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The Frontier Post

NATO man, seven cops killed in bomb blasts

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A member of the NATO force died in southern Afghanistan on Thursday while attacks on police facilities in several provinces killed at least seven Afghan law enforcement officers and one civilian.

The latest violence comes as local forces assume greater responsibility for security in advance of a planned pullout of NATO combat troops by 2014.

A NATO coalition spokeswoman said the force member's death was caused by a roadside bomb but that, in line with policy, any additional information would be provided by officials of the victim's home country, which was not immediately identified.

Ahmad Jawed Faisal, a spokesperson in the Kandahar governor's office, said six policemen and six civilians were wounded in that southern province Thursday morning when a suicide bomber rammed an explosive-laden 4-wheel-drive vehicle into the gate of a district police headquarters compound.

Kandahar, the birthplace of the Taliban, is among the most heavily contested areas as militants and Afghan and foreign forces battle for control.

Ahmadzia Abdulzai, a spokesman in the governor's office of eastern Nangrahar province, said a device detonated at a police checkpoint on the Jalalabad-Torkham highway, although the type of explosive and circumstances of the blast were still under investigation.

And in northern Kunduz province, a roadside bomb reportedly struck a vehicle carrying the head of a district anti-terrorism police force, killing him, a colleague and a police bodyguard.

Civilian deaths in Afghanistan between January and April fell 36%, the first time since record-keeping began in 2007 that the death toll has declined over a several-month period, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan said in a statement Thursday.

Although that is welcome news, too many civilians are still getting caught up in the violence as insurgents fight Afghan and foreign forces, the agency said.

And despite the most recent improvement, 2011 was the fifth consecutive year that civilian casualties increased, with 3,021 deaths reported.

Roadside bombs planted by anti-government forces remain the biggest civilian killer, the UN said, adding that, despite improvements, it continues to document human rights abuses by Afghan local police.

According to UN figures, 579 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the first four months of 2012, down from 898 in the year-earlier period, while the number of wounded fell to 1,216, from 1,373. Anti-government forces -- basically the Taliban and its allies -- were responsible for 79% of civilian casualties, the UN said. Afghan and foreign forces accounted for 9%, with the remainder unaccounted for.

Jan Kubis, the UN's special representative to Afghanistan, told reporters Wednesday that he believed the \$4.1 billion required annually to support and continue training Afghan security forces after 2014 "will be reached and is achievable," according to the Associated Press. The Afghan government is slated to provide \$500 million of the total budget. There are currently 130,000 US-led NATO forces fighting the Taliban-led insurgency in Afghanistan. On Tuesday, the Pentagon announced the death of Sakhr al-Taifi, Al Qaeda's second-in-command in Afghanistan, part of its bid to prevent the country from becoming an Al Qaeda stronghold again.