

Beat: Miscellaneous

44 die as Taliban militants storm Afghan court

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USPA News - A group of Taliban militants stormed a court in western Afghanistan on Wednesday, killing at least 44 people and injuring more than 90 others in an attempt to free insurgents who were standing trial, local officials said. It was one of the country's worst attacks in recent years.

The attack began early Wednesday morning when nine heavily-armed men, wearing Afghan army uniforms and with explosives strapped to their bodies, stormed a court building in Farah, the capital of the western province which carries the same name. The complex is just a short distance from the governor's office. Authorities said the assault, aimed at freeing 13 Taliban militants who were due to stand trial, began when the attackers detonated an explosives-laden vehicle outside the court's front gate. The men then opened fire at civilians and security forces as they forced their way into the compound, triggering an eight-hour-long gun battle before the last attacker was killed. A spokesman for the provincial government confirmed a total of 53 people were killed, including 34 civilians, six Afghan army soldiers, four Afghan police officers, and all nine attackers. In addition, at least 91 others were injured, including 75 civilians, 13 police officers and soldiers, two judges, and a prisoner. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid claimed responsibility for the attack and said they were successful in freeing 13 militants who were on trial. The governor's office confirmed a number of Taliban militants were due to stand trial on Wednesday, but officials could not say if any of them escaped. Afghan President Hamid Karzai strongly condemned the deadly assault, describing it as a "brutal attack" against innocent people. He later spoke by telephone with Farah Governor Mohammad Akram Khpalwak and said a government delegation will visit the scene on Thursday to investigate the attack and provide emergency assistance to the families of the victims. Wednesday's attack was the country's deadliest since December 2011 when a suicide bomber attacked a large group of Shiites at a shrine in the Afghan capital of Kabul, killing 80 people and injuring more than 160 others. The toll includes several people who were killed on the same day when a bomb went off near a mosque in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif.

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