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Reuters

Bomb blast kills 20 Afghan civilians in southeast

By Jonathon Burch
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Twenty Afghan civilians, including 13 children, were killed by a roadside bomb in southeastern Afghanistan on Wednesday, a senior official said, in the country's deadliest insurgent attack in nearly six months.

Violence in Afghanistan is at its worst level since the overthrow of the Taliban by U.S.-backed Afghan forces in late 2001 with record casualties on all sides of the conflict and a raging insurgency that has shown little sign of abating.

Ordinary Afghans have taken the brunt of the fighting as they become increasingly caught up in the crossfire.

Brigadier General Josef Blotz, senior spokesman for NATO-led forces in Afghanistan, said 13 children and six women were among the dead in Wednesday's attack in Khoshamand district of Paktika, a volatile province south of Kabul, that borders Pakistan.

"It is another spike in this brutal Taliban arsenal and tactics and techniques. It is unjustifiable, it is brutal," Blotz said in an interview with Reuters.

Earlier reports from Afghan officials said 13 civilians had been killed as they traveled in a motorized rickshaw to the district center for medical treatment. Casualty tolls from such attacks can often increase hours after the incident.

The bombing was the bloodiest insurgent attack since July 28 when at least 25 civilians were killed after their bus was hit by a roadside bomb in western Afghanistan.

In the first six months of last year, the deaths of children rose by more than half from the same period of 2009, according to the United Nations. Deaths of women also increased.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai condemned the attack calling it "inhumane and un-Islamic."

Roadside bombs are by far the deadliest weapon deployed by insurgents and are responsible for most of the casualties among international, Afghan troops as well as civilians.

Ordinary Afghans, however, have been hit the hardest. The United Nations said 2,412 civilians were killed and 3,803 others wounded in the first ten months of last year, a 20 percent increase compared to 2009.

Dozens of civilians have been killed this month alone.

Earlier this month, a suicide bomber killed 17 people, including 16 civilians, inside a public bathhouse in southern Kandahar province.

The increased violence around the country has helped to dispel expectations of a winter lull in fighting and military commanders acknowledge militant attacks are up on a year ago.

In Gormach district in northern Faryab province, 12 insurgents were killed and another six wounded when the homemade bomb they were making, exploded inside a compound overnight, the Interior Ministry said on Wednesday.

Four Afghan policemen on patrol were killed when their vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb in southern Zabul province on Tuesday, said Abdul Razziq a senior police official.