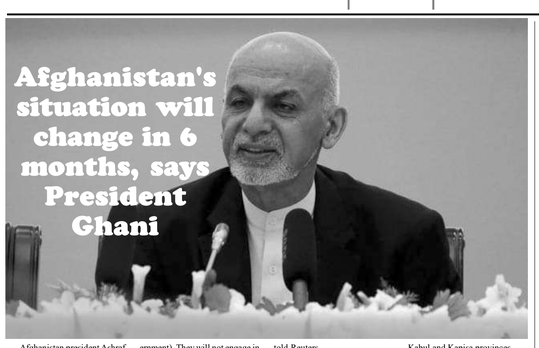

Afghanistan president Ashraf Ghani has said the violence-hit country's situation will see a change within the next six months as he emphasized that the security of cities is his government's priority. Addressing a virtual cabinet meeting, President Ghani said on Sunday the Taliban has become "more cruel and more oppressive" in the last two decades.

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Addressing a virtual cabinet meeting, President Ghani said on Sunday the Taliban has become "more cruel and more oppressive" in the last two decades.

"They have no wish for peace, for prosperity, or progress; we want peace, but they want surrender (subdued people and government). They will not engage in meaningful negotiations unless the situation changes on the battlefield; therefore, we should have a clear stance. For this, there is a need for a countrywide mobilization," President Ghani said.

President Ghani's comments came as Afghan forces fought and bombed Taliban fighters and positions on Sunday as the group mounted offensives in major cities across the country.

The Taliban also attacked the airport in Kandahar, the second-largest city of Afghanistan and the former stronghold of the insurgents, with at least three rockets overnight with the group's spokesperson saying that the aim was to thwart airstrikes conducted by Afghan government forces.

"Kandahar airport was targeted by us because the enemy was using it as a center to conduct airstrikes against us," Zabiullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesperson, told Reuters.

Authorities suspended flights out of Kandahar after the rockets hit the runway partially damaging it. The flight operations were restored later.

Taliban fighters have also attacked at least two other provincial capitals, including nearby Lashkar Gah in Helmand and Herat in the province of the same name. The government has said that hundreds of Taliban terrorists have been killed by the Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) across the country. At least 200 hundred Taliban terrorists were killed in an airstrike by a B-52 plane of the US air force in the Herat province.

Afghanistan security forces have lead operations and counter-attacks against the Taliban in Ghazni, Kandahar, Farah, Jowzjan, Balkh, Samangan, Helmand, Takhar, Kunduz, Baghlan, Kabul and Kapisa provinces.

President Ghani's remarks also came on the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) said in a report that 1,677 civilians have been killed and 3,644 injured in the first six months of this year in 1,594 different security incidents. "Important to note that the total number of civilian casualties in the first six months of 2020 was 2,957, including 1,213 killed and 1,744 injured," AIHRC said in a report. "A comparison of the above-mentioned figures shows that civilian casualties have increased by 80 per cent in the first six months of 2021 compared with the first six months of 2020," it added.

The Taliban has captured a number of districts, seized more land and taken control of key border crossings with neighboring countries as US and NATO troops pull out of the country.

Monitoring Desk

Leaving Afghanistan is a huge US mistake

By: Dalia Al-Aqidi

As the US-led military coalition's two-decade presence in Afghanistan ends this month, a majority of the country's territories are falling back under the control of the radical Islamist Taliban, pushing thousands of civilians and government security forces to seek refuge in neighboring countries, particularly Tajikistan.

Even though Washington continues to reassure the Afghan government that it will resume its airstrikes to support official forces, women, children and the elderly are feeling vulnerable, as they have already been a target of the barbaric militants. Civil war seems to be becoming inevitable, which means that the Taliban will not be the sole threat coming out of Afghanistan. When the group signed the Doha peace deal with the US in February last year, it vowed to prevent any terrorist groups or individuals from launching attacks against the US, its allies or any other country in the world. But there is no reason to believe that it would ever abandon Al-Qaeda, which was the initial cause of the war.

To win the war against the legitimate Afghan security forces, the Taliban needs as much support as it can get. The fact that Al-Qaeda maintains a presence in about 15 Afghan provinces makes it the best partner to help the Taliban further weaken the Kabul government, easily control the country, and force its own ideology and strict rules on the entire population. Defending US President Joe Biden's decision to complete the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, US Department of Defense spokesperson John Kirby emphasized that his country's goals to deter, dismantle and defeat Al-Qaeda had been accomplished. However, he acknowledged the presence of its operatives and cells. "But they are nothing like the organization they were on 9/11, 20 years ago," he added.

With the approach of the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and Biden's admission that the conflict in Afghanistan was an "unwinnable war," the hashtag "The year of running away" was created by Al-Qaeda on its Telegram page to declare its victory over the American "infidels." It wanted to send a message to its supporters that time has come to regroup and resume its evil activities. With the radical Islamist leadership reclaiming its traditional safe haven in Afghanistan, it is now ready to rumble.

Although a recent report by the UN Security Council (UNSC) suggested that ailing Al-Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri's most probable successor, Saif Al-Adel, who currently resides in Iran, may not be able to relocate to Afghanistan due to the Doha agreement, there are no serious indications that the Taliban would refuse to host him. And he would not be alone, according to Russia. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, during a visit to Tajikistan last week, highlighted the emergence of a new threat in Afghanistan posed by Daesh fighters, who are pouring into the country from several locations, including Iraq, Syria and Libya. Daesh has apparently decided to join forces with its Afghan affiliate, the Khorasan Province, which has already claimed responsibility for several high-profile attacks in the war-torn country.

The UNSC report indicated that a fresh international terrorist recruitment plan had already been launched. "Its leaders also hope to attract intransigent Taliban and other militants who reject the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the United States of America and the Taliban and to recruit fighters from the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and other conflict zones," read the report. The US administration needs to remember that most of Afghanistan's neighbors are not entirely friendly with America and can be difficult to deal with, including Iran, Russia, China, Pakistan and Turkey.

By miscalculating the imminent threat and ignoring the consequences of its actions, the US is making a huge mistake that will compromise its own national security, especially with the lack of trusted intelligence sources in the region. Washington should have listened to CIA Director Bill Burns when he told US lawmakers in April that withdrawing from Afghanistan would hinder the agency's ability to gather intelligence, negatively affecting its performance. The global war against terrorism is not over and the sacrifices made by American and NATO troops over the last 20 years might be easily erased if Afghanistan goes back to being a hostile, Taliban-run headquarters for terrorist planning and training, as well as the execution of attacks. It is not a matter of if, it is a matter of when.

Dalia Al-Aqidi is a senior fellow at the Center for Security Policy

Breastfeeding to promote health of newborn babies & infants

By: Lailuma Noori

World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF has stressed on importance of promoting the breastfeeding for the health and feeding of newborn babies and infants. The World Breastfeeding Week is celebrated every year from August 1 to August 7. All countries have been asked to execute practical programs for promotion of breastfeeding.

World Breastfeeding Week is celebrated to encourage breastfeeding and improve the health of babies around the world. The history of this week-long commemoration dates back to the 1990s when the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) created the Innocenti Declaration to promote and support breastfeeding. Later in 1991, to execute UNICEF and WHO's goals, an association was formed called the World Association of Breastfeeding Action. In 1992, a whole week was dedicated to promote this campaign.

WHO has declared artificial or dry milk as the main competitor to breastmilk, urging its member states to implement more strict policies on the production and importation of artificial milk as the artificial or dry milk is never equal to breastmilk at all, but unfortunately it has replaced breastmilk.

World Breastfeeding Week is an annual celebration held every year from August 1 to 7 in over 120 countries. World Health Organization states breastfeeding as one of the most effective ways to ensure child health and survival. This year, the theme for breastfeeding week is 'Protect Breastfeeding: A Shared Responsibility.' Breastfeeding is also known as nursing. It is the best way to provide young infants with the essential nutrients required for growth and development. World Health Organisation says that breastmilk is the ideal food for infants.

It is safe, clean, and acts as the babies' first vaccine, protecting them against many common childhood illnesses.

Breastfeeding helps boost the immune system of the infant, lowers the infant mortality rate, lowers the risk of developing infections such as respiratory tract infections, diabetes, allergic diseases, and childhood leukemia. It also helps enhance the cognitive function of the baby.

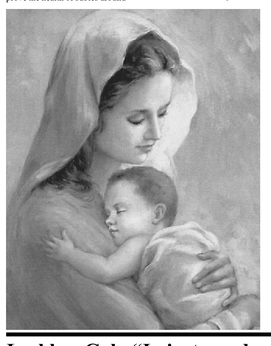
Additionally, breastmilk is extremely nutritious and healthy for the baby and can help the baby develop a healthy weight.

On the other hand, as a grant of Almighty Allah, breastfeeding is free of charge and mothers are not obliged to pay for that, while a can of artificial or dry milk is expensive enough.

There are some challenges to consider when deciding whether to formula feed. None of the antibodies found in breast milk are in manufactured formula.

So formula can't provide a baby with the added protection against infection and illness that breast milk does.

The formula feeding can't match the complexity of breast milk. Manufactured formulas have yet to duplicate the complexity of breast milk, which changes as the baby's needs change.



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Lashkar Gah: "In just one day we performed 10 surgeries on people injured by violence"

Fighting in Afghanistan has been intense since May, but in recent weeks the clashes between the Afghan army and the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan (also known as the Taliban) have increased in intensity and have moved into more urban areas such as Lashkar Gah city in Helmand Province.

"There has been relentless gunfire, air strikes and mortars in densely populated areas. Houses are being bombed, and many people are suffering severe injuries," explains Sarah Leahy, coordinator of the MSF Helmand project.

"Fighting within the city makes it harder for us to respond; our staff are part of the community and they, like many people, are afraid to leave their homes. It's just far too dangerous and life is at a standstill. Some of our colleagues are staying overnight in the hospital as it's safer, but also so they can keep on treating patients. The situation has been dire for months but now it is even worse."

Despite the challenges, the MSF-supported Bost hospital remains operational and has seen a marked increase in trauma needs over the last week.

"In just one day we performed 10 surgeries on people injured by violence, which is unheard of for MSF here as we are not Lashkar Gah's main provider of trauma care," said Leahy. "Before last week we have been operating on average on two war-wounded people per day." The main trauma centre in the city is run by another organization, and it too is under immense pressure; the people they cannot admit are sent to MSF for care.

Between 29 and 31 July alone, MSF treated 70 war-wounded patients. And in total from 3 May until 31 July, teams have treated 482 war-wounded, nearly all (92%) for injuries caused by shells and bullets and around a quarter (26%) aged under 18.

The patients seen by MSF will be just a fraction of the true number injured by the violence. The fighting also exacerbates health needs beyond trauma care. Given the lack of well-functioning and affordable medical facilities in Helmand, people rely on the 300-bed Bost hospital, the only referral hospital in the province, for essential neonatal, paediatric, inpatient, intensive care, maternity, malnutrition, and surgical services among others. Since May though, MSF staff have witnessed an alarming increase in the severity of patients' illnesses when they arrive at the hospital. People described how, despite needing medical care, they have been forced to wait at home until the fighting subsides or to take dangerous alternate routes.

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