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Taliban planned inroads into Kabul via Hesarak

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Officials on Thursday said Taliban militants wanted to establish sanctuaries in the Hesarak district of eastern Nangarhar province in order to extend their activities to Kabul and other provinces, but their designs had been frustrated.

A security operation “Iron Triangular” has been ongoing since about a month in the Khogyani zone and other districts including Hesarak, where a highway was reopened after remaining closed for three years as a result of the operation.

More than 2,000 security forces have been taking part in the operation that was launched simultaneously from central Logar province’s Azra district, Kabul’s Sarobi district and Nangarhar’s Khogyani.

Hesarak Operation

Hesarak district lies close to Pakistan’s tribal region of Waziristan and is connected to Kabul, Kapisa, Logar provinces and a number of districts in Nangarhar through narrow routes.

It is said insurgents in the district are supplied logistics from Waziristan.

Brig. Gen. Mohammad Naseem Sangin, the 201st Selab Military Corps fourth battalion’s commander, told Pajhwok Afghan News: “Taliban wanted to have safe havens in Hesarak and from there carry out their attacks into Kabul, Logar, Kapisa and eastern provinces, but we frustrated their designs.”

Hesarak administrative head Haji Abdul Khaliq told Pajhwok Afghan News roads, which had been closed for three years, reopened as a result of the operation. He expressed the hope that the government's attention to the district would increase.

Casualties

Exact figures for casualties among security forces during the operation in the Khogyani zone are not known, but the 201 Selab Military Corps commander, Gen. Mohammad Zaman Waziri, said casualties among the Taliban exceeded 200.

Waziri, who is leading the operation in Hesarak, told Pajhwok Afghan News: "Our accurate information is that 148 Taliban militants have been killed and another 110 wounded. Of 65 suspected militants who were arrested 30 remain in custody."

He said most of the detainees were landmine-making experts and the dead included Taliban's shadow district chief for Hesarak, Mullah Zakir.

The Hesarak district chief said most of the slain Taliban militants were Pakistanis whose names were registered with the district administration.

Concerns

Local officials said residents due to fear had given in control their houses to Taliban insurgents who would attack security forces from these houses.

The Operation Iron Triangular is said to be concluded next week amid concerns that the Taliban would stage a comeback and recapture areas they lost to security forces during the operation once the security forces disappear.

But Nangarhar police chief Brig. Gen. Fazl Ahmad Sherzad told Pajhwok Afghan News a number of security posts had been reorganised and 50 new created during the operation.

He said all security posts in the three districts had been supplied logistics and equipment to be enough for six months until the arrival of winter.

The police chief said the interior and defence ministries should deploy a special force for maintaining security on the main highway in the zone.

Local problems

The Hesarak district chief said besides schools and health clinics all sectors needed assistance.

"The population of this district reaches 200,000 people but only 20,000 people have access to healthcare services. I hope we will be assisted in this regard," Haji Abdul Khaliq said.

About education, he said all schools in the districts were operational, but the schools lacked resources.

Most of Hesarak residents are associated with farming. It is planned that after the operation, construction work on a second Kabul road will be launched to connect the town with Kabul and Jalalabad.

A resident of Hesarak, Khan Mohammad, told Pajhwok Afghan News they were satisfied with the security operation, but security posts should be established to prevent possible Taliban attacks. "Taliban militants still exist in the district," he said.

In Sherzad district, a resident, Stana Gul, said the road in their area was reopened after a long time and hoped the security situation would remain controlled.

He said the provincial government should construct roads and increase the number of schools and hospitals in the district.