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The New York Times

Bombings Kill at Least 20 in Afghanistan as Attacks Escalate

By Rod Nordland

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At least 20 people were killed in four insurgent attacks in Afghanistan on Thursday, police and government officials said.

The worst attack was the explosion of a roadside bomb as a pickup truck packed with civilians passed by, killing 10 people, including five women and a child, said Abdul Zirak, the spokesman for the governor of Helmand Province, in southern Afghanistan. Six other civilians were injured.

That attack took place at 7:30 a.m. in the troubled Musa Qala district in Helmand, a former Taliban stronghold that was never fully brought under control by United States Marines in their offensive last year. Since the withdrawal of American surge forces, who were replaced by Afghan troops, such attacks have steadily increased, local leaders say.

In the city of Kandahar, also in southern Afghanistan, a suicide bomber on a motorcycle struck at a police checkpoint just before dawn, killing three police officers, said Javed Faisal, the spokesman for the governor of Kandahar Province.

Although violence in the city of Kandahar was greatly reduced during the American surge, suicide attacks remain a threat, particularly against the police. The provincial police chief, Gen. Abdul Raziq, was nearly killed by a suicide bomber in late August and has not fully recovered from his injuries.

In Laghman Province, in the east, another roadside bomb detonated near an Afghan National Army supply convoy in the Badpakht district, killing five soldiers and wounding one. Laghman was one of the earliest areas where international forces passed responsibility for security to the Afghans.

Since that transition began last year, the level of violence in Laghman Province has steadily increased, according to local officials and Afghan elders.

In the fourth attack on Thursday, in Zabul Province in the south, a bomb hidden in a trash container exploded, killing two boys who were collecting garbage and wounding three police officers, according to the provincial police chief, Assadullah Shirzad.

Taimoor Shah contributed reporting from Kandahar, Afghanistan, and Khalid Alokozai from Jalalabad, Afghanistan.