

Explosions Shake Nervous Kabul

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Residents of the Afghan capital are living with the constant threat of explosives and car bombs.

The massive car bomb that rocked Kabul this week may have hit the headlines across the world, but the capital's residents have been learning to live with albeit smaller explosions on an almost daily basis.

Recently, refugees sheltering in the bombed out ruins of the Russian embassy in the south of the city had to run for their lives after a bomb hidden in a fruit stand exploded. One man was killed, a woman lost both her legs and three other people were injured.

Small explosives have been placed at high-profile sites such as the Intercontinental Hotel, the ministry of telecommunication, the UN guest-house and the Bakhtar Cinema. Both Bagram and Kabul airports have also been hit in the past week.

As well as the incidents in Kabul, rockets have been fired on the international airport in Jalalabad in the east.

Tensions are increasing in the run up to September 9 - one year on from the murder of the charismatic Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Masood - and the anniversary of the September 11 attacks on America.

"There has been fighting in our country for many years so terrorist activities should not come as much of a surprise," said Helal Uddin, an interior ministry official in charge of security affairs.

Helal admits that extremists from many countries are operating in Afghanistan. "I cannot say that all of these activists have been killed. They have the means and facilities to implement their attacks in different parts of the country.

"We not only have the responsibility of securing the Afghan nation, but also have to look after the safety of all the people who come here. Everyone is tired of all these horrible incidents."

Some believe the bombings are the work of remnants of al-Qaeda. The suspicion was fuelled by the discovery of a flag hung from a school in Maidan, 30 km west of Kabul, carrying a disturbing message, signed by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan - the Taleban name for the country.

"People should begin Jihad (holy war) against the American forces, " it said. "They should shelter the mujahedin in their houses. Any person who tears or destroys this message will lose his life".

Kabul residents are understandably nervous. "After the latest explosions it's obvious that the authorities are not able to take care of security," said government worker Mohammad Homayoon Shahab.

Ghaffar runs a general store in the city after recently returning from Pakistan. "We came back to Kabul because we had thought that there would be security in our country, but in the recent days there have

been too many explosions. We now wish we'd never come back."

Only last month, Akeen Zorlo, the commander in chief of the International Security Assistance Force, ISAF, advised the interior ministry to relax the curfew that Afghans have lived under for 30 years. However, even more blasts followed his request.

"I don't think that the curfew should be ended very quickly. Kabul is not the sort of city you can wander around at night," said Helal.

Col Richard Hunsicker, from the ISAF Kabul Multinational Brigade, told IWPR that the explosions have not led to a change in security policy for the city.

"However, on September 9 and 11, we are going to increase our patrols because we want to avoid any unpleasant incidents," he said.

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