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## **NATO helicopter carrying Afghan governor hit**

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By Abdul Qodous

MUSA QALA, Afghanistan (Reuters) - Suspected Taliban insurgents fired at a NATO helicopter carrying a provincial governor in southern Afghanistan on Saturday, forcing it to make an emergency landing, a Reuters witness said.

The helicopter was flying Helmand governor Golab Mohammad Mangal to Musa Qala in Helmand province when it was hit close to the town, a former Taliban stronghold captured from the insurgents by Afghan, British and U.S. forces in December.

"I was the target of this attack. It was the work of the enemies of Afghanistan," Mangal told reporters travelling with him.

One of the rotor blades of the Chinook helicopter was damaged in the attack, but none of the passengers were injured. The governor, who had been due to attend a ceremony in the town was quickly flown back to the provincial capital in another aircraft.

The British military, which provides the bulk of foreign troops in Helmand, said only that a helicopter from the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) made an unscheduled landing in the Musa Qala area and none of the passengers were hurt.

Afghan provincial officials are a frequent target of assassination attempts by the hardline Islamist Taliban in its campaign to oust the pro-Western government and drive out foreign troops.

Taliban fighters often shoot rocket-propelled grenades and small arms at the helicopters foreign troops rely on for transport in Afghanistan, but so far lack the surface-to-air missiles which would dramatically alter the balance of power.

Musa Qala took on a symbolic importance after British troops were forced out of the dusty market town in late 2006. The Taliban then seized it in

February last year and it became the only town of any size held by the rebels.

## BICYCLE BOMB

Elsewhere in the south, a bicycle bomb killed a child and wounded four people in the main southern city of Kandahar, police said.

The bomb was detonated by remote control as a police convoy passed through the centre of Kandahar, police official Mohammad Yaqub told Reuters. Three of those wounded were police, he said.

A NATO spokesman confirmed the attack, saying the child who was killed was nine years old.

Thousands of people have died in violence in Afghanistan in recent years as the Taliban has stepped up attacks despite the presence of more than 55,000 foreign troops led by NATO and the U.S. military and nearly 150,000 Afghan security forces.

Taliban Islamist militants aim to topple the pro-Western Afghan government and drive foreign troops out of the country.

U.S.-led forces overthrew the Taliban's strict Islamist government after its leadership refused to hand over al Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden, the architect of the September 11 attacks on the United States.

In another incident, six civilians were wounded when Taliban insurgents fired rockets aimed at a government building in Ziruk district of Paktika province on Friday, a spokesman for the provincial governor said.

The rockets missed their target and hit civilian houses instead. Foreign troops responded with air strikes killing four Taliban insurgents, he said.

Elsewhere, Afghan and U.S.-led coalition forces killed several Taliban militants in the eastern province of Khost, the U.S. military said in a statement on Saturday.

The incident happened on Friday while Afghan and coalition forces were carrying out search operations targeting a Taliban extremist, the U.S. military said.

(Additional reporting by Ismail Sameem in Kandahar and Elyas Wahdat in Khost; Writing by Jonathon Burch and Jon Hemming; Editing by Richard Williams)

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