

Stockholm terror attack: Four killed as truck drives into crowd, one arrested

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Stockholm: Four people were killed as a hijacked beer truck ploughed into a crowd outside a busy department store in central Stockholm on Friday.

Hijacked truck after it ploughed into a crowd outside a busy department store

15 others were injured in this incident which has been termed as a "terrorist attack" by Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven.

According to the Swedish police, "One man has been arrested in connection with this attack but the driver remained at large.

"Sweden has been attacked," Prime Minister Stefan Lofven said in a nationally televised press conference.

"This indicates that it is an act of terror," he added.

Later Friday night, Lofven laid a bouquet of red roses and lit a candle near the site of the attack. Officials announced flags at government offices would fly at half-mast Saturday to honor the victims.

"The country is in a state of shock," Lofven said.

"The aim of terrorism is to undermine democracy. But such a goal will never be achieved in Sweden," he added.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack. Police arrested a man in Marsta, a northern Stockholm suburb close to the city's international airport, as a possible suspect.

The stolen beer truck traveled for more than 500 yards (meters) along a main pedestrian street known as the Drottninggatan before it smashed into a crowd outside the upscale Ahlens department store about 3 p.m. It came to rest in the entrance to the building. TV footage showed smoke coming out of the store after the crash.

"People were screaming and running in all directions," said Brandon Sekitto, who was in his car nearby. "(The truck) drove straight into the Ahlens entrance."

"I saw the driver, a man in black who was light around the face," Brandon told Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter. "Some women were screaming, 'Run! Run!'"

Late into the night, forensic experts in full white suits could be seen working on the truck, collecting evidence.

Although there was initial confusion on the number of victims, police told reporters in the evening that four people had been killed and 15 were wounded, nine of them seriously.

Condemning the attack in Stockholm, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that India firmly stands with the people of Sweden in this hour of grief.

â€œIndia stands firmly with the people of Sweden in this hour of grief,â€• PM Modi tweeted.

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said that the attack took place close to Indian EmbassyÂ but all Embassy officials were safe.

â€œI am in touch with Indian Ambassador in Sweden. The attack was very close to Indian Embassy. Our embassy officials are safe,â€• she tweeted.

Authorities evacuated the city's nearby Central Station, a hub for regional trains and the subway system. All trains to and from the main station were halted and several large shopping malls in Stockholm were shut down. Sweden's national theater, Dramaten, canceled three performances Friday evening.

Jan Evensson of the Stockholm police told a news conference that the man who was arrested looked like the person depicted wearing a greenish hood in a surveillance camera photo that police released earlier. He said police were "particularly interested" in him.

"We continue to investigate at full force," Evensson said, urging people not to go to central Stockholm on Friday night.

Stefan Hector of Sweden's national police said the working hypothesis was that "this is an act of terror."

"We will be working as long as necessary" to determine who was responsible, Stockholm police spokesman Lars Bystrom told The Associated Press.

The Swedish brewery Spendrups said one of its trucks had been hijacked just a few blocks from the crash scene earlier Friday.

"It is one of our delivery trucks. In connection with a delivery to a restaurant called Caliente, someone jumped into the truck and drove it away while the driver was unloading his delivery," Spendrups spokesman Marten Luth told the Swedish news agency TT.

The beer company's truck driver was not injured, he said.

The truck crash appeared to be the latest attack in Europe using a vehicle.

In an attack last month claimed by the Islamic State group, a man drove into a crowd on London's Westminster Bridge, killing three people and injuring many others before stabbing a policeman to death. He was shot and killed by police. A fourth person, a woman thrown into the Thames by the force of the car attack, died Thursday.

The IS group also claimed responsibility for a truck attack that killed 86 people in Nice, France, in July 2016 during a Bastille Day festival, as well as another truck attack that killed 12 people at a Christmas market in Berlin.

Swedish King Carl XVI Gustaf cut short a visit to Brazil on Friday to return home and sent the royal family's condolences to the families of the truck attack victims.

Lofven said his Social Democratic Party was still planning to hold its annual convention this weekend in Goteborg, Sweden's second-largest city.

Condolences poured into Sweden. In neighboring Finland, President Sauli Niinisto said he was shocked by the "maniac act of terror," adding "every terror attack is to be equally condemned. But it touches us deeply when such an attack takes place in our Nordic neighborhood."

Danish Prime Minister Lars Loekke Rasmussen called the attack a cowardly attempt "to subdue us and the peaceful way we live in Scandinavia."

Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo said the Eiffel Tower's lights will be turned off from midnight Friday in homage. She expressed her "strong emotion" over "this new terrorist attack of immense cowardice."

EU Council President Donald Tusk said in a tweet that "my heart is in Stockholm this afternoon. My thoughts are with the victims and their families and friends of today's terrible attack."

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said "one of Europe's most vibrant and colorful cities appears to have been struck by those wishing it â€" and our very way of life â€" harm."

Juncker also said "an attack on any of our (EU) member states is an attack on us all" and that Sweden can count on EU help.

In February, U.S. President Donald Trump suggested that Sweden could be the next European country to suffer the kind of extremist attacks that have devastated France, Belgium and Germany. Two days after his remarks, a riot broke out in predominantly immigrant suburb of Stockholm where police opened fire on rioters, a surprise to many Swedes who aren't used to officers using guns.

Friday's truck crash was near the site of a December 2010 attack in Stockholm in which Taimour Abdulwahab, a Swedish citizen who lived in Britain, detonated a suicide bomb, killing himself and injuring two others.

Abdulwahab had rigged a car with explosives in the hope the blast would drive people to Drottninggatan â€" the street hit Friday â€" where he would set off devices strapped to his chest and back. The car bomb never went off, and Abdulwahab died when one of his devices exploded among panicked Christmas shoppers.

If confirmed as a terror attack, it would be Sweden's first such attack with a deadly outcome. Pictures taken at the scene showed a large blue truck with a mangled undercarriage smashed into the Ahlens department store.

Witnesses described scenes of terror and panic.Â One witness identified only as Dimitris told the Aftonbladet daily the truck came â€œout of nowhere.â€• â€œI couldnâ€™t see if anyone was driving but it was out of control. I saw at least two people get run down. I ran as fast as I could away from there,â€• he said.

Another shopper, 66-year-old Leander Nordling, was at Ahlens when he suddenly heard a loud bang.Â â€œIt sounded like a bomb exploding and smoke starting pouring in through the main entrance,â€• he told daily Aftonbladet.

He and fellow shoppers took refuge in a storage room inside the department store.

â€œAfter that the building was evacuated ... There were a lot of guards who took care of us outside and they urged us to leave the scene immediately,â€• Nordling said.Â Video footage taken from above showed scores of people streaming down the street in terror.

A spokeswoman for beer company Spendrups told AFP that the truck involved â€œhad been stolen during a delivery to a restaurant.â€•

The man arrested in a suburb north of Stockholm was detained after his appearance matched that of a man in a picture released by police and wanted in connection with the attack.

Yesterdayâ€™s attack was the latest in a string of similar assaults with vehicles in Europe, including in London, Berlin and the southern French city of Nice.Â The attack occurred just before 1300 GMT at the corner of the store and Drottninggatan, the cityâ€™s biggest pedestrian street, above ground from Stockholmâ€™s central subway station.Â Thick smoke billowed from the scene, while the area was blocked off by police and crowds gathered around the police cordon.

Police vans circulating in the city using loudspeakers urged people to go straight home and avoid large crowds.Â The centre of the usually buzzing city was in lockdown, with the central train station evacuated and other stores quickly emptied of shoppers.

The Stockholm metro was also completely shut down for several hours before resuming in the early evening, with the attack taking place at the cityâ€™s T-Centralen station, through which all the cityâ€™s lines pass.

Cinemas, shopping malls and other public buildings were also evacuated.

The area around the attack was cordoned off, but other streets in the city were packed for hours with pedestrians trying to find a way home.

Helicopters could be heard hovering in the sky over central Stockholm, and a large number of police cars and ambulances were dispatched to the scene, witnesses said.Â Another section of Drottninggatan was also the scene of Swedenâ€™s only other terror attack, in 2010, when a suicide bomber blew himself up, killing himself and slightly injuring several others.

European politicians expressed solidarity, with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker saying that it was an â€œattack on us all.â€•

A spokesman for German Chancellor Angela Merkel said: â€œOur thoughts go out to the people in Stockholm, to the injured, their relatives, rescuers and police.

• We stand together against terror.

The attack followed a string of similar massacres in Europe by people using vehicles as weapons. The deadliest came last year in France on the Bastille Day national holiday of July 14, when a man rammed a truck into a crowd in the Mediterranean resort of Nice, killing 86 people.

Last month, Khalid Masood, a 52-year-old convert to Islam known to British security services, killed five people when he drove a car at high speed into pedestrians on London's Westminster Bridge before launching a frenzied knife attack on a policeman guarding the parliament building.

And in December, a man hijacked a truck and slammed into shoppers at a Christmas market in Berlin, killing 12 people. In 2014, IS called for attacks on citizens of Western countries and gave instructions on how they could be carried out without military equipment, using rocks or knives, or by running people over in vehicles.

- (With AP inputs)