

Pak Taliban claims responsibility for crash that killed Norway, Philippines ambassadors

Written by JPNN



JPNN/Sajjad Hussain /Islamabad /May 08, 2015/A Pakistani military helicopter carrying 11 foreigners today crashed in the PaK, killing ambassadors of the Philippines and Norway and at least five others as the Taliban claimed responsibility for the downing of the chopper and said premier Nawaz Sharif was the target. Pakistan Army, however, ruled out the possibility of any terrorist or subversive activity in the crash in Pakistan-administered Kashmir's Gilgit-Baltistan

in the north and said the chopper crashed due to a technical fault while landing. Leif H Larsen, the Norwegian envoy, and Domingo D Lucenario Jr of the Philippines were killed along with the wives of the Malaysian and Indonesian ambassadors, besides two army pilots and a Pakistani crew member in the helicopter that caught fire as it crashed into a school. Six Pakistanis and 11 foreigners were on board the Mi-17 helicopter that was making an emergency landing when it crashed in Naltar valley, setting the school building ablaze, according to initial reports. "Update Naltar: 7 Fatalities. Foreigners-4 (Amb Norway, Philippine, wife of Amb Indonesia, Malaysia). Pakistani-3; two pilots, one crew member-6," military spokesman Major General Asim Saleem Bajwa tweeted. Polish ambassador Andrzej Ananiczolski and Dutch ambassador Marcel de Vink were also injured. The army pilots were identified as Major Altamash and Major Faisal. Sharif's plane was already airborne for Naltar where he was scheduled to inaugurate two projects but it was diverted back to Islamabad following the "tragic" news of the crash. Bajwa said that three Mi-17 military helicopters were carrying diplomats from 37 countries to Naltar where Sharif was to address a ceremony. The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed the responsibility for the downing of the helicopter and said Sharif was their target. "The helicopter was shot down by an anti-aircraft missile, killing pilots and many foreign ambassadors," according to a statement in Urdu emailed by the TTP's main spokesman Muhammad Khorasani. A special group of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan had prepared a special plan to target Nawaz Sharif during his visit but he survived because he was travelling in another helicopter," he said. The TTP claim could not be immediately verified, but the Gilgit-Baltistan region is not known to be a stronghold for the militant outfit. Bajwa said the helicopter crashed due to a technical fault.

"Update Naltar:Accident cause-As per initial info,2 heli landed safely while 3rd developed tech fault while landing-7," he tweeted."Two of the helicopters landed safely but the third one crashed and caught fire," Bajwa said.Defence minister Khawaja Asif said the helicopter fell from the height of 25 foot and caught fire after impact on the ground.He said the crash was due to a technical fault and there was no evidence of an outer attack.The TTP claimed that they attacked the helicopter with a shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missiles."Nawaz Sharif and his colleagues are our target. We will soon show the world the shoulder launch missile which was used in the attack," the militants said.According to some reports, ambassadors of Indonesia, Lebanon, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Romania, Norway, South Africa, the Philippines and Poland were in the helicopter.According to the Express Tribune, the High commissioners of South Africa and Indonesia were also injured.

The Foreign Office has informed the respective governments about the tragic incident.The victims of the crash were airlifted to the military hospital in Gilgit. Officials were preparing to bring back all passengers to Islamabad.The Foreign Office in a statement said diplomats of more than 30 were part of the three-day excursion trips organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in consultation with the Diplomatic Corps.The trip was mainly organised for tourism purposes, however, the ambassadors were expected to hold high-level meetings, including one with the Gilgit-Baltistan chief minister Shah Jehan Mir."This morning, Heads of Diplomatic Mission of more than thirty countries and their family members as well as some Pakistani dignitaries were flown to Gilgit by a C-130 aircraft," the statement said.

They were being taken to Naltar in separate helicopters, when one of the helicopter carrying 17 persons crashed.The Prime Minister "expressed deep grief and sorrow" over the incident and declared one day mourning, according to a statement issued by his office.President Mamnoon Hussain, Advisor to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Syed Tariq Fatemi and Foreign Secretary Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry have also conveyed their heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families, it said.A Crisis Management Cell (CMC) has been established at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a board of inquiry has been constituted to investigate into the cause of the crash.The air crash, the worst since 2012 when a civilian 737 went down in Islamabad killing 130 people, was also reminiscent of the one in 1988 that killed then military-ruler General Zia-ul-Haq as well as the US ambassador at the time Arnold Raphel.Agency