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Buried bombs take increasingly deadly toll on Afghan civilians

Thirty are killed within 48 hours as the fighting season escalates. The United Nations says May was the deadliest month in five years for noncombatants.

By Laura King, Los Angeles Times

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Buried bombs killed 30 Afghans in a 48-hour span, in the latest grim illustration of the dangers faced by civilians as the season's fighting heats up.

Insurgents routinely seed roads and pathways with IEDs, or improvised explosive devices — their favored weapon against Western troops. But most often, those killed and injured by the hidden bombs are civilians.

The latest casualties came Saturday in Zabul province, in southern Afghanistan, when a van filled with travelers struck a roadside bomb. Thirteen people were killed, including four children and four women, said a spokesman for the provincial government.

On Friday evening, two bombs planted close together killed four people in the rural Maruf district of volatile Kandahar province. One was apparently triggered by a donkey, and two people riding or leading the animal died in the explosion. Then two more people who rushed to the rescue were killed by the second bomb, police said.

The Taliban and other insurgents often plant bombs close together, in hopes of killing troops and those who try to help victims.

The bombings in Zabul and Kandahar followed another deadly episode Thursday night in nearby Nimroz province, a roadside bomb that killed 13 people and injured about three dozen others.

Civilians have been dying in record numbers as violence intensifies across Afghanistan. The United Nations said that May was the deadliest month for noncombatants since it began keeping track five years ago, with 368 civilians killed in war-related violence. That month coincided with the start of the Taliban spring offensive.

Military fatalities, too, have been edging higher. Western troop deaths reached their highest levels of the year last month. Sixty-five were killed in June, according to the independent website icasualties.org, which tracks combat fatalities in Afghanistan and Iraq. Forty-six of those were Americans.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force announced the deaths of two more service members, one Saturday in western Afghanistan and another a day earlier in the south. The NATO force did not disclose the nationalities involved, but Italian media reports said the soldier killed Saturday was Italian.