

Tribute to Habib

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Kabulis mourn latest innocent victim of continuing violence.

Habibullah Shahimee had everything to live for. The 27-year-old political science graduate, who spoke good English and Russian, had just been offered a job in the Afghan foreign ministry.

On December 19, Habib, as he was nicknamed by everyone at Kabul's French-run Aina international media centre where he ran a small shop and worked as a guard, became the latest innocent victim of Afghanistan's continuing violence.

While waiting outside the main base of the International Security Assistance Force, ISAF, with two French journalists from Aina, for treatment in its hospital for a stomach complaint, a man hobbling on artificial legs tried to enter the base carrying four grenades hidden under his coat.

When he was refused entry, he turned on the group waiting outside, throwing two grenades, killing Habib, fatally wounded an ISAF interpreter and injuring the two journalists. Then he blew himself to pieces with another grenade.

It was the first attack on foreign civilians in Kabul, where over 4,000 international troops are deployed to provide security following the defeat of the Taliban regime just over a year ago. As so often happens, it was local people, rather than the likely intended targets, who were the victims.

"I can't say who that man was and what was his purpose, whether he wanted to kill ISAF personnel or the journalists, but what is clear is that he wasn't able to enter the compound, and therefore attacked the journalists outside," ISAF spokesman Major Gordon Mackenzie told IWPR.

Shortly after this incident, two US soldiers were injured when a grenade was thrown into their open jeep in the middle of Kabul.

ISAF launched a joint investigation with local police into the attack on the journalists, who were working in Kabul training young Afghans in the use of video cameras. The usual suspects in such cases are Taliban or al-Qaeda fighters or supporters of former mujahedin leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who is opposed to current Afghan president Hamed Karzai and has pledged to drive all foreign troops out of the country.

Habib's funeral was held on December 22, attended by a large crowd of family and friends, including local and foreign journalists from the Aina centre - which also houses the IWPR office - and beyond. Many of those present had got to know Habib after a game of chess or a can of soft drink from his tiny shop.

Javad, another guard at Aina, was visibly angry as he said, "Habib was the gentlest of men. He didn't have a grudge against anyone. This shows that the terrorists can't or won't differentiate between soldiers and civilians. Soldier, journalist or man-in-the-street, it's all the same to them."

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