



Page 2 | NATIONAL
Afghans Haven't
Forgotten Taliban
Atrocities

USA is 'leaving' Afghanistan

Twenty years after the US commenced its military operations in Afghanistan in response to the terrorist attacks carried out by ...

Page 2 | NATIONAL

Page 3 | ECONOMY
ADB Approves \$50 Million
Grant for Afghanistan's
COVID Vaccine Campaign



Kabul
21 / 7



Herat
30 / 13



Nangarhar
33 / 15



Balkh
28 / 18



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10 afs



Taliban Caused \$1bn Damage to Afghanistan Infrastructure: Ghani

Highlighting the violence prevalent in the country, President Ashraf Ghani on Tuesday said that the Taliban have damaged infrastructure in Afghanistan worth \$1 billion.

Ghani, who was speaking at the meeting of Governance and Human Resources Week at the Presidential Palace, said, "I ask them why do you spoil? If you do not have the ability to build and do not have a positive plan, at least stop destruction."

He called on the Taliban to plant "flowers" and "wheat" instead of exploding mines and take part in the development of the country.

President Ghani said that any public benefit project that the Taliban destroys harms the Afghan people.

On the withdrawal of troops, ... **P2**



Another Call for Taliban to 'Remain Engaged' in Afghan Peace Process

Pakistan has urged the Taliban to remain engaged in the Afghan peace process after the group said that it would not attend peace conferences till all foreign troops leave Afghanistan. The Taliban made the announcement after the US and NATO revealed their decision to withdraw troops by September 11. "They take their own decisions, but we will do whatever we can to convince them that it is in their national interest to remain engaged," Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said.

The refusal has thrown the peace process into disarray with Turkey scheduled for Saturday to host a summit that diplomats had hoped could create new momentum towards a political settlement between the Taliban and Afghan government.

Qureshi said he believed the ... **P3**

Afghanistan Ranks 122 On Press Freedom; RSF Says Peace Crucial



Afghanistan dropped one place from its rank last year 121 to 122 this year in the newly-released 2020 Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF). The group has called Afghanistan Pakistan, Philippines and

Bangladesh the "world's deadliest countries for journalists and bloggers" and added that peace is crucial for the country to obtain better standards of press freedom. RSF in its report mentioned concerns that press freedom,

along with other freedoms, "could be sacrificed in the course of international efforts to restore peace in Afghanistan". According to the report, no journalist was killed in the country so far this year, but for Afghanistan's journalists, 2018

was the deadliest year since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001.

A total of 15 journalists and media workers were killed in a series of bombings that began early in the year, nine of them in a single day. "Women journalists are a favorite target, and are especially vulnerable in those regions where fundamentalist propaganda is heeded," the report says.

The organization said that even though peace process between the Afghan government and the Taliban have been ongoing since September 2020, violence against journalists and media outlets continues unabated.

Six journalists and media workers have been the victims of targeted killings since the start of 2020. The problems for journalists have been compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has taken the lives of at least seven journalists and has caused economic problems forcing many media outlets to lay off staff or reduce the hours they work (with a corresponding loss in pay).

There is much concern that basic freedoms, including the freedom of women journalists, could ... **P3**

Students Protest Against Lack of Books, Teachers in Kabul

Seeking distribution of books and appointment of more teachers, hundreds of schoolchildren of the Fayz Mohammad Katib school in Etefaq township of Dasht-e Barchi area took to the streets to protest against the government's apathy towards education.

Slogans like "Education Minister, we want books" and "We want teachers" echoed across the streets during the protest. ... **P3**



Drought Worsens in Afghanistan as 13 Million Lack Food

There is an urgent need to prevent the deepening crisis in Afghanistan as at least one third of the country's population does not have access to adequate food due to drought, said the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

Afghan Red Crescent Society Acting President, Dr Nilab Mobarez, said, "We are deeply concerned about worsening and severe water shortages in many areas, depleted food crops and crippled economic activity, such as decimated local markets and basic incomes. In the past month, Afghan Red Crescent volunteers and response teams have urgently ramped up relief, including food and cash assistance for thousands of drought-affected families across the parched provinces of Badghis,



Baghlan and Faryab." At least 13.1 million people are facing food shortages, according to the latest food insecurity analysis.

This food security crisis compounds social and economic hardships already faced by millions of people in Afghanistan due to the COVID-19 pandemic and years of conflict.

The IFRC has issued an Emergency

Appeal seeking 7.5 million Swiss francs to support the Afghan Red Crescent to deliver cash grants to buy food supplies and restore livelihoods and crops for 210,000 people in ten of the provinces worst affected by food insecurity and drought. Wheat production is expected to be slashed by up to 27 per cent in 2021, according to the Afghanistan Inter-Cluster Coordination Team.

WHO Reports...

Globally, CO2 emissions only decreased by less than 6% last year, but by December, they had rebounded to their previous levels.

"The health argument for climate action is crystal clear. The same unsustainable choices that are killing our planet are killing people," said Tedros.

He said at the UN's COP26 climate conference in Glasgow this year, a special report will be delivered with recommendations on maximizing the health benefits of tackling climate change while avoiding the worst health impacts of the climate crisis. He then introduced Swedish climate and environmental activist Greta Thunberg, who he said: "has become the powerful voice of a younger generation demanding climate action."

Thunberg addressed the webinar, urging the global community to address vaccine inequity that the WHO and Tedros have warned is a massive impediment to halting the COVID-19 pandemic.

Taliban Caused...

he said that with the withdrawal of these forces, a new chapter of cooperation between Afghanistan and the international community will begin.

According to Ashraf Ghani, economic relations, strengthening Afghanistan's security and defense forces, humanitarian aid and Afghanistan's development are at the forefront of this chapter in cooperation between the international community and Afghanistan.

By STEFANIE GLINSKI

Afghans Haven't Forgotten Taliban Atrocities

The Taliban flooded into the Shomali Plain by the thousands, supported by tanks and air power. Reza Gul fled south toward Kabul barefoot amid the chaos, leaving behind her house, her belongings, and the bodies of her three teenage sons, slain by Taliban bullets.

Within days, the militants had deliberately killed countless people, scorched the rich farming land, destroyed tens of thousands of houses, and blown-up irrigation systems. The Taliban's 1999 invasion of the Shomali Plain, stretching north from Kabul toward Bagram, was one of their most brutal—and lingering. Today, the destruction is still visible. Behind the main highway, countless skeletons of old houses are testimony to the Taliban's past atrocities; out of 70 villages in Gul's district of Qarabagh, 99 percent of the houses were destroyed. Many of the ruins have never been rebuilt.

Gul, who is now 75, breaks into tears at the memory, which remains crystal clear, as deeply etched as the wrinkled crevasses in her face that she said show just how much she's suffered.

"It haunts me," she told Foreign Policy. "I am afraid the Taliban will come back."

She's not alone. More than two decades after the invasion of the Shomali Plain, with the United States poised to abandon Afghanistan for good after 20 years, many fear the militants will once again stage large-scale devastating attacks.

"Atrocities like Shomali were a regular feature of the war in the 1990s. A vast international presence prevented some but not all such killings in the past 20 years," said Patricia Gossman, Human Rights Watch's associate Asia director. "If there is no settlement and the war continues, which unfortunately seems likely, I am afraid civilians will continue to bear the brunt of the war and continue to be the victims of atrocities."

One of the senior Taliban field commanders in the Shomali Plain during the 1999 offensive and massacre as well as the Taliban's deputy to the chief of army are today leading the militant groups' negotiations in Doha, Qatar, according to the Afghanistan Justice Project. In other words, the men who allowed entire valleys to be razed and torched are today leading the theoretical charge for "peace."

The Taliban said U.S. President Joe Biden's decision to withdraw all U.S. troops by Sept. 11 rather than the



May 1 deadline they thought they had clinched with former U.S. President Donald Trump is a breach of the pact. The militants warned in a statement this "opens the way ... to take very necessary countermeasures, hence the American side will be held accountable for all future consequences and not the Islamic Emirate." On April 13, just moments before Biden announced his decision to pull out, Asadullah Sarwary, 56, sat at home in Qarabagh, recalling how his own house was burned to the ground when the Taliban attacked. Sarwary, a tall man with 10 children who is a community leader, fought for the Northern Alliance in the 1990s, the military force that opposed the Taliban during its rule from 1996 to 2001. The Taliban had made incursions into the Shomali Plain before but nothing as horrible as late summer 1999. "They captured, abducted, and killed people, destroyed houses and mosques, and set entire villages on fire," Sarwary said. "The sky had turned black. People scattered quickly and couldn't even bury their dead; they dried up in the sun or were eaten by dogs." For a 25-mile stretch, from the northern outskirts of Kabul toward what is today the U.S. Air Base at Bagram, everything in the valley was razed within days.

Then, Sarwary said, the Northern Alliance launched

a counteroffensive and managed to push the Taliban back, allowing an estimated 167,000 civilians to seek refuge in the narrow Panjshir Valley, the Northern Alliance stronghold, where they set up temporary camps.

"I remember the day well," said Mir, a 64-year-old former humanitarian worker who spoke on condition of anonymity. "People were traumatized. They had been chased out of their homes. It's unclear how many died, but those who made it to Panjshir stayed there for almost two years, enduring bitterly cold winters."

Not until after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 could people, including Gul, return to the Shomali Plain in large numbers. Mir and his team of aid workers rebuilt more than 5,000 houses, simple dwellings just shy of 200 square feet built from mud bricks and wooden planks. That's exactly where Gul has been ever since.

If the U.S. arrival allowed Gul and many of her neighbors to return home, the question is what happens when the U.S. troops leave. Some observers speculate the Taliban of today are not the same as the brutal group that waged vicious war and imposed a hard-line brand of Islam on the country in the 1990s. Sarwary sees no change. ... **P3**

By Daily mirror online

USA is 'leaving' Afghanistan

Twenty years after the US commenced its military operations in Afghanistan in response to the terrorist attacks carried out by AL-Qaeda on September 11, 2001, US President Joe Biden announced - in a departure from policies embraced by his predecessors he was unconditionally ordering all US military forces out of Afghanistan by September 11, 2021.

The 20th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks which propelled the US invasion of Afghanistan. According to the UK-based 'Save the Children' report of November 23, 2020, between 2005 and 2019, at least 26,025 children were killed or maimed in Afghanistan - an average of five children every single day over the past 14 years. This has been but part the legacy bestowed by the US and its western allied occupation forces to the people of Afghanistan. The report adds:

between 2017 and 2019, there

have been more than 300 attacks on schools, injuring or killing at least 410 students and teachers • 3.7 million children - almost half of all primary school-aged children are out of school

• 93% of late primary school-aged children are not proficient in reading

• 60% of school-aged children missing out on their education are girls

• Spending on education is presently 78% less than the average for the South Asia region

• 14 million people, nearly 50% of the country's population, need humanitarian assistance

• More than 7 million children are at risk of hunger

• 3 million children under the age of five suffer from under-nutrition...

As it did in Vietnam in May 1975, the US is once again leaving yet another Asian country amid a trail of death and destruction, and with its tail between its legs - beaten and bloodied. The BBC calculates over 60,000

members of the Afghan security forces were also killed and nearly twice that many civilians lost their lives to the US-West European 20-year 'adventure' in Afghanistan.

So, what did the Americans and their partners-in-crime achieve in Afghanistan? Right from the beginning of the US-European Afghan adventure, the enemy was unclear, foreign and mysterious. It was not an identifiable entity as Nazi Germany's armed aggression during World War II.

Attacking Al Qaeda was seen as a just cause, the attempts to overthrow the Taliban regime and wage war against a non-governmental body were questionable. What was clear was the US wanted revenge to save face because it had been attacked in its (US) home, by an organization it helped build, create and arm. Therefore, non-violent means were not enough. But it had to justify its new war and so the term ... **P3**

Military Says...

concerns regarding the security forces' assessment of the clashes and their intelligence regarding the severity of the situation."

Other analysts pointed to Deby's long history of visiting the battlefield as a former army commander-in-chief himself.

"There's no evidence to suggest this was a coup committed by his troops. Anyone who follows Deby knows he used to say 'to lead troops you have to smell the gunpowder,'" tweeted Cameron Hudson with the Atlantic Council's Africa Center.

Deby first came to power in 1990 when his rebel forces overthrew then-President Hissene Habre, who was later convicted of human rights abuses at an international tribunal in Senegal.

Over the years Deby had survived

numerous armed rebellions and managed to stay in power until this latest insurgency led by a group calling itself the Front for Change and Concord in Chad.

The rebels are believed to have armed and trained in neighboring Libya before crossing into northern Chad on April 11. Their arrival came on the same day that Chad's president sought a sixth term on election day, which several top opposition candidates boycotted. Deby was a major French ally in the fight against Islamic extremism in Africa, hosting the base for the French military's Operation Barkhane and supplying critical troops to the peacekeeping effort in northern Mali.

Deby's son, Mahamat, has served as a top commander for Chadian forces taking part in that effort.

UK: Ex-Foreign...

level in British politics in the interests of Israel on the back of donor power in the UK," he added.

Duncan said this pro-Israel influence came at the expense of Palestinians. "Most of the Jewish donors would never want their donations to be used

to influence in this way -- I just think it's a mess," he added.

The CFI was founded in 1974 as a parliamentary group that supports the Conservative Party and lobbies in favor of support for Israel. In 2014, the CFI claimed 80% of Conservative MPs were members of the group.

ADB Approves \$50 Million Grant for Afghanistan's COVID Vaccine Campaign

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Tuesday approved a \$50 million grant to help the Afghan government procure and deploy safe, high-quality COVID-19 vaccines, and strengthen the country's capacity to implement its vaccine program.

The ADB said in a statement that the project will support the National Plan for COVID-19 Vaccination in Afghanistan by procuring and transporting six million doses of COVID-19 vaccines for priority segments of the population, as determined by the government.

"As Afghanistan continues to grapple with COVID-19, this project will help ensure that safe and high-quality vaccines are made available to the Afghan people," said ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa.

"Making vaccines available to vulnerable groups and strengthening Afghanistan's immunization program will help to save lives and is a vital step toward recovery.

This support is part of ADB's strong commitment to helping Afghanistan overcome the pandemic and achieve a sustainable economic recovery," Asakawa said.

Under its national plan, the Afghan



government aims to vaccinate all eligible people including vulnerable groups, approximately 60 percent of the total population.

ADB's COVID-19 Vaccine Support Project will provide financing to procure vaccines for at least 2.6 million people, or about 11 percent of the eligible population, including through the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX)

Advance Market Commitment facility.

The grant will also strengthen the Ministry of Public Health's capacity in

planning, communications, coordination, and implementation of the vaccine program at national and provincial levels. According to the ADB, technical training including specialized gender sessions will ensure that vaccines are administered to women in a culturally sensitive manner and a waste management firm will be engaged to build capacity for proper disposal of medical waste.

ADB estimates that Afghanistan's GDP contracted by five percent in 2020 as

the pandemic forced business closures and disrupted supply chains.

Unemployment is projected to have risen from 23.9 percent in 2019 to 37.9 percent in 2020 adding to the negative pressures of increased costs of food, housing, and health services.

ADB's grant complements other development partners' efforts and contributes to fostering growth in the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation region through addressing pandemic risks and cross-border health threats.

Afghanistan Ranks...

be sacrificed for the sake of a peace deal. In response to this threat, the RSF-backed Centre for the Protection of Afghan Women Journalists has waged several campaigns for the protection of the rights of women journalists as a precondition for a lasting peace.

This comes even as a group of Afghan journalists and media officials on April 17 established the "Afghanistan Free Speech Hub". The Free Speech Hub aims to create an inclusive, pluralistic, and professional organization for journalists and media workers. There are growing calls for an immediate end to the targeted killings of journalists and other civilians, and requests that cases of murder and violence against journalists should be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

There is hope that transparency in the peace process would be ensured through the continued access of the Afghan people and the media to the details of the peace talks and the presence of representatives of Afghan journalists and civil society in the peace process.

Students Protest...

The students said that their high school lacks 188 teachers and that 9,000 students have been left destitute at the school.

The gathering comes just a month after the official start of the school term in Kabul and a number of other Afghan provinces.

A large number of schools in the capital, especially in the western part of Kabul, are on unannounced leave (holiday).

USA is 'leaving'...

'War on Terror' came into being. But how far have these aims been accomplished?

A claimed purpose of US policy in Afghanistan was to defend and protect women's rights. But as in any war, women are one of the worst affected groups Human Rights Watch quoting the UN 'Civilian Casualty Report' of 2017, states many more women are being killed and injured in Afghanistan today than a year ago. They are casualties of an intensifying

Afghans Haven't...

"If the U.S. were to leave tomorrow, I could see the Taliban try to launch similar large-scale attacks in the future," he said. Equally concerning, he said, is the steady infiltration of extremist ideology in the Shomali Plain. "They recruit criminals and the unemployed. It's no longer safe here. The Taliban is everywhere now."

The U.S. intelligence community's annual threat assessment, published on April 13—the same day as Biden's announcement—warned the Taliban are confident they can achieve a military victory and are likely to make gains on the battlefield. It also stated the Afghan government will struggle to hold them at bay if coalition forces withdraw

armed conflict that is also claiming more children as victims every year.

The primary aim of the US invasion of Afghanistan was to eliminate the Al-Qaeda. While it has killed of a number of its main operatives and the Head of Al-Qaeda itself - Osama bin Laden - the Al-Qaeda is very much alive and operational. Worse still the invasion has seen the rise of a more violent terrorist group -the Islamic State (IS)- whose atrocities pale Al-Qaeda's worst offences. In addition, the IS

support.

After a phone conversation with Biden, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani tried to calm rising panic. "Afghanistan's proud security and defense forces are fully capable of defending its people and country, which they have been doing all along," he said. But Afghan forces are already demoralized. Some have abandoned their posts and taken defensive positions.

"We shouldn't underestimate the Taliban's capacity to inflict major damage," said Michael Kugelman, deputy South Asia director at the Wilson Center. "When Afghan forces no longer have the advantage of calling in U.S. air power to fend off Taliban advances into cities, the insurgents will have a major opportunity that they will fully exploit." He added the Taliban

and its affiliates are today more widespread worldwide than Al-Qaeda ever was.

In short - as Scott Ritter, a former US Marine Corps intelligence officer and author points out, the 20-year conflict in Afghanistan accomplished for the US, nothing other than killing more than 2,000 Americans, wasting trillions of dollars of the American treasury, and slaughtering hundreds of thousands of Afghans while leaving their country a little more than a tortured wasteland.

have plenty of arms and money after diversifying their funding over the years beyond drug trafficking and smuggling.

Like many Afghans, Mir believes a full U.S. withdrawal could not only clear the path for the Taliban but likewise empower warlords and regional power brokers to set up their own armies, possibly leading to civil war—as has happened before. "Everyone—including the warlords—wants to come back to power," Mir said. "None of them care about the ordinary people."

Gul, now a widow living with her three remaining children and their own families, admits the memories and fear haunt her, but she said she wouldn't flee again if the Taliban come back in force. "I will either live in peace or die in war," she said.

Another Call...

Taliban would benefit from staying involved but said he had no contact with the group.

In fact, globally calls are growing for the Taliban to come to the negotiating table and end the bloodshed. Andreas von Brandt, the EU

ambassador in Afghanistan, on Saturday had urged the Taliban to take the upcoming UN-led conference on Afghanistan seriously and hoped that the Taliban will not miss this opportunity offered to them at the upcoming Istanbul conference. A conference is scheduled on the

Afghanistan peace roadmap starting on April 24 in Istanbul that would include the United Nations and Qatar. The Afghan government is ready with a unified plan; however, the Taliban has rejected coming to the negotiating table till all foreign troops have not been withdrawn from the country.

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WHO Reports Alarming Hospitalization Of 25-59-Year-Olds

New cases of COVID-19 increased for the eighth week in a row, with more than 5.2 million reported -- the most in a week so far -- and alarming hospitalizations among people aged 25-59 worldwide, the director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO) said Monday.

"Deaths rose for the fifth straight week, and more than 3 million deaths have now been reported to the WHO," said Tedros Ghebreyesus at a twice-weekly webinar in Geneva.

He said it took nine months to reach 1 million deaths, four months to reach 2 million, and three months to reach 3 million.

"Infections and hospitalizations among people aged 25 to 59 are increasing at an alarming rate, possibly as a result of highly transmissible variants and increased social mixing among

younger adults," said Tedros.

"Big numbers can make us numb. But each one of these deaths is a tragedy for families, communities, and nations.

The WHO chief noted that COVID-19 has now killed more than 3 million people.

He noted that this week marks Earth Day on April 22 -- "a reminder that human health depends on the health of the planet that sustains us."

Tedros said air pollution kills more than double the number killed by the novel coronavirus -- 7 million people a year.

"Despite temporary improvements in air quality last year as a result of so-called lockdowns, by September, air pollution had returned to pre-pandemic levels," he said.

- CO2 emissions rebound ... **P2**



A look at the world

Military Says That Chad's President Killed on Battlefield

Chadian President Idriss Deby Itno, who ruled the central African nation for more than three decades, died Tuesday of wounds suffered on the battlefield during a fight against rebels, the military announced on national television and radio.

The stunning announcement came just hours after electoral officials had declared Deby, 68, the winner of the April 11 presidential election, paving the way for him to stay in power for six more years.

An 18-month transitional council will be led by Deby's 37-year-old son, Mahamat Idriss



Deby Itno, the military said, also imposing a nightly curfew of 6 p.m.

"In the face of this worrying situation, the people of Chad must show their attachment to peace, to stability, and to national cohesion," Gen. Azem Bermandoa Agouma said.

The circumstances of Deby's death could not immediately be independently confirmed due to the remote location of the fighting.

The military said Deby had taken "the heroic lead in combat operations against terrorists who had come from Libya." After being wounded in battle, he then was taken to the capital, the general announced.

However, some foreign observers questioned how a head of state could have been killed, saying it cast doubt on his protective guard. The Chadian military had only acknowledged five deaths in weekend fighting in which it said it had killed 300 rebels.

"We still don't have the whole story," Laith Alkhouri, a global intelligence adviser, told The Associated Press. "It raises ... **P2**

UK: Ex-Foreign Office Minister Slams Pro-Israel Lobby



A former British Foreign Office minister is accusing pro-Israel lobbyists of having "the most disgusting interference" in British politics, as well as negatively influencing foreign policy in the Middle East.

In an interview on the MailPlus news site promoting his memoir *In the Thick of It: The Private Diaries of a Minister*, former Conservative MP Sir Alan Duncan criticized the Conservative Friends of Israel (CFI) lobbying group -- going so far as to claim that they blocked him from being appointed minister for the Middle East and North Africa by then-Prime Minister Theresa May.

He was told by Boris Johnson -- then-foreign secretary and current prime minister -- that the CFI "are going ballistic" over his potential appointment, according to Duncan.

Duncan is known to hold a number of pro-Palestinian views, including opposition to illegal Israeli settlements, and claims this was the reason he was blocked from becoming minister for the Middle East and North Africa.

He told MailPlus that the CFI injected a "Netanyahu-type view of Israeli politics into our foreign policy," referring to Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu.

In his memoir, Duncan wrote of his strong disapproval of Conservative lawmakers' excessive praise for Netanyahu.

He said he was "ashamed" of the British government, and said UK officials allowed Netanyahu to "peddle pro-settlement propaganda" during a visit to Britain.

Speaking to Crick, he said: "A lot of things do not happen in foreign policy or in government for fear of offending them because that's the way it's put to them by the CFI."

"It's a sort of buried scandal that has to stop ... They will interfere at a high ... **P2**

Sweden: 5 Women Murdered by Men in Recent Weeks

At least five women in Sweden have been murdered by men in recent weeks, the country's prime minister said on social media on Monday.

"The men who expose women to these heinous crimes should be punished, but men's violence against women should not be reduced to individual cases. It is a societal problem that must be fought with the collective power of society as a whole," Stefan Lofven said on Facebook.

In 2020, nearly 9,000 women filed reports



of violence by men with whom they had a close relationship, said Lofven.

In a powerful post, he underlined that for men's violence against women to end, it is men who must change.

"Especially we, men, have to mark and say no. We need to talk to men about what true masculinity is, that it is not beating or harassing. Never accept that someone uses violence or threats of violence to gain power over their loved ones. Never look away. Never apologize. Sound the alarm," he added.

Lofven added that the government will do everything it could to stop violence against women.

Annie Loof, the leader of the Center Party, also took to Facebook to condemn violence against women.

"Where is the roar from society? From my political colleagues? Where are the commissions, the tough ones? The common signal? I am ready to sit down at the party leadership level to take action against men's violence against women at any time," she added.



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