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AP News

## 5 Pakistani road workers shot dead in Afghanistan

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Five Pakistani road construction workers were shot dead Thursday in Afghanistan's restive southern city of Kandahar, police said

The workers were traveling to their construction site when two gunmen on motorbikes opened fire on their minivan at about 7 a.m., said Kandahar's deputy police chief, Mohammad Shah Faruqi. Five of the laborers were killed and one was wounded.

The Pakistanis worked for Saita Construction Co., a Japanese joint-venture with a contract to repair the road from Kandahar to Punjwai district, Faruqi said.

Taliban insurgents dominate much of southern Afghanistan and often attack aid projects. On Monday, car bombs in and around Kandahar killed one NATO soldier and five Afghan civilians.

Kandahar, southern Afghanistan's largest city, is the spiritual birthplace of the Taliban and was the seat of the government before the 2001 U.S.-led invasion that ousted the hard-line Islamist regime for sheltering al-Qaida leaders allegedly behind the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the United States.

Combined Afghan and international forces are planning an offensive later in the year to bring greater security to Kandahar, a main goal of NATO operations this year, U.S. officials have said.

American and Afghan forces recently staged a major offensive to clear the former insurgent stronghold of Marjah, in neighboring Helmand province, in hopes of setting up an effective Afghan government to prevent a return of the Taliban there.

The Marjah offensive is the tactical prelude to a bigger operation being planned for Kandahar, according to senior officials in the Obama administration.