

Residents fear new military operation in Musa Qala

LASHKARGAH, Nov 28 (Pajhwok Afghan News): Residents of the Musa Qala in the southern Helmand province Wednesday said Coalition forces were preparing for a huge operation in border areas of the Taliban-infested district.

Concerned over preparations for a likely sweep, locals claimed thousands of families were ready to flee their houses. Muhammad Farhad, a resident of Landi Nawi village, told Pajhwok Afghan News about reconnaissance flights over the district.

"Most of villagers, fearing a new round of hostilities, have left their houses for safer areas," Farhad said, adding the situation was fast growing tense.

Haji Tor Khan, a tribal elder from Musa Qala, revealed militants and Coalition forces briefly clashed on the periphery of the Taliban stronghold. The troops have been readying the push for a month or so, according to the elder.

"Despite the biting cold, war-weary residents spend nights in the open and return to their houses after the sunrise," said Khan, whose view was corroborated by a number of locals.

Haji Attaullah, hailing from Karka village, is one of the people who leave their houses at night and stay in deserts. We are facing a whole host of problems in the existing situation. The Coalition should either go into a push or announce a delay to end the state of uncertainty," he remarked.

A Coalition spokesman in Helmand, Richard, told a press conference they would launch a new operation in Musa Qala. But he did not give timeframe for the crackdown. "We want to end Talibans sway power in Musa Qala."

Helmand police chief Brig. Gen. Muhammad Hussain Andiwai, who confirmed the US-led forces planned a new sweep, said he did not know much in this regard. It was not going to be a joint counter-insurgency swoop, he argued.

Located in northern Helmand, Musa Qala has been under Taliban control for the last 10 months. In October 2006, the district was handed over to tribal elders under a deal between Taliban, NATO forces and tribal elders. But four months later the Coalition troops attacked the district again. Taliban overran the town remain in control of it.

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