

Taliban will never be able to capture Lashkargah: Governor

LASHKARGAH (AIP): Governor of southern Helmand province Gulam Mangal has said that Afghan forces were fully capable to defend Lashkargah City without the presence of International Security Assistance (ISAF) and Taliban will never be able to take Lashkargah. In an exclusive interview with Afghan Islamic Press Monday (Oct. 13) Governor Gulab Mangal said "Afghan National Army (ANA) Afghan National Police (ANP) and National Security forces were capable to defend Lashkargah on their own." "I believe that if the Afghan forces can defend Lashkargah against Taliban even if the coalition forces are not present there," he said. Recalling recent attack on Lashkargah, he said, "Taliban had made preparation for the attack for last two months and made every preparation but Afghan and ISAF forces very bravely foiled the attack and defended Lashkargah." A statement issued by Afghan defence ministry today said that over 20 Taliban were killed in that clash but the governor once again put the Taliban death toll at over 60. When asked whether the gathering of Taliban in the vicinity of Lashkargah and their attack on the City does not mean that Taliban were strengthen there, Gulab Mangal replied, "Helmand is province where every place has hundreds of ways and no one can maintain surveillance of these ways. Helmand has 163 km long border with Pakistan and until an effective system is not installed at the border to stop movement at the border, the Taliban presence in Helmand will continue." Asked whether the non-existence of an effective system at border does not show the weakness of the government, he said, "Till now, no effective talks were held on this issue. It is hoped that attention will be focused in this issue in the future." To a question about high civilian casualties during air and ground operations by foreign forces in Helmand province, the governor said, "This year, we made every efforts to minimize civilian casualties during operation and we did it as there was very fewer casualties to civilians during the Garamser operation. The same was in Kajaki. Despite that we have trying to minimize civilian casualties." He continued that foreign fighters including Arab, Chechen, Tajek, Uzbek and Pakistani nationals were fighting alongside Taliban, adding that 350 foreign Taliban were killed during the recent operation in Garamser and several others were killed in the Lashkargah operation. "Foreign Taliban in the ranks of local Taliban want to destroyed schools and national assets. In the Nawa district foreign Taliban wanted to demolish schools with tractors but Afghani Taliban did not want this," he said. He once again urged Taliban to set on negotiation table with government. "When I came to Helman. I urged Taliban to stop fighting and hold talks with government. A progress had been on the issue to some extent but later some problems erupted. Today too, I urged Taliban to come and hold talks." To another question that Taliban have said that they will only hold talks after the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan, then how can they hold talks in presence of foreign troops, he said, "We should think on realities. If we have the ability to form government and system then I too give importance to ouster of foreign troops from our country and if we are fighting among ourselves and have no ability to form the system then I consider the presence of foreign troops necessary." "Ours' foreigners and the Taliban's foreigner have difference. Our foreigners build schools, ways and roads while the Taliban's foreigners destroy these schools and roads. The Taliban should think on their foreigners." Asked whether the NATO decision that their troops can take action against narcotics in Afghanistan will not create security situation in Helmand, he said, "In my opinion, this is a good decision. On one hand we have been trying to minimize poppy cultivation in Helmand by providing seeds to farmers. We hope the poppy cultivation will further decrease when NATO help us in this regard." Helmand is one of the troubled provinces in southern Afghanistan where Taliban are very strong as compared to other provinces. A day back, Taliban launched a heavy attack on the provincial centre which Taliban termed successful while the Afghan officials claimed inflicting heavy casualties on Taliban. Besides thousands of British troops, a large number of US and other NATO countries forces are also present in Helmand but it does not seem that foreign troops are heading for success. A few days back, top commander of British troops in Afghanistan said that war in Afghanistan was not the solution of the problem, therefore, talks should be held with Taliban. Though the Helmand governor termed Afghan troops very strong in Helmand but the latest attack on Lashkargah suggest that Taliban have become strong as compared to the past. Ends Posted @ 13:40 GMT