

## Azimi slams BBC reports as speculative

By: Najib Khilwatgar - 9/01/2008 - 19:32

KABUL, Jan 9 (Pajhwok Afghan News): The Defence Ministry Wednesday accused the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) of releasing highly exaggerated and biased reports about civilian casualties and plunder in southern Afghanistan.

Addressing a joint news conference here, a spokesman for the ministry regretted the leading media organisation had lapped up negative and speculative stories from suspect sources regarding civilian deaths and looting by the Afghan army in the Musa Qala town of Helmand.

Afghan army chief Bismillah Khan Muhammadi and an ISAF commander visited the district to investigate the reports, which turned to be untrue, said Gen. Zahir Azimi, who remarked the BBC should have sought comments from the ministry to bring balance and accuracy to its stories.

Im confident such malicious reports wont undermine the prestige the Afghan National Army commands at home and abroad. We condemn the politically motivated reports and urge the outlet to demonstrate impartiality, the spokesman added.

BBC officials based in Kabul, however, refused to comment on Azimis blunt remarks about the credibility of the stories filed by them on emotive issues facing Afghanistan.

Reminded of news reports the Bush administration could strike targets inside Pakistan, Azimi called for addressing the root causes of terrorism rather than dealing with its symptoms. From day one, we have been stressing the elimination of funding and training sources of terrorists.

He went on to stoutly defend the appointment of a former Taliban commander as Musa Qala district chief in the wake of a recent operation. Mullah Abdul Salam landed the position on January 5 after switching sides.

Salam had helped government and NATO forces in recapturing the town, Azimi said while asserting a marked improvement in the security situation in the erstwhile militant bastion in the wake of the December offensive.

ISAF spokesman Lt. Gen. Carlos Branco declined to comment on likely US airstrikes on terrorist safe havens in Pakistan. He contended the issue concerned Americans and that he would not speak on the subject.

The NATO-led force had extended winter assistance including blankets, warm clothing and food items to the needy Afghans in Baghlan, Khost and Ghor provinces, he informed.

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