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Afghan governor accused of assault, adding woes for Ghani

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A powerful Afghan governor is facing accusations he detained and assaulted a political rival in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif this week, the second senior Afghan official to be accused of violence in a year.

The fresh allegations add to Afghanistan's domestic political woes, as President Ashraf Ghani's government has struggled in the war against Taliban insurgents amid a fractious political arena that includes former warlords with armed followers.

Atta Mohammad Noor, the governor of Balkh province, denies an accusation by provincial council member Asef Mohmand that Noor and his sons abducted him from the Mazar-i-Sharif airport and then assaulted him.

Mohmand told reporters one of Noor's son bit off part of his ear during the beating.

A spokesman for Noor called Mohmand's story a "pure lie".

The claims come as Vice President Abdul Rashid Dostum remains in Turkey amid unresolved accusations that he ordered his men to abduct, beat, and rape a political rival last year.

Noor was among several prominent politicians to form a coalition with Dostum and earlier in August he held a demonstration to call for the "unconditional return" of the vice president.

A government delegation has been dispatched to Mazar-i-Sharif to investigate the allegations against Noor, his office said.

On August 9, Mohmand held a press conference in Kabul criticizing Noor for corruption and running personal prisons. When Mohmand returned to Mazar-i-Sharif on Monday, he said he was met by Noor and "dozens of armed men".

Mohmand, appearing at a press conference on Kabul on Thursday with a bandaged head, told reporters that he was taken to Noor's house where the governor and his sons beat him.

"His son came forward and bit my ear as you can see," Mohmand said. "His second son was punching and kicking me and saying, 'Now you can see how powerful we are'."

Mohmand said Noor himself stepped on his throat and accused him of trying to conspire against the governor.

Noor's office rejected Mohmand's account.

"Mohmand was directly taken to the police station and the injuries could have happened during his arrest," said Muneer Ahmad Farhad, spokesman for the Balkh governor's office. "He was not taken to the governor's residence."

Many of Afghanistan's leaders, including Noor and Dostum, are former warlords who maintain large followings and armed militias.

After Ghani was elected in 2014, he removed all of Afghanistan's 34 provincial governors.

Noor, however, refused to leave and has retained his position in Balkh.

