

# The World; Afghan Authorities Blame Al Qaeda for Attack at Cleric's Funeral; Kabul police chief is among the 19 killed. Officials say the blast shows terror network's staying power.

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## ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

Authorities say they believe foreign operatives linked to Al Qaeda were responsible for Wednesday's suicide attack that killed at least 19 people and wounded 50 at the funeral of a prominent Muslim cleric in the southern city of Kandahar.

More than 200 mourners had gathered for the early morning funeral of Mawlavi Abdullah Fayaz, the head of Kandahar's Cleric Council and a prominent critic of the former Taliban regime.

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## FULL TEXT

Authorities say they believe foreign operatives linked to Al Qaeda were responsible for Wednesday's suicide attack that killed at least 19 people and wounded 50 at the funeral of a prominent Muslim cleric in the southern city of Kandahar.

Security officials said the mosque blast was a sign that the terrorist network was still a major force in Afghanistan, intent on staging major attacks, and that it was employing more aggressive tactics.

The explosion killed Kabul's newly appointed police chief, Akram Khakreezwal, and several other police officers.

More than 200 mourners had gathered for the early morning funeral of Mawlavi Abdullah Fayaz, the head of Kandahar's Cleric Council and a prominent critic of the former Taliban regime.

Fayaz was killed Sunday by gunmen on a motorcycle.

"This was a well-chosen target for the rebels, one of a higher level," said Nick Downie, who heads an independent body that advises aid organizations on security in Afghanistan. "They knew that important political and security officials would be there for the funeral."

President Hamid Karzai called the attack on the mosque "an act of non-Muslim and defeated terrorists." In a statement, he called on the Afghan people to be vigilant against foreigners conspiring against the country's national security.

Government officials said two of Karzai's brothers were expected at the funeral but had not arrived.

The Karzais are from Kandahar province and they usually attend high-profile events in the area.

The suicide bomber was reportedly wearing a police uniform and entered the mosque posing as a government security officer, authorities said.

"Our investigation so far gives us strong reasons to believe that this suicide bombing was the work of foreign operatives," said Zaher Azimy, a spokesman for the Ministry of Defense.

Azimy declined to give information about the identity of the bomber, but the governor of Kandahar, Gul Agha Sherzai, was quoted by journalists as saying "definitely it was Al Qaeda, I can say he was an Arab."

Many government officials believe the representatives of the former Taliban government were not responsible for the attack.

"The Taliban have killed a lot of people but they would not attack a mosque and Muslims, especially while they are praying for the dead," said a resident of Kandahar who did not want to be identified.

Azimy said insurgents were trying to undermine the government.

"The recent talks about a strategic partnership with the United States and the development of the parliamentary elections are both steps toward an independent and legitimate government for Afghanistan," Azimy said. "The violence is to get people fearful of these processes."

Credit: Special to The Times

## DETAILS

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