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Afghanistan sees growing monthly casualties in March

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Afghanistan sustained increasing casualties of war and conflicts in March as militants intensified attacks ahead of the country's presidential and provincial councils elections slated for April 5.

The Taliban-led attacks and conflicts claimed more than 170 lives while leaving over 200 others injured in the month, compared with a bit more than 100 and 130 for the previous month, respectively.

More than 40 major bomb attacks took place in March, including 13 suicide bombings, according to official data.

On Monday, six civilians were killed when their vehicle set off a roadside bombing in northern Kunduz province.

The Taliban carried out two attacks on the Afghan Independent Election Commission (IEC) main office and a sub-office on March 29 and March 25 in Kabul, respectively, killing a provincial council candidate and four other civilians and wounded five people. Eleven attackers were killed by the security forces in the counter- attacks.

On March 28, two Afghan civilians were killed and four people wounded when five militants launched a massive attack on a guest house in Kabul. Nearly 20 foreigners escaped the four-hour gunfight and a car bomb on the four-story building located in western Kabul.

A bloody attack occurred on March 18 when 17 civilians were killed and 50 others wounded in a suicide blast which targeted people shopping for the New Year holiday in a local bazaar in northern Faryab province.

On March 11, nine civilians, including five foreigners, were killed when four attackers armed with six handguns made their way to a fortified hotel in central Kabul and opened indiscriminate firing on people dining in the restaurant.

An Afghan journalist, his wife and two children and an international election observer were among the killed in the five- star Kabul Serena Hotel.

While the campaign for the presidential election was in full swing, at least five politicians were killed and several others wounded in separate attacks across the country.

Afghanistan's third presidential and provincial councils election is slated for April 5 this year. Campaign by presidential candidates officially started on Feb. 2 and will close on April 2 or 48 hours before the election day.

The number of presidential candidates has dropped to eight after the withdrawal of three contenders from the race, and that of those for the council seats in 34 provinces across the country stands at more than 2,500.

At least eight targeted killings occurred in different provinces last month, claiming the lives of several government officials and local leaders.

Local analysts feared that the Taliban would continue their attacks across the country as the Afghan army and police took the lead in combat operations. More than 52,000-strong NATO-led foreign troops, down from the peak of 130,000 in 2010, are being deployed in Afghanistan.

Most of the foreign forces are due to withdraw from Afghanistan by the end of the year.

The exact number of casualties on the Afghan army and police last month remained unknown.

For the first time since the war began in late 2001, no combat foreign soldier was killed in March but two NATO-led coalition service members lost their lives in non-combat incidents.