

International

Norway bow-and-arrow attack an 'act of terror'

Norway attacker converted to Islam, suspected of radicalisation

KONGSBERG: The killing of five people in Norway in a bow-and-arrow attack appears to be an "act of terror," the Norwegian security service said yesterday, with the suspect, a Danish Muslim convert, already on their radar over fears he had been radicalized. Four women and a man died and two others were injured on Wednesday in the south-eastern town of Kongsberg in Norway's deadliest attack in a decade.

"The events in Kongsberg currently appear to be an act of terror, but the investigation... will determine in closer detail what the acts were motivated by," Norway's intelligence service PST said in a statement. "We're talking about a convert to Islam," police official Ole Bredrup Saeverud told reporters yesterday, adding: "There were fears linked to radicalization previously." Saeverud said the 37-year-old suspect had confessed to the facts of the matter during questioning. Those who were killed during the attack were all aged between 50 and 70.

"We are investigating among other things to determine whether this was an act of terror," Saeverud added. Reports that linked him to radicalization predated this year, Saeverud said, and police had followed up at the time. "We haven't had any reports about him in 2021, but earlier," he said. "We're relatively sure that he acted alone." PST also confirmed that the suspect was known to them but added they couldn't give "further details about him."

It also said they didn't believe the threat level

in the country had changed, describing it as "moderate". "Our evaluation is that what happened in Kongsberg Wednesday October 13 does not change the national threat assessment," PST said. Murder in Norway is rare. It was the deadliest attack since far-right extremist Anders Behring Breivik killed 77 people in 2011. Since then, Norway has seen one other far-right attack, carried out by a self-proclaimed neo-Nazi who opened fire into a mosque.

'Like Kabul'

Yesterday, it was largely quiet in Kongsberg, a picturesque town of 25,000 people with wooden facades and the foliage changing color for the autumn. Streets were almost empty with only a light police presence. A few police officers stood outside a store where part of the attack took place. A glass door there was chipped by a shot.

Two candles flickered outside the town's church. The suspect was due to appear before a judge on Friday for a custody hearing. He was undergoing a psychiatric examination yesterday, the prosecutor said. The victims have not yet been named publicly, but one of the wounded was an off-duty police officer who had been in a store. Norwegian media questioned why it took police more than a half-hour to arrest the suspect after the first reports of the attack.

Police were informed of the attack at 6:13 pm



KONGSBERG: Police officers cordon off the scene where they are investigating in Kongsberg, Norway after a man armed with bow killed several people before being arrested by police on October 13, 2021. —AFP

and the suspect was arrested at 6:47 pm. He fired arrows at police, who responded with warning shots, Saeverud said. Thomas Nilsen was at home when he heard the screams and said images of war came to mind. "I thought it was Kabul," he told AFP. "I heard children screaming, barking and then the sound of a helicopter circling around my house," Terje Kristiansen, another witness, said. "I didn't sleep much," he added.

Images in the media showed a black arrow

sticking out of a wall and what looked like competition-grade arrows lying on the ground. Police said yesterday the suspect had also used other weapons, but provided no details. "These events shake us," said Prime Minister Erna Solberg, who stepped down yesterday, replaced by Jonas Gahr Store, whose Labour Party won recent parliamentary elections. Store lamented the "horrible acts", while Norway's King Harald said he was "appalled by the tragic events". — AFP

Ten villagers killed in mosque attack in western Niger

NIAMEY: Suspected jihadists killed 10 villagers in an attack on a mosque earlier this week in western Niger's Tillaberi region, local sources said on Wednesday. The attack occurred Monday in the village of Abankor in the "Tri-Border" region where Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso meet. "The attackers arrived on motorbikes during evening prayers and the victims were in the mosque when they were killed," an official in Banibangou city told AFP.

A resident of the neighboring town of Tondiwindi confirmed the attack and the death toll. On local radio Studio Kalangou, an Abankor resident said one person was injured in addition to the 10 dead, adding that the attack happened in the early evening. Since early 2021, attacks by suspected jihadists have shot up in the area around Banibangou and nearby towns in the Tillaberi region, a vast area covering 100,000 square kilometers (38,000 square miles) home to ethnic groups such as

the Djerma, Fulani, Tuareg and Hausa.

The flashpoint area is frequently targeted by the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims with deadly attacks against civilians and soldiers. Authorities on Wednesday reimposed a ban on motorbikes in several parts of the Tillaberi region. The interdiction, first decreed last year to combat jihadist attacks carried out by gunmen on motorbikes, had been lifted on September 1.

The initial decree also regulated the sale of fuel and shut down markets suspected of feeding the armed groups and hiding their informants. The tougher security measures - which have sparked sometimes violent protests - have had economic repercussions on local people, Tillaberi MPs said in August. Instead of motorbikes, attackers took to using pushbikes and camels, they said. Motorbikes are the primary means of transport for people in the Tillaberi region.

Meanwhile, the United Nations has warned that the Tillaberi region is facing a "major food crisis", with almost 600,000 people exposed to food insecurity. "Insecurity and recurrent attacks by suspected elements of non-state armed groups targeting farmers and civilians will have serious repercussions this year on the already precarious food situation," the UN Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs office warned in a report sent to AFP earlier this month. — AFP

Italy puts Egyptian officers on trial for student's murder

ROME: The trial of four Egyptian security officers for the brutal killing in Cairo five years ago of Italian student Giulio Regeni opened in absentia in Rome yesterday. The officers stand accused of kidnapping, conspiracy to murder and grievous bodily harm in the case, which sparked outrage in Italy and has strained diplomatic relations with Egypt.

Regeni's mother had her head bowed as she arrived with his father and Giulio's sister for the hearing, which was taking place in the bunker room of the Rebibbia prison, often the stage for mafia trials. Regeni, 28, was doing research for a doctorate at the University of Cambridge when he was abducted in January 2016. His body, bearing extensive signs of torture, was eventually found dumped on the outskirts of Cairo.

Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio welcomed the opening of the trial as "a result un hoped for in the weeks following the

discovery of Giulio's body," when the case looked unsolvable. Prime Minister Mario Draghi's office announced late Wednesday that the government was joining the case as a civil plaintiff, in a symbolic show of support for the Regeni family. But the trial may collapse before it has begun.

The court will have to rule on whether the four suspects are aware of the judicial proceedings against them, as required by law. Egypt has refused to provide their contact details. At a preliminary hearing in May, a judge ruled that media coverage meant news of the investigation into the four would have reached them. That decision may be upheld or overturned by the court yesterday. The four are named in court documents as General Tariq Sabir, Colonels Athar Kamel and Uhsam Helmi and Major Magdi Ibrahim Abdelal Sharif, who is accused of carrying out the killing.

Investigators believe Regeni was abducted and killed after being mistaken for a foreign spy. Prosecutor Michele Prestipino told a parliamentary committee in December that there were "elements of significant proof" implicating Egyptian officers in the murder—an accusation rejected by Egypt. His team allege Sharif got informants to follow Regeni, had him arrested and caused him "acute physical suffering". Regeni's teeth were broken and his hands and feet fractured. He died of suffocation. — AFP