

Sweden calls Stockholm blasts terror crimes

Threatening letter to news agency mentions Afghanistan, cartoonist.

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Stockholm: Swedish police investigating two blasts that rocked central Stockholm on Saturday, killing the suspected bomber and wounding two, said yesterday they had good leads into what they said were "terror crimes".

The Swedish news agency TT said that before the explosions it received a threatening letter about Sweden's military presence in Afghanistan and caricatures of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) drawn several years ago by a Swedish cartoonist.

Anders Thornberg, director of operations at the Security Police, said police could neither confirm that the man who died was a suicide bomber nor discuss his identity, as some family members had not yet been informed.

"We are investigating this as terror crimes according to Swedish law ... we have not raised the security (threat) level," Thornberg said, adding police were stepping up their presence in the capital.

The incident follows several nervous months in Europe after a US travel alert about possible attacks by militants and a failed bid by a Yemen Al Qaida group to use air cargo to send parcel bombs via Europe to America.

Potential attackers

"Other European capitals must be worried about the fact that this happened in a capital city in the run-up to Christmas," said Claude Moniquet, head of the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Centre think-tank in Brussels. "It could be a signal to other potential attackers to prompt them to attack at this time." The incident began when a car burst into flames near a busy street in the city centre, followed by explosions inside the car which police said were caused by gas canisters.

The second explosion, about 300 metres away and 10-15 minutes later, killed one man and wounded two people.

Police vans cordoned off several streets around the body and towed away the car.