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The Associate Press

Afghan Official: Bomb Kills 12 Civilians

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A roadside bomb killed 12 civilians Sunday in east Afghanistan near the border with Pakistan, a spokesman for the governor of Paktika province said.

Mokhlis Afghan said another five people were wounded Sunday when the bomb planted by insurgents exploded next to a truck carrying civilians. He said the dead included two children, five men and five women. The truck was traveling between the towns of Turwa and Wazakhwa.

The Interior Ministry confirmed the attack but said only 10 people were killed. There was no way to immediately reconcile the difference in numbers.

President Hamid Karzai condemned the bombing as an act "against all principles of Islam."

Paktika borders Pakistan's lawless tribal areas, used as safe havens by insurgents fighting U.S.-led coalition troops in Afghanistan. Insurgents regularly cross the rugged frontier to attack coalition forces and the region has seen an increase in fighting, as well as a rise in casualties.

NATO operations against insurgents in the area have caused friction with the Karzai administration in recent weeks following government charges that the military has caused a number of civilian deaths and casualties.

Last week Karzai warned President Barack Obama that U.S.-led forces must do a better job addressing civilian casualties. He issued the warning during a video conference with Obama after

coalition helicopters killed nine Afghan boys in the eastern province of Kunar. NATO forces acknowledged accidentally killing the boys, ages 12 and under.

Earlier this month the Karzai administration claimed that 65 civilians, including 40 children, were killed in a NATO assault on insurgents in Kunar. NATO has said that video of Kunar operations on Feb. 17 — the main event of more than three days of fighting — showed troops targeting and killing dozens of insurgents, not civilians.

Civilian deaths have jumped this year primarily because of increased attacks from insurgents, according to U.N. data. Insurgents recently have started carrying out indiscriminate attacks against soft targets such as banks, supermarkets and sporting events.

But allegations of civilian deaths from NATO forces — who pledge to protect the population — often cause much more anger.

Hundreds of people from a left-wing political party marched through the streets of central Kabul to protest against U.S. military operations and demanded the withdrawal of foreign troops.

They chanted "death to America, death to the American government" and carried pictures of Afghans killed or wounded in recent airstrikes. They later burned an effigy of Obama.

In southern Helmand province, which has also seen heavy fighting, the governor's office said an air strike on Friday killed 11 insurgents, including an insurgent commander for the volatile Sangin district. The militants were killed in a strike on compounds in Musa Qala district, the governor's spokesman said in a statement.

Initial reports indicated no civilian or military casualties, the statement said.

NATO forces did not immediately respond to requests for confirmation of the incident.

Earlier, NATO said a bombing in southern Afghanistan killed one of its service members on Saturday. It did not provide the victim's nationality or any other details. The coalition typically waits for the relevant national authorities to confirm deaths of service members.

The death was the fourth in March. A total of 71 coalition service members have been killed so far this year.