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## Attack on prison vans in Islamabad: PTI MPAs among prisoners escape amid shootout



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Unidentified gunmen ambushed three prison vans carrying detainees on Friday at the Sangjani Toll Plaza, leading to a chaotic scene as several prisoners, including three Members of Provincial Assembly (MPAs) from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), managed to escape, according to police sources. The prisoners, 187 individuals detained during recent protests at D-Chowk, were being transported to Attock Jail following court appearances. Among those in the vans were MPAs

Anwar Zeb, Malik Liaquat, and Yasir Qureshi, alongside K-P government employees and police officers, police sources confirmed.” Armed assailants, seemingly lying in wait, opened fire as the prison vans reached Sangjani,” stated a police official. The attack targeted the vehicles’ tyres, forcing them to halt, while police officers onboard sustained injuries and were subsequently taken to the hospital. In the aftermath, law enforcement quickly mobilised reinforcements, securing the area and launching an immediate manhunt. Police report that some escapees have already been recaptured, including the son of an MPA. However, several prisoners remain unaccounted for, believed to have been aided by the attackers in their escape. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police spokesperson confirmed the incident, stating that the assailants numbered between 25 to 30, armed and firing to break the prisoners free. “This was a planned assault, intended to free individuals implicated in terrorism cases related to the recent PTI protests,” said the spokesperson. While many prisoners were successfully prevented from escaping, the attackers did manage to shatter van windows and disable some police vehicles. Local sources reported significant police presence at the scene following the attack, with authorities vowing to pursue those responsible for the daring ambush and the escape of high-profile detainees. Meanwhile, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders have dismissed the attack on prison vans near the Sangjani Toll Plaza as a staged incident orchestrated by the federal government and police,

claiming it was intended to malign the party. PTI officials accused the police of encouraging detainees to escape and called the incident a “drama” that reflects rising government “conspiracies.” “The attack on the prison vans in Islamabad is yet another stunt by the federal government,” said Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur. “These schemes by the government are escalating daily. The people should see through this and understand that our members are committed and will not flee,” he stated. PTI Secretary of Information, Sheikh Waqas Akram, also criticised the handling of PTI detainees, who he claimed were held without just cause. According to Akram, over 80 PTI supporters had been detained by Islamabad Police following recent protests and were supposed to be released as ordered by the court. “Instead, they have been re-arrested under new charges. Our people are not hiding; they are demanding justice,” he added. Akram alleged that after a court hearing, the prison vans transporting PTI detainees to Attock Jail were diverted to an area near Faisal Town, where SHO Shabbir Tanoli reportedly intervened, ordering the vehicles to stop and breaking their windows. “Tanoli told our people to flee, but they remained firm,” he claimed. Akram emphasised that those arrested include government employees and MPAs, stating, “These are individuals of integrity; they’re not running away.” According to police sources, the prison vans carrying 82 detainees were attacked by assailants in four vehicles as they approached the Sangjani Toll Plaza. The attackers, armed with weapons,

batons, and stones, targeted the vans, causing four police officers to sustain injuries. Police reported that three of the attackers were apprehended on the scene, while the remaining managed to flee. “The attackers were armed and clearly intent on causing disruption,” said an Islamabad Police spokesperson, adding that law enforcement was investigating the incident thoroughly. “Medical aid has been provided to injured officers, and additional teams have been deployed in the area to apprehend those who fled.” Islamabad Police launched a search operation across nearby areas to locate remaining attackers and any potential escapees. Senior officers, along with a sizeable police presence, arrived on-site immediately after the incident, reviewing the situation and establishing checkpoints. Earlier in the day, an Islamabad sessions court discharged two PTI MPAs, 34 K-P police employees, and 42 personnel from the 1122 Rescue Service who had been detained during a PTI protest at China Chowk in Blue Area. The hearing was held before Judicial Magistrate Mian Azhar Nadeem, where MPAs Anwar Zeb and Malik Liaquat were also present. Defence counsel Ansar Mahmood Kayani argued that all defendants were granted bail the previous day but were taken into custody again by Secretariat Police shortly after their release. During the proceedings, the judge questioned whether the defendants had engaged in any vandalism or robbery at the Marriott and raised concerns about applying terrorism charges. “Does this case even qualify for terrorism charges? They were just granted bail in similar

cases yesterday,” the judge remarked. Police representatives noted that while the suspects were previously charged under cases from Secretariat and Kohsar Police Stations, there was a two-hour gap between the incidents. They confirmed that the defendants were arrested under the Secretariat Police Station’s case. Following the arguments, the court ordered all defendants, who had been presented for an identification parade, to be formally discharged from the charges.

Federal Information Minister Attaullah Tarar condemned the attack on prison vans near Sangjani Toll Plaza, describing it as a “premeditated assault” by PTI members aimed at aiding detainees’ escape. Tarar, in a statement, called the incident a failed attempt by PTI workers to free party members in police custody, adding that several attackers, including the son of PTI MPA Liaquat from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, had been arrested. “PTI workers launched this assault with full planning at the Sangjani Toll Plaza, attempting to break detainees free,” Tarar said. He stated that the attackers travelled in four vehicles, carrying weapons, and managed to intercept the vans before police regained control. “Our police acted courageously, and all detainees are now back in custody,” he added, noting that two officers sustained injuries during the incident. According to Tarar, two vehicles, four individuals, and firearms were seized from the attackers. “PTI’s history is one of violence and chaos, from the May 9 riots to their past attacks on state institutions,” he remarked, adding that the toll plaza’s CCTV footage captured the attack and would aid in further

arrests. Tarar criticised PTI's response to the incident as "laughable," dismissing their claims as "the script of a film." He asserted that the state would not tolerate such actions and promised strict legal repercussions for those involved. "We will set an example here to ensure that no one in the future dares to intercept prison vans and help detainees escape," he stated. The information minister disclosed that a police operation was underway to identify additional suspects, with authorities pursuing the vehicles involved in the attack. "The state's authority will be upheld, and no leniency will be shown," he added, referencing the sentences imposed in incidents like the US Capitol Hill and London riots. "Had the culprits of May 9 been adequately punished, such acts would not have been attempted today," Tarar concluded.