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Bomb blast hits minibus, kills 5 Afghan civilians

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KABUL, Afghanistan – A minibus full of Afghan civilians struck a roadside bomb in southern Afghanistan on Monday, setting off an explosion that killed five passengers.

One woman and four children died and another six passengers were wounded, said Fareed Ayal, a spokesman for the Uruzgan provincial police.

Ayal said the vehicle had just left the main market area in Chor district when it hit the buried explosive. He said two brothers and their families were traveling in the minibus.

Civilians are frequently the victims of bombs laid by insurgents to target Afghan or international forces.

The U.N. said in a recent report that 1,462 Afghan civilians were killed in the crossfire between Taliban insurgents and Afghan, U.S. and NATO forces during the first half of this year — up 15 percent from the same period a year earlier.

The U.N. report attributed 80 percent of the civilian deaths to insurgents and others fighting against the Afghan government. International troops and other pro-government forces were to blame for 14 percent of the deaths; 6 percent were not attributed to any side.

In the east, meanwhile, eight Pakistani laborers were freed five days after being kidnapped by unknown gunmen, said Din Mohammad Darwesh, the spokesman for the Logar province government. Local elders helped negotiate their release, Darwesh said, adding that no ransom was paid.

The laborers were taken when a gunman on a motorcycle ambushed a bus carrying them to work at a hospital construction site in the provincial capital. After he stopped the bus, a group of attackers took them into the woods at gunpoint.