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Anti-Taliban Afghan tribal leader killed in mosque

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Assailants gunned down a prominent anti-Taliban tribal leader as he was praying in a mosque Tuesday in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar, authorities said, the latest in a steady campaign of assassinations of pro-government officials.

Armed insurgents entered the mosque Tuesday morning and shot Mohammad Nahim Agha Mama as he worshipped, the Kandahar provincial governor's office said in a statement. A Pashtun tribal leader and local council member of the province's Dand district, Mr. Nahim was well known in the province for urging his followers not to join the Taliban.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but the Taliban has killed hundreds of Afghan government officials and pro-government tribal leaders in recent years as part of wave of assassinations seeking to weaken confidence in President Hamid Karzai's administration.

The campaign also has targeted senior figures, including former President Burhanuddin Rabbani, who was killed in September by a suicide attacker with a bomb hidden in his turban.

The governor's office called Mr. Nahim's killing "an anti-Islamic and anti-human act," saying in a statement that he "was doing his best to bring peace and stability, and that's why the enemies are killing those people."

Also Tuesday, a suicide car bomber slammed into the entrance of a military base jointly run by NATO and Afghan troops in eastern Afghanistan, wounding three Afghan private security guards, officials in Nangarhar province said.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack at the base in Ghani Kail district. A statement from insurgent spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid claimed the bomb killed 17 American troops.

Provincial spokesman Ahmad Zia Abdulzai said no one was killed but the attacker.

In the country's northeast, at least 14 people died Monday in avalanches after heavy snowfall in the mountainous Badakhshan province, officials said.

Rescue crews were trying to reach the remote areas of the province, where a number of houses were reported to have been destroyed, said Shams ul-Rahman deputy provincial governor. About 6 to 9 feet of snow has made roads to the provincial capital of Faizabad impassable.

Avalanches present a constant danger in many parts of Afghanistan during the winter. In 2010, an avalanche killed at least 171 people near the Salang Pass, a major route through the Hindu Kush mountains that connects the Afghan capital of Kabul to the north of the country.

Also on Tuesday, Mr. Karzai urged the Taliban to allow teams conducting a polio vaccination campaign to reach areas under the insurgents' control.

"Whoever prevents the polio vaccination is the enemy of our children's future," Mr. Karzai said in a statement.

Afghanistan is one of just three nations where polio — which usually infects children and can cause paralysis, deformities or death — remains endemic. The two others are neighboring Pakistan and Nigeria.

Last year, the government registered 80 new cases of polio, most of them in the restive southern provinces. That figure was three times higher than the total for 2010.