

## **5 UAE diplomats among those killed in Kandahar blast**

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**Kabul:** The United Arab Emirates today said that five of its diplomats were killed in a bombing in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

### **At least 50 killed in bombings across three Afghan cities**

The UAE said on Wednesday it will fly the nation's flags at half-mast in their honour.

At least 50 people were killed on Tuesday in bombings across three Afghan cities including in capital Kabul.

Nine people died when explosives hidden in a sofa detonated inside the governor's compound in southern Kandahar during a visit by the UAE ambassador to Afghanistan, who escaped the attack with injuries.

Just hours earlier, twin Taliban blasts in Kabul tore through employees exiting a parliament annexe, which houses the offices of lawmakers, killing at least 30 people and wounding 80 others.

In Lashkar Gah, the capital of volatile Helmand province, a Taliban suicide bomber killed seven people as militants ramp up nationwide attacks despite the onset of winter, when fighting usually wanes.

The carnage underscores growing insecurity in Afghanistan, where US-backed forces are struggling to combat a resilient Taliban insurgency as well as Al-Qaeda and Islamic State militants.

Kandahar's governor and UAE envoy Juma Mohammed Abdullah Al Kaabi were wounded by flames from the explosion, but many others were burned beyond recognition, provincial police chief Abdul Raziq said.

Health ministry spokesman Waheed Majroh warned that the toll was expected to rise as many of the wounded were battling for their lives in hospital.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said they were behind the twin blasts, adding the victims were mostly Afghan intelligence agents. The insurgents are known to exaggerate battlefield claims.

"The deaths of scores of civilians in today's Kabul bomb attacks indicates that the Taliban are pressing ahead with a gruesome campaign of violence that makes no effort to spare civilian lives. An immediate, impartial and independent investigation must be carried out to secure justice for the victims and their families," Amnesty International said in a statement.

The carnage comes just two weeks before Donald Trump is sworn in as US president.

The situation in Afghanistan will be an urgent matter for the new leader, even though America's longest war got scarcely a passing mention in the bitterly contested presidential election.

Repeated bids to launch peace negotiations with the Taliban have failed and a fierce new fighting season is expected to kick off in the spring.

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