

UK Treating Rise in Migrant Channel Crossings as 'Major Incident'



LONDON - Britain is treating the spike in migrants trying to cross the Channel in small boats as "a major incident", its interior ministry said on Friday. The move follows the interception of two more vessels carrying 12

migrants off the southeast English coast -- the latest in a sharp increase in such cases over the Christmas week. In the latest incidents, eight Iranian men were spotted in a small boat near the busy port of Dover at around 0900 GMT, and brought

ashore for medical assessments and immigration interviews. About six hours earlier, border officials detained a Syrian and three Iranians encountered on a dinghy in a similar area. Interior Minister Sajid Javid held a conference call Friday with key officials, and has asked for an urgent call with his French counterpart this weekend, according to the ministry. He has appointed a commander to oversee the response to the incidents and asked for daily updates, it said. Javid is also assessing whether to deploy additional border enforcement vessels in the Channel amid fears it could encourage more people to try to make the crossing, the ministry added. (AFP)

Israeli PM Visits Brazil ahead of Bolsonaro Inauguration



RIO DE JANEIRO - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu opened the first visit to Brazil by a leader of Israel on Friday, saying he hopes for a strong partnership between the two countries. Netanyahu came for President-

elect Jair Bolsonaro's inauguration Jan. 1, but arrived several days early in Rio de Janeiro to meet with the incoming far-right leader and several other top members of the new administration. (Fox News)

(1) Slight Majority...

not directed the Department of Defense to begin the process of withdrawing US personnel from Afghanistan," the Bloomberg News quoted Garrett Marquis, a spokesman for the National Security Council, as saying in an emailed statement on Friday.

The Wall Street Journal was first to report about the possible reduction of US forces in Afghanistan.

The US and NATO Forces Commander in Afghanistan Gen. Scott Miller in a meeting with Nangarhar governor last week on Sunday assured that they will continue to support the Afghan forces even if they get an order about troop withdrawal - an issue which Miller said is rumors by "newspapers".

"I have seen the same rumors I have from the newspapers but all I would assure you is first of all I have no orders, so nothing changed," he said in the meeting.

There are at least 14,000 forces in Afghanistan who are engaged in counterterrorism as well as train and advise mission for their Afghan counterparts. (Tolo news)

(2) IEC Criticized...

repeatedly, but our voices were not heard. Takhar residents have no hope anymore on the electoral commissions," said Habibullah Rustaqi, a candidate from Takhar.

"The election commission and the complaints commission are playing with the people's destiny and have taken the election into crisis," said Mahdi Mubashir, a Kabul resident.

An electoral monitoring organization said those who have caused delay in announcement of parliamentary elections' results should be punished.

"The commission cannot make decisions on its operational activities and the decisions being dictated from inside government on them," said Naeem Asghari, member of Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan. The election commission meanwhile said delay in results announcement is for the sake of transparency.

"We have learned these lessons from October 20 elections and now we are working on how to bring reforms to these areas," said Abdul Aziz Ibrahim, a spokesman for IEC.

The results for Kabul, Paktia and Baghlan provinces as well as for Kochi and Hindus have not been announced so far. (Tolo news)

(3) Government Should...

Abdul Rauf Ibrahim said the issue of peace has become a hot debate in Afghanistan and the

region and Afghanistan, he said, as nation and state had been sidelined in this process.

"Remove you difference in connection to peace process in order to find and unified strategy," he told the leaders of the government. (Pajhwok)

(4) Over 40,000...

government enforced and which prompted joyous celebration by fighters and civilians alike, offered a short respite, though fighting resumed immediately afterwards.

Taliban fighters now effectively control perhaps half the country, cutting off transport routes and laying siege to cities and towns. A sharp uptick in US airstrikes has not curbed their momentum. In September, Washington appointed the veteran diplomat Zalmay Khalilzad as an envoy for peace talks—a welcome sign that it was prioritizing negotiations to end the war.

Taliban leaders appear to be taking the talks seriously, though the process is stuck over their continued insistence that the United States commit to a timeline for full withdrawal of international forces as a precondition for a wider peace process involving other Afghan factions, a sequence that would be a win for the Taliban while saddling other Afghans with uncertainty.

Only days after Khalilzad's latest talks with the Taliban came Trump's bombshell. Withdrawing 7,000 troops in itself will probably not be militarily decisive.

Indeed, there could be value to the United States making clear it is serious about bringing troops home. All sides understand that a rapid pullout could provoke a major new civil war, an outcome nobody, including the Taliban, wants.

With a US drawdown in the cards, the Taliban's suspicion about Washington's motives might ease, propelling talks forward.

Neighboring countries and others involved in Afghanistan—notably Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and China—all want the Americans out eventually, but none of them wants a precipitous withdrawal.

They may be more inclined to support U.S. diplomacy if they believe that Washington will eventually give up its strategic foothold in South Asia. Trump's announcement could therefore spur them to help end the war, but regional powers could just as easily increase their meddling by doubling down on Afghan proxies to hedge their bets.

Unfortunately, the rashness of Trump's decision risks out-

weighing any potential silver lining. Its timing appeared to catch everyone—from Khalilzad and top US military chiefs to the Afghan government—off guard. The fact that it was not coordinated with Khalilzad meant that the envoy could not extract any concessions from the Taliban in return for such a key pledge that partially addressed their core demand.

In Kabul, the sense of betrayal was palpable. A few days later, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani nominated two hard-line anti-Taliban officials as his defense and interior ministers, suggesting a move away from his compromising tone of the past year. The festivities that greeted the June cease-fire revealed broad support for peace, and there are signs that the war's core protagonists are open to a settlement. But that was always an uncertain bet. Trump's decision has only added to the uncertainty. (Pajhwok)

(5) Turkey to...

actively operation along with at least 20 Saffron companies.

The growing harvest of Saffron has also paved the way for employment of a large number of residents of Herat province despite the farmers and traders complain regarding the reduction of the prices of Saffron product in this province.

According to the officials, the price per kilogram of Saffron has dropped from 60,000 Afghanis to 28,000 while reports also indicate that a kilogram of Saffron has also been sold as low as 20,000 Afghanis.

The Afghan Saffron is currently being exported to India, United Arab Emirates, and some other countries. (KP)

(6) India Closely...

Sinha, India's former envoy to Afghanistan & TCA Raghavan at non-official level at the Moscow talks.

US special representative for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad will be visiting India in January during which he will be meeting Indian leadership and brief them about developments in Afghanistan.

Recent months have seen hectic parleys on peace in Afghanistan. Earlier this month Foreign Ministers of China, Afghanistan & Pakistan meet in Kabul and earlier this week Pakistani FM Shah Mehmood Qureshi was in Kabul, his 2nd visit to the country in one month. Iran, US, Russia have been engaging with Taliban.

The development coming even as US media reported that US President Donald Trump may withdraw 7000 troops from Afghanistan, something that still

is to be confirmed by Pentagon. (Pajhwok)

(7) WH Denis Report...

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(8) Khalid Vows...

be to give morale to government forces and address their problems.

He said he is sure that the nation trusts him while assuring that the ministry will serve the soldiers who are on the frontline and that he will not allow bureaucracy in the ministry. Khalid said the Afghan forces will be on the offensive against militants.

"After this, our slogan will be to kill the enemy and eliminate their strongholds. We must go after the enemies' strongholds," Khalid said.

He said that the Army forces will continue to support the peace process.

"I assure government that all the forces will support the peace process and if peace comes to Afghanistan, that will be because of security forces' pressures," Khalid said.

He vowed further attention to the families of those soldiers who have been wounded or who have lost their lives on duty.

"When I came to the ministry, I noticed an incident in which wounded soldiers in Andar district were not taken to the center for a week. I assure all soldiers that I will not allow such an accident to happen again. I will not sleep and I will shake up the ministry until our wounded soldiers are transferred," he added.

Khalid vowed to boost coordination among the Army forces as a main principle in the ministry.

"Coordination is a main principle in the ministry and we will work more on this. I heard that in some areas our forces are busy as private guards. We will change this soon and our commando forces' focus will be only on operations," Khalid said.

He said the Afghan forces are the owners of this country as he described the importance of the duty of the Afghan Army who are defending the country on the frontlines of the battle.

"Foreign forces are here for training and supporting Afghan forces, but you (Afghan forces) are the real owners and the decision makers of the country," he said.

He assured that he will protect the people as he recalled an at-

tack against him when he served as the head of the National Directorate of Security.

"Some people criticize me and say that Khaild could not save himself when he was in the NDS. Let me tell them that I was here to protect them not to protect myself, and I will continue to protect you again," he concluded. (Tolo news)

(9) MOI BARS...

events held inside the foreign missions.

He warned of legal action if the orders had been violated by the officials and policemen. (Pajhwok)

(10) Peace Talks...

of the stakeholders," he said, adding, a clear policy for handling Daesh besides the peace talks was also important.

The ANP leader said Pakistan's past foreign policies had not only created problems for the country but the nation also suffered.

"Both the counties should frame policies for furthering their national interests," he said, adding, the policies adopted for benefiting the super powers had destroyed the peace in the region. "We are the followers of Bacha Khan and want peace in the world," he said, adding, war was not solution to problems and every issue could be resolved through talks.

"We preferred talks for restoration of peace in Malakand division. The government resorted to the use of force after the Taliban violated peace agreement," he recalled.

He said the US asking Pakistan to play a role in the Afghan peace process was actually a 'do more' demand, which the government of Pakistan portrayed as a request.

He stressed that peace in Afghanistan would not be fully achieved without giving China and Russia a role in the peace talks.

He pointed out that India had maintained its relations with Russia but at the same time it didn't oppose US. "The government should learn a lesson from the flawed policies of Musharraf and Zia," he argued.

Afghanistan is the biggest market for Pakistan and the government should strengthen trade relations with its neighbours after the Kartarpur corridor opening, he added. (Pajhwok)

(11) Gunmen Set...

said 21 girls had been graduated from the school this year. Investigation was underway in this regard, he added. The school's guard said the fire erupted at the building at 3am. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the incident. (Pajhwok)