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Afghanistan Hit by Wave of Violence

By AZAM AHMED

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A spate of violence across Afghanistan has claimed the lives of nearly two dozen Afghan police officers and civilians in the past few days, including a district police official assassinated over a recent anti-Taliban campaign.

Two gunmen on motorcycles in the Khaki Safed district of Farah Province, in western Afghanistan, killed the police official, Abdul Ghani, in front of his home on Friday night, apparently as retribution for a crackdown on the Taliban that killed several insurgents, a spokesman for the Farah governor said.

The targeted hit was a rare example of recent violence not involving a bomb or civilian casualties. In Helmand Province in the south, six Afghan policemen were killed and four were injured on Thursday when a roadside bomb exploded near their vehicle in the Gereschk district. On Friday, three police officers and six civilians were killed by two car bombs in a Kandahar city development owned by Mahmoud Karzai, President Hamid Karzai's brother. Meanwhile, an explosion on Saturday morning in Khost, in eastern Afghanistan, killed at least one border policeman while wounding eight others.

The annual fighting season is beginning in earnest, including a huge bombing in Kabul on Thursday that injured dozens and killed 16 people, 6 of them Americans, the deadliest attack in the city in months.

Though unrelated, the assaults underscore the ability of insurgents to attack government forces, despite a decade-long campaign to snuff them out. The acts also undermine the credibility of Mr. Karzai's administration and heighten the uncertainty over whether Afghans can maintain security on their own once the majority of international coalition forces withdraw next year.

The International Security Assistance Force, the military coalition known as ISAF, released a statement Friday night denouncing the attacks on civilians in Kandahar, which took place in the Aino Mina development, a relatively peaceful area where families often gather for picnics. "Once again the insurgents have chosen to conduct an attack that was designed to kill or maim the maximum number of people possible," Gen. Joseph F. Dunford, the coalition commander, said in the statement. "To conduct this attack in a crowded area on the traditional day of peace and mercy speaks to the utter ruthlessness of the insurgents."

The first blast in Kandahar targeted a police vehicle, killing the three officers, while the second killed six people visiting Aino Mina with their children, according to Javed Faisal, a spokesman for the provincial governor.

The attack in Khost took place around 9:30 a.m. Saturday, when a barrel laden with explosives was detonated near a checkpoint in the Kochi Sarai area. In addition to killing one of the police officers, the blast wounded three other officers and five civilians, said Mubariz Zadran, the provincial governor's spokesman.