

Beat: Miscellaneous

Roadside bomb kills 18 wedding guests in eastern Afghanistan

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USPA News - At least 18 civilians, including two young children, were killed Sunday when a vehicle carrying wedding guests drove over a roadside bomb in eastern Afghanistan, provincial officials said. Five other civilians and five soldiers were injured.

The blast happened at around 5 p.m. local time when a minibus was carrying 23 people to a nearby village in Andar district of Ghazni province, which is located in Afghanistan's eastern region that is also home to the country's capital. The vehicle was taking them home after celebrating a wedding. Provincial police officials said at least eighteen civilians, including fourteen women and two children, were killed when the minibus struck an improvised explosive device (IED). Five other civilians on board the vehicle were injured, as well as five Afghan soldiers who were waiting on the street nearby. The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) strongly condemned Sunday's attack and offered its condolences to the families of the victims. "We will continue to stand by the people of Afghanistan in this fight against extremists whose senseless acts endanger innocent women and children," the multinational force said in a statement. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), at least 1,319 civilians were killed and 2,533 others were wounded as a result of the conflict during the first six months of this year. The figures showed an increase of 14 percent in deaths over the same period in 2012, owing mainly to the increased use of IEDs by insurgents. There are currently more than 86,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan, including some 60,000 U.S. troops and 7,900 British soldiers. The UN Security Council extended ISAF's authorization for a final time earlier this month, as all foreign combat troops are due to leave Afghanistan by the end of 2014. In June, Afghan President Hamid Karzai announced the fifth and final phase of security transition in which coalition forces hand over control of the remaining 95 districts - including Taliban stronghold areas in the south and east - to Afghan security forces. ISAF will still be responsible for military air support as well as support in combat operations until the end of 2014.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org
info@gna24.com
www.gna24.com