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The Los Angeles Times

Insurgents' roadside bomb kills 12 Afghans in minibus

By Laura King

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The attack shows the dangers faced by civilians. IEDs kill and maim far more Afghans than Western troops.

Kabul - Pointing up the dangers faced by Afghan civilians as insurgents take aim at Western troops, a minibus in eastern Afghanistan hit a roadside bomb Wednesday, killing 12 passengers, provincial officials said.

Taliban fighters and other insurgents have made IEDs, or improvised explosive devices, their weapon of choice. Although buried bombs are the No. 1 killer of Western troops, they also kill and maim far larger numbers of Afghan civilians.

Many of the devices are planted on roads known to be used by military convoys, but civilian vehicles travel them as well, often with catastrophic results.

Wednesday's explosion took place in Khowst province, near the Pakistan frontier. The Pakistan-based Haqqani network is the most active insurgent group there, staging frequent attacks on American troops. But no group took immediate responsibility for the blast.

Mobariz Zadran, a provincial spokesman, said in addition to the dozen fatalities, four other people aboard the passenger van were injured. The explosion took place in the Tani district.

Zadran said women and children were believed among the dead, but the bodies were so badly

mutilated by the powerful blast that a precise breakdown could not immediately be provided.

The explosion came as the national capital, Kabul, was on high security alert during a military parade marking the 18th anniversary of the toppling of a Soviet-installed government by mujahedin fighters who drove the Red Army out of Afghanistan.

Two years ago, the Taliban attacked the anniversary observances in a bid to assassinate Afghan President Hamid Karzai. Karzai was not present for this year's parade; he was at a regional conference in the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan.

Other top officials were present, including his two vice presidents. But checkpoints dotted the capital, because any large public gathering is seen as vulnerable to insurgent attacks. Many foreign aid workers and other expatriates were under "lockdown" for the duration of the celebrations.

Tensions were also running high in the southern city of Kandahar, where insurgents have launched a concerted campaign against municipal and provincial officials and other local leaders seen as supportive of the Karzai government.

Provincial officials said a tribal elder in the district of Argandab, on the city's outskirts, was killed Wednesday. Last week, the city's deputy mayor was gunned down as he prayed in a mosque.