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Poverty boosts insurgency in Kajaki: official

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Abject poverty and unemployment have strengthened the insurgency in the Kajaki district of southern Helmand province, the town's administrative head said on Monday.

"If residents are provided with jobs, they will be kept from joining the insurgents," Mullah Abdul Raziq Mazlumyar told Pajhwok Afghan News during an exclusive interview.

Mazlumyar lamented not a single significant project had so far been implemented in Kajaki over the past decade. He said foreign and Afghan forces had been confined to areas surrounding the hydropower dam for seven years.

They have been able to bring under government control the district's southern and lower sections over the past one year as a result of a series of anti-militant operations, according to him.

He said a 100-member local police force had been approved for the district, but only half of them had been trained and equipped so far. He called insufficient resources a continuing challenge.

Mazlumyar said Kajaki was one of the most important districts in northern Helmand, but it had long been neglected, reducing government's writ to 10 percent of areas.

Rebels and drug mafia who controlled 90 percent of the district had turned areas under their influence into narcotics hubs, the official said, adding the individuals involved in the illicit commerce had established warehouses in rebel-controlled areas.

The district chief said residents of Zamindawar area were increasingly turning against the government amid reports that 350 Punjabi, Waziristani and other Pakistani Taliban trained were operating in the area.

Smugglers had established a number of drug-producing laboratories in Gandam Rez area, revealed Mazlumyar, who claimed 50 percent of land in Kajaki was sown with poppy crops every year.

He said the central government had failed to initiate development schemes and to convince farmers into growing food crops instead of poppies.

The Kajaki chief said improved security would have a direct impact on the situation in the entire province due to its strategic importance. He suggested the government should raise the local police force for deployment to Zamindawar area in order to overcome hostilities there.

"The area has long been in turmoil that did not allow reconstruction schemes, leaving residents remain in deep economic constraints. We have families who cannot afford even a one-time meal," Mazlumyar remarked.

He warned the entire town could slip into the hands of the Taliban if the government failed to launch job-creating projects.