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# BOMBING KILLS 14 IN MOROCCO TOURIST SQUARE

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The Associated Press

MARRAKECH, Morocco — A massive terrorist bombing tore through a tourist cafe in the heart of Marrakech's old quarter, killing at least 11 foreigners and three Moroccans in the country's deadliest attack in eight years.

The bombing Thursday was timed to maximize deaths in one of North Africa's most popular tourist destinations, striking as crowds sat down for lunch. The attack appeared to be the work of a suicide bomber, though there was no immediate claim of responsibility, according to a senior intelligence official who requested anonymity.

At least 23 people were wounded in the blast in Djemma el-Fna square, one of the top attractions in a country that depends heavily on tourism, Moroccan Interior Minister Taib Cheragaoui said.

Government spokesman Khalid Naciri said it was too soon to lay blame for what he called a terrorist attack, but he noted that Morocco regularly dismantles cells linked to an al-Qaida affiliate, al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb. He said several plots have been disrupted. At least eight French citizens were being treated at Marrakech's main Tofail Hospital, along with one Canadian, a British citizen and three Moroccans, emergency-room chief Hicham Nejmi said. Others were being treated at a military hospital and a handful in private clinics.

April marks the start of Morocco's tourist season, when visitors gather to watch snake charmers, storytellers, jugglers and musicians, filling the cafes

that ring the edges of the iconic square on the route to the city's major open-air souk, or market.

"There was a huge bang, and lots of smoke went up. There was debris raining down from the sky," honey-mooner Andy Birnie, who lives in north London, said by telephone. "Hundreds of people were running in panic."

The explosion blew much of the facade off the two-story Argana cafe, leaving awnings dangling. Panicked passers-by dragged away bodies and tried to put out flames with fire extinguishers, witnesses said.

"I believe the injured were mostly tourists, judging by what they were wearing," Alexandre Carvalho, 34, a call-center worker from southern Portugal, said by telephone. French President Nicolas Sarkozy confirmed the victims included French citizens.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague said the British ambassador was traveling to Marrakech, although he gave no immediate confirmation of British casualties. The bombing threatens to stress the nation's roughly \$8 billion tourism industry. More than 9 million people visited the country last year, according to statistics from the state news agency.

This former French colony has enjoyed relative stability compared with some of its neighbors, but King Mohammed VI holds the final say in all policy, and the country's largest Islamist movement is banned from politics. He is relatively popular, having pushed for some political and economic liberalization and increased women's rights since taking power 11 years ago, when his father died.

The king has pledged constitutional changes in response to several largely peaceful protests during the past two months that were inspired by the Arab Spring uprisings that pushed out autocrats in nearby Tunisia and Egypt.

Al-Qaida's affiliate in North Africa stages regular attacks and kidnappings in neighboring Algeria. Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb is holding four Frenchmen hostage after kidnapping them in Niger last year.

Morocco, however, has been mostly peaceful since it was hit by five simultaneous terrorist bombings in Casablanca in 2003 that killed 33 people and a dozen bombers linked to the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group, a local militant group also been implicated in the deadly transit attacks in Madrid, Spain, in March 2004.

Material from The New York Times is included in this report.