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Up to 15 policemen killed daily: Patang

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Afghan police, hit by recruitment problems and lack of military support, lost up to 15 men daily to the ongoing fight against terrorism, the interior minister said on Thursday, voicing grave concern over the high fatality rate.

Mujtaba Patang told a gathering in Kabul despite the fact the Afghan police were being used as "light infantry" in counterinsurgency operations, the force had been able to protect citizens. "Our police are not dedicated to fighting in tight formations. But still they have proved their worth; they sacrifice their lives to prove they can defend the country after the departure of foreign troops," Patang told the event, attended by a large number of civil society and human rights activists. He called lack of equipment the main challenge facing them.

Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) head Fahim Hakim praised as remarkable the police role in curbing the insurgency. He said the force had given the Afghans hope for security.

Aziz Rafe, executive director of the Afghan Civil Society Forum, asked security organs to enhance their support to police in operations and capacity-building to keep the sense of patriotism alive among them.

"Because it is patriotism that keeps us going," remarked the civil society activist. "A person who lays down his life for his country is a true national hero," Rafe said.

The interior minister came hard on news organisations for failing to "highlight police achievements," accusing some media outlets of broadcasting anti-police programmes.

Siddiqullah Tawhidi, the executive director of NAI, an organisation that supports free media in Afghanistan, said journalists performed their duty in life-threatening situations alongside security forces.

"Media and civil society groups are proud of their police; they are our heroes," said Tawhidi, who also complained of unruly police behaviour at times with media representatives during security incidents.

Patang hinted at launching community-oriented policing, an idea that combines traditional aspects of law enforcement with preventive measures, in about two months' time. It would help improve police efficiency, their operations and accountability, he concluded.

Huge corruption in Marja projects: There has been blatant corruption in newly-completed projects, including a multimillion dollars building for a police headquarters, in the Marja district of southern Helmand province, officials acknowledged on Thursday.

Five alleged rapists detained in Daikundi: Five employees of the women's affairs department were arrested on Thursday on the charge of sexually assaulting a 15-year-old girl in the central province of Daikundi, an official said.

Landmines threat to million lives: Nearly one million Afghans are living in mined areas in different parts of the country, with the invisible weapon continuing to threaten their lives, an official said on Thursday.