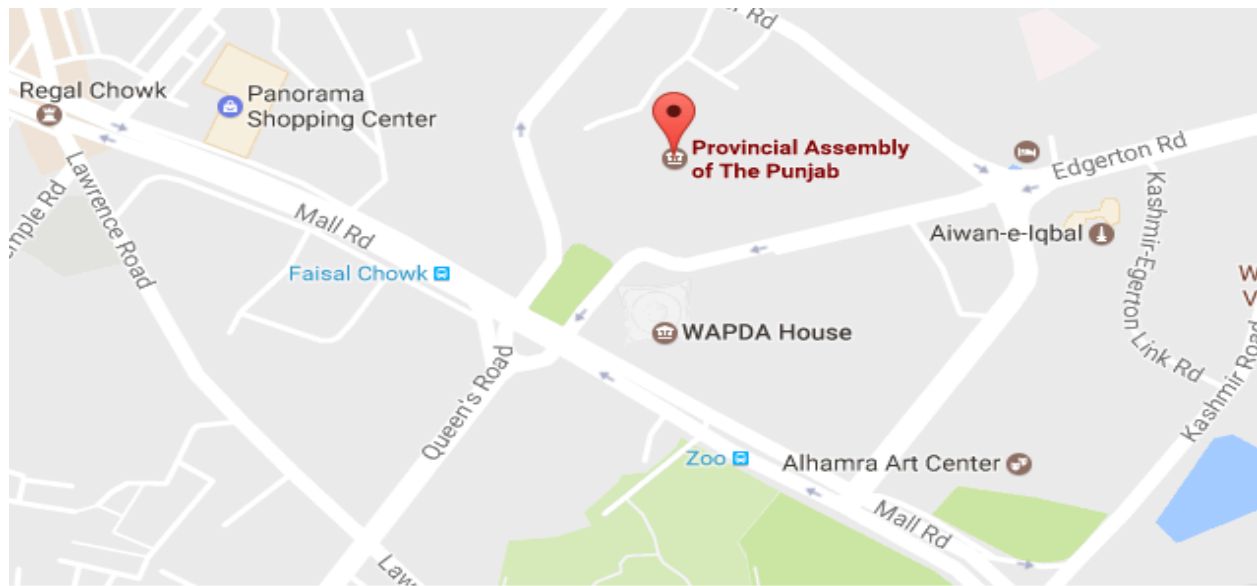


Photo Gallery



Sight of explosion. Dawn, February 14, 2017.



The vehicle of a media channel destroyed in blast. Dawn, February 14, 2017.



Volunteers helping the victims at blast sight. The Express Tribune, February 14, 2017.



Relatives of victims mourning at the scene. The Express Tribune, February 14, 2017.