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## Editorial

### UN role key to build national, int'l consensus for peace in Afghanistan

Addressing a special United Nations' Security Council meeting on Afghanistan, UNSMCA chief Deborah Lyons said that Taliban attacks on towns and cities are dragging Afghanistan into a "deadlier and more destructive" phase of urban warfare resembling the bloodiest days of fighting in Syria and the Balkans.

Lyons addressed the UN Security Council as the deadline insurgents sparing no effort to target government officials, media and civil activists, in a bid to spread fears among Afghan masses. "The war in Afghanistan has entered a new, deadlier, and more destructive phase," she said.

The special meeting on Afghanistan included briefings and consultations on the latest developments in Afghanistan. India, which holds the rotating presidency of the Security Council for August, has consistently called for an immediate cessation of violence and a comprehensive ceasefire while steps are taken to advance the intra-Afghan dialogue to find a political settlement.

An announcement about the Security Council meeting was made two days after Afghan foreign minister Mohammad Haneef Atmar called his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar on Tuesday and sought an emergency session of the UN body to discuss ways to halt the Taliban's violence and atrocities across Afghanistan.

Among others, UK, US, Estonia, Russia, China, Nigeria and Afghan Ambassadors as well as chairwoman of Afghanistan Independent Human Rights' Commission briefed the session on Taliban's increasing violence, mass murder and migration of people, and the group's demolition of vital infrastructures in Afghanistan.

The meeting showed that the international community has consensus against Taliban atrocity and that supporting a legitimate, independent and prosperous Afghanistan. They have also acknowledged that Afghanistan cannot be taken by force, but a negotiated settlement is the only option ahead.

Indeed, UN has played some constructive role in the establishment of the new political system in the post-Taliban era. The United Nations made its utmost efforts and assistance with Afghanistan in last twenty years, in different areas of political, social, cultural and health affairs.

But now, despite the fact that the country burns in the fire of war and plunder, the houses are being burned, children and women are massacred, millions of the civilians are displaced and the war crime and crime against humanity repeatedly occur, the organization has not taken any steps, but issuing just statements and condemning the terrorist acts.

The UN also documenting civilian casualties in Afghanistan, but they are yet to play role in curbing Taliban violence and closing their financial and logistical channels. Since the Afghan peace talks are stalled and Taliban are yet to show will for negotiation, then there is a strong need for a third party mediation.

No party is capable to mediate, rather than the UN, as it shows firm will and honesty in ending this tragedy. Hence, it is high time for the UN to play its active and honest role in ending the conflict in Afghanistan. The impartial and honest intermediation of the UN can create confidence and build consensus at the regional and international levels.

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### 'Taliban's travel ban exemption must be predicated on real progress in peace'



KABUL, Afghanistan is at a dangerous turning point as the war has entered a new phase, said Deborah Lyons, the UN secretary-general's special representative for Afghanistan, on Friday. She also said that Taliban's travel ban exemption must be predicated on real progress in peace.

"Afghanistan is now at a dangerous turning point. Ahead lies either genuine peace or a tragically interrupted set of cease-fire increasingly leading to further combined with an acute humanitarian situation and escalating human rights abuses," she told the Security Council in a briefing.

She asked the Security Council to work to prevent Afghanistan from descending into a situation of catastrophe. "No nation that it would have few, if any, people in this country."

"And let me assure you, such a catastrophe would have consequences far beyond the borders of Afghanistan," she believed that the security Council had the broader international community can help prevent the most dire scenario, that it will require acting in only and acting quickly," she said.

In the past weeks, the war in Afghanistan has entered a new, deadlier, and more destructive phase. The Taliban campaign during June and July to capture major cities has achieved significant territorial gains. From this strength and position, they have begun to attack the largest cities, and Lyons said the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

This is now a different kind of war in Afghanistan, reminiscent of Syria recently or Bangladesh in the not-so-distant past, she said.

The attack when there is no known message is even more depressing, she said.

Fighting has been especially severe in Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand province in the south. Since July 28, at least 194 civilians have been killed and 491 others wounded, as registered by the two main hospitals in the city. All roads leading to and going out of the city are closed by the Taliban. Hospitals have nearly reached full capacity and can no longer accept patients. The available food supply in the city is fast diminishing, which raises the possibility of imminent food shortages in the coming days, as well as shortage of medical supplies, she said.

Since the start of the offensive, the neighboring Kandahar province in July is more than 600 civilians, many of whom have been killed. The United Nations has credible reports of over 135 civilian casualties from the onset of the Taliban offensive in and around Herat in the west, she said.

Homes, hospitals, shops, bridges and other infrastructure are being destroyed. In this district alone, more than 60 others injured in the first six months of 2021, she said.

Lyons expressed frustration over the lack of progress in peace negotiations. "There has been an expectation when the U.S. and Taliban deal was signed in February 2020... that we would see a reduction of violence. We did not. There had been an expectation when the talks between the Af-

ghan Republic and the Taliban began in September last year that we would see a reduction of violence. We have not. There had been an expectation that when the international troops left, that we would see a reduction of violence. We did not," she said.

Based on the progress in peace, we have seen a 50 percent decrease in civilian casualties in the country of every more as the cities are attacked."

"There is a striking contrast between the activity on the battlefield and the quiet violence at the negotiating table in Doha, where we should see the opposite, quiet on the battlefield and engagement around the negotiating table," said Lyons.

"In speaking to Afghans, the impression I have was not of a population waiting apprehensively for a deal, but rather to press over the biggest issues they need to be resolved. It is difficult for me to do that. I am not a negotiator. We are no longer talking about preserving the progress and the rights we have gained, we are talking about a strategic decision by the Taliban, who have accepted the likely ending that will come. Afghan government troops are defending their cities. But this defense will also undoubtedly cause civilian casualties, she said.

"Urban warfare will also inflict daily misery when basic infrastructure such as electricity and water services are damaged. These societies may amount to serious violations of international humanitarian law for which individuals can be held accountable and may quickly amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, warned the UN envoy.

The suffering caused by war comes on top of an already increasing humanitarian crisis, with seven million facing the threat of famine. Some 18.5 million people, or nearly half of the country's population, need humanitarian assistance. And yet, attacks on aid workers continue with more than 25 aid workers killed and more than 60 others injured in the first six months of 2021, she said.

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