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Associated Press

Governor among 15 killed in Afghan mosque blast

By RAHIM FAIEZ

A massive bomb blast at a mosque in northern Afghanistan killed 15 people Friday, including a provincial governor who had survived a series of assassination attempts, officials said.

More than 20 people were wounded in the explosion during Friday prayers at the Shirkat mosque in Takhar province, said Gen. Shah Jahan Noori, the provincial police chief.

The governor of neighboring Kunduz province, Mohammad Omar, was killed in the blast, Noori said.

Takhar Gov. Abdul Jabar Taqwa said the bomb was meant to kill Omar, who regularly attends Friday prayers at the mosque.

"He was the target, and the terrorists were able to kill him," Taqwa said. "This is a big loss for us because Mohammad Omar was a very brave and good governor."

Omar has survived at least three previous assassination attempts, including ambushes and roadside bombs.

In May 2009, he was slightly wounded by a roadside bomb along a main highway. Omar blamed the "enemies of peace and security."

In an Afghan television interview last week, Omar said if security wasn't increased in Kunduz province, insurgents would not only be a threat to northern Afghanistan, but to

neighboring nations as well. Omar said his province was home to Afghan militants as well as foreign fighters.

Kunduz was being used by insurgents to stage attacks throughout the region, he said.

Afghan officials are prime targets for the Taliban and other militant groups that have instituted an assassination campaign against people who work with the Afghan government or NATO forces.

On Sept. 28, a suicide bomber killed a deputy provincial governor and five others in Ghazni in eastern Afghanistan. The bomber rammed a motorized rickshaw loaded with explosives into a convoy taking Deputy Gov. Khazim Allayar to his office in Ghazni city. His son, a nephew, a bodyguard and two civilians also were killed.

Northern Takhar has been the scene of escalating violence amid intensified military operations by NATO and Afghan forces in recent days.

Sixteen militants were killed in air raids and ground fighting overnight Wednesday in the Darqad, Yangi Qala and Khwaja Bahawuddin districts of Takhar, Noori said. More than a dozen insurgents were wounded.

Noori said his convoy was ambushed early Thursday and four attackers were killed in a gunbattle that lasted several hours. No NATO or Afghan forces were injured, he said.