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Suicide blast kills 12 Afghan civilians, 6 police

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By Sharafuddin Sharafyar

HERAT, Afghanistan (Reuters) - A suicide bomber disguised in a burqa blew himself up in a bazaar in western Afghanistan on Thursday, killing six police and 12 civilians, officials said.

Twenty-two people were wounded in the blast, which happened near a police station in the Del Aram district of Farah province. The policemen were inspecting vehicles on the road outside at the time.

"So far, 18 people, including police and civilians, have been killed," Farah's governor Rohul Amin told Reuters by telephone. Citing officials near the site, Amin said the bomber was wearing the all-enveloping burqa robe commonly worn by Afghan women.

President Hamid Karzai who has been leading Afghanistan since the Taliban's removal in 2001, condemned the attack and said it was "obscene" that the bomber had used a burqa as a disguise.

"The enemies of Afghanistan, by misusing the women's veil, put on display their unmanliness," a palace statement quoted him as saying.

A Taliban spokesman, Qari Mohammad Yousuf, told Reuters the attack was carried out by a member of the group, which is leading an insurgency against the government and foreign troops. He said the bomber was a man and was not wearing a burqa.

The al Qaeda-backed Taliban largely rely on suicide attacks and roadside blasts in their campaign to overthrow Karzai's pro-Western government and eject foreign forces.

The militants are most active in southern and eastern areas near the border with Pakistan, but have also carried out attacks in several major cities, including the capital Kabul.

Two police vehicles were destroyed in Thursday's attack, the latest in two years of rising violence in Afghanistan, the bloodiest period since the Taliban were driven from power in 2001.

Six of those killed were police, including a senior officer, another provincial official said, adding the rest of the dead were civilians.

In another incident, Taliban militants killed two policemen when they attacked a checkpoint in Qalay-I-Zal district in the northern province of Kunduz on Wednesday night. A mobile phone mast was also destroyed in the same district, Security Commander General Mohammad Saleh told Reuters on Thursday.

"There are small insurgent groups active in the area and we are working to eliminate them," he said.

Elsewhere, in the northwestern province of Badghis, Afghan security forces killed 11 Taliban militants on Wednesday, a regional security commander said.

U.S.-led forces overthrew the Taliban's radical Islamic government after its leadership refused to hand over al Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden, the architect of the September 11 attacks on the United States.

More than 12,000 people have died in violence since 2006, despite the presence of more than 55,000 foreign troops led by NATO and the U.S. military and nearly 150,000 Afghan security forces.

(Additional reporting by Tahir Qadiry; Writing by [Sayed Salahuddin](#); Editing by [Valerie Lee](#))

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