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The Associated Press

Gunmen kill provincial judge, child in Afghanistan

By RAHIM FAIEZ and HEIDI VOGT
2/12/2012

KABUL, Afghanistan – Gunmen burst into a family home of a provincial judge in eastern Afghanistan, killing him and his niece in the latest assassination of an Afghan government official, authorities said Sunday.

Mohammad Nasir, the head of the appeals court for Kunar province, was visiting family in neighboring Nangarhar province Saturday night when gunmen stormed into his sister-in-law's house and opened fire, said Mohammad Asan, the administrator of Khogyani district in Nangarhar. Nasir and his eight-year-old niece were both killed, Asan said.

Nasir's wife and another five children were wounded, said provincial health department adviser Sayed Hafandi. Two of the children are in serious condition at a hospital, he said.

Asan said the gunmen appeared to target Nasir because of his ties to the government. Taliban insurgents have assassinated hundreds of Afghan government officials and supporters in recent years, seeking to sap public confidence in President Hamid Karzai's administration.

The insurgent group has also said in public statements that it considers anyone working for the government or the international military a collaborator, not a civilian.

Separately, the Afghan Health Ministry said that the director of a medical clinic in Helmand province was found dead after being kidnapped a week ago by unknown gunmen. The Health Ministry did not provide further details.

In another part of Helmand province, a roadside bomb killed three civilians in Washir district, the provincial government said in a statement.

Last year was the deadliest on record for civilians in the Afghan war, with more than 3,000 killed as insurgents ratcheted up violence with suicide attacks and roadside bombs, according to a U.N. report released earlier this month.

On Saturday, a helicopter operated by U.S. military contractors crashed in the mountains of Zabul province, killing all four Tajik crew members. The contractors, Supreme Group, said the helicopter was carrying cargo used for its contracts to supply food and water to U.S. forces.

The helicopter was operated by a company called Central Asian Aviation Services, Supreme said.