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Reuters

Blasts hit southern Afghan city, at least one dead Casualties at highest level since Taliban ousted in 2001

By Ismail Sameem
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The southern Afghan city of Kandahar was hit by several explosions on Saturday, including one at a police headquarters which killed at least one person and wounded four more.

Police were preparing to defuse a bomb packed onto a motorcycle outside a police compound when it exploded, Zalmay Ayubi, a spokesman for the Kandahar provincial governor's office, said.

Mohammad Rasool, a doctor at a local hospital, said one person was killed and four wounded in the blast. Witnesses said Kandahar had been hit by four other explosions, although details on those were not immediately available.

Thousands of U.S. troops are engaged in a campaign to flush insurgents out of districts around Kandahar, a drive seen as vital to turning the tide of a war now in its tenth year.

Casualties in Afghanistan's conflict are at their highest since the Taliban were ousted by U.S.-backed forces in 2001. More than 2,000 foreign troops have been killed since then as the insurgents extended attacks beyond their southern heartland.

More than 40 foreign troops have been killed so far this month alone.

Rising foreign casualties are putting pressure on U.S. President Barack Obama and his NATO allies to seek an end to the war. U.S. and Afghan officials are increasingly looking at a political settlement to the conflict as an option.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has already reached out to the Taliban in an effort to broker negotiations. But Taliban commanders say they will not consider any official talks until foreign troops leave Afghanistan soil.