

Taliban hold Pakistani govt chopper crew hostage in Afghanistan

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The crew of a Pakistani government helicopter that crashed in a Taliban-held territory in Afghanistan on Thursday is being held by insurgents.

Hamidullah Hamid, governor of the Azra district in Afghanistan's Logar province, said all seven people aboard the MI-17 chopper had been detained by the Taliban.

"The government has no control of the area" where the helicopter crashed and burst into flames.

However, a local Taliban commander said there were only six people in the crew and that his faction was holding them.

The discrepancies in the crew numbers could not immediately be reconciled.

Qari Saifullah Saif, a commander of the Tahrik-e-Taliban Pakistan as the Pakistani Taliban are known, said the crew are in "safe hands" of the local TTP commander, Adam Kochi, in neighboring Afghanistan's Logar province.

The airmen had been taken to a "safe location" by the TTP to avoid any attacks by Afghan forces or the Afghan Taliban faction.

One of the pilots was critically injured in the crash, Saif said, adding that the crew allegedly also includes men from Pakistan's secret service. While the Taliban were taking the crew captive, their positions were shelled by aircraft, which killed one and wounded two of their fighters, Saif also said.

Pakistani officials also said there were only six crew members on board after one backed out of the flight at the last minute. Pakistani army spokesman Lt. Gen. Asim Bajwa said the Russian-made chopper was being flown to Russia via Uzbekistan for maintenance.

The crew also included a Russian navigator while the rest are retired army officers serving on civilian aircraft.

- With AP Inputs