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Reuters

Afghan prison chief jailed for raping teenage girl

By Miriam Arghandiwal

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An Afghan prison chief was jailed for 16 years on Tuesday for raping a teenage girl, a rare show of justice for women in a country where they are suffering increased violence and offered scant protection from the law.

Sayed Nasir Ahmad was found guilty of raping Meena Asifa during the holy month of Ramadan three years ago in eastern Logar province, when she was 15.

She had been detained at the prison where he was director after she ran away from home.

"He raped Asifa and threatened to kill her if she told anyone," her lawyer Mohammad Mujahid Moram told a Kabul courtroom. Asifa and her family did not attend the hearing.

Ahmad, who had previously worked as a judge, denied the charges. "I am being framed by the local government because I stopped them unlawfully obtaining land," he said.

A spokesman for Logar's provincial government declined to comment on his allegation.

The Minister for Women's Affairs, Husn Bano Ghazanfar, praised the sentence handed to Ahmad.

"I welcome this. This is one of the ways we can help decrease violence against women," she told Reuters.

Afghanistan's independent human rights commission has recorded a sharp increase in cases of violence against women - it said there have been almost 1,000 cases in the past four months, compared with about 1,300 for all of last year.

And there have been 52 murders of women in the past four months compared with 20 last year, it said. In most cases of violence, the perpetrators were not punished, it said.

On Friday Hanifa Safi, a regional head of women's affairs, was killed by a bomb attached to her car in eastern Afghanistan, a month after a woman was publicly executed for alleged adultery about an hour's drive from the capital Kabul.

During their 1996-2001 reign, the Taliban banned women from education, voting and most work, and they were not allowed to leave their homes without permission and a male escort.

These rights have been painstakingly won back since the ultra-conservative Islamist group were forced from power by a U.S.-led invasion.

But activists and some lawmakers accuse President Hamid Karzai's government of losing interest in women's rights as most foreign troops prepare to leave the country by the end of 2014 and it seeks peace talks with the Taliban.