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Afghan Deputy Minister Kidnapped in Kabul

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Afghan Deputy Minister of Public Work, Ahmad Shah Waheed, was kidnapped by unknown gunmen Tuesday morning in Kabul city, making him the top government official abducted in the heavily fortified Afghan capital, officials said.

"Minister Waheed had just entered his vehicle from his home north of Kabul city at 7:20 a.m. to go to work when four gunmen opened fire on his vehicle, injuring his driver in the foot and taking the minister with them," said Sediq Sediqqi, spokesman for the Ministry of Interior.

An 18-year-old shopkeeper, Ahmad, witnessed the abduction telling TOLONews reporter Karim Amini that the kidnappers were in a white SUV with one license plate on the back of the vehicle and fired only two bullets.

"They were in local attire and managed to take the deputy minister in less than five minutes and flee the area," eyewitness Ahmad said.

Police officials said they have begun their investigations.

Kabul city has been relatively safe in terms of kidnapping in the past couple of years. But the abduction of Minister Waheed alarms other government officials and business communities.

Kidnapping Afghan officials is not a tactic used by the Taliban. Experts suggest that it might be criminals who seek ransom through contacting the captive's family.

A family member of Minister Waheed, who did not want to be named, said they have not been contacted by the kidnappers yet.

Kabul Police Chief Gen. Zahir Zahir told TOLONews that protecting ministerial level officials is not his responsibility, explaining that protection of ministers and deputy ministers are provided by the intelligence agency.