

1983: Car bomb in South Africa kills 16

Macau Daily Times

At least 16 people have been killed and more than 130 people injured in a car bomb explosion in South Africa's capital city, Pretoria.

The explosion happened outside the Nedbank Square building on Church Street at about 1630 hours - the height of the city's rush hour.

More than 20 ambulances attended the scene and took the dead and injured to three hospitals in and around Pretoria.

Police sealed off the surrounding area with a barbed-wire fence as emergency personnel sifted through the rubble looking for bodies.

Bomb disposal experts were called to the scene to search for a possible second bomb.

The outlawed anti-apartheid group the African National Congress has been blamed for the attack.

Bled to death

A huge pall of smoke rose hundreds of feet into the air as debris and bodies were strewn around the scene of the explosion.

It is understood the bomb had been placed in a blue Alfa Romeo car outside the multi-storey building, which houses the South African air force headquarters.

It exploded at the height of the city's rush-hour as hundreds of people were leaving work for the weekend.

Glass and metal were catapulted into the air as shop-fronts and windows were blown out.

Many passers-by had limbs amputated by the flying debris. Others bled to death.

South Africa's Minister for Law and Order, Louis le Grange, who visited the scene immediately, blamed the attack on the ANC.

He said: "I have no doubt who is responsible for this despicable attack."

He said the explosion was the "biggest and ugliest" terrorist incident since anti-government violence began in South Africa 20 years ago.

He added: "Most of the victims were civilians, but some were air force personnel in uniform, black and white. Quite a number of those killed were black.

The ANC is committed to overthrowing the minority white government.

Oliver Tambo, who is the organisation's acting president while its senior figure, Nelson Mandela, is in prison, said the Nedbank Square building was a legitimate target, although he did not admit carrying out the attack.

General Mike Gedenhuys, Police Commissioner, said: "Many of the victims are so badly mutilated they have not yet been identified."

General Magnus Malan, South African's defence minister, described the explosion as a "cowardly, criminal deed in the Communist war being raged against South Africa".

He said more than 40,000 civilians had died as a result of terrorism in the past five years in Africa and 83,000 armed men had died.

South Africa has nearly five million whites, 21 million blacks, nearly one million Indians and about 2.5 million people of mixed race.

The government's apartheid system denies citizenship rights to black people except in 10 remote homelands.

The ANC has warned it intends to step up its campaign to bring an end to white minority rule.

In Context

The number of dead rose to 17 and 197 people were injured in the explosion.

Four days later the South African Air Force bombed ANC bases in Maputo, Mozambique, in retaliation for the Pretoria car bomb.

At least six people, including two children, were killed.

Following the Maputo attack the ANC formally admitted carrying out the Pretoria bombing.

On 2 February 1990 the South African government lifted restrictions on the ANC allowing legal opposition to apartheid for the first time in 40 years.

The ANC party's leader, Nelson Mandela, was freed on 11 February 1990 after 27 years in detention.

In May 1994 Mandela became South Africa's first black president when the ANC swept into power.