

world

Pakistan pledges citizenship to Afghans, Bengali refugees

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Karachi, Pakistan

Pakistan's new premier Imran Khan has vowed to give citizenship to some Afghan refugees and Bengali immigrants, officials confirmed yesterday, granting rights to many who have lived in the country for decades.

Pakistan, one of the world's largest refugee-hosting nations, is home to roughly 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees, some of whom have lived in the country since fleeing the Soviet invasion of 1979.

There are also roughly a quarter of a million Bengalis, many of whom arrived during Pakistan's civil war in 1971, when East Pakistan broke away to declare independence and become Bangladesh.

Khan, who visited Karachi on Sunday, told a fundraising dinner that his government would take steps to grant nationality to those who had been there longest.

"The first thing I will do going back (to Islamabad), God willing, is that we will get those people from Bangladesh, who are perhaps living here for more than 40 years and their children have grown older, issued passports and national identity cards," he said, according to footage of the dinner seen by AFP.

"And those Afghans whose children have grown older here, who were born in Pakistan, they would also be issued the passports and ID cards," he continued.

"When you are born in America, you get the American passport. It is the practice in every country in the world, so why not



Afghan women wait during the visit of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi at the Azakhel Voluntary Repatriation Centre in Nowshera

here? How cruel it is for them." However he also noted that Bengali immigrants and Afghan refugees have created an "underclass" in Karachi that has

helped fuel street crime in the megacity of more than 20 million people.

Officials confirmed Khan's comments Monday and said a

draft policy would have to be prepared for cabinet before legislation could be written and debated in parliament.

Pakistanis have long viewed

Austerity drive: Government begins car auctions

Reuters | Islamabad

Pakistan's new government yesterday began auctioning off about 100 government-owned vehicles as part of new Prime Minister Imran Khan's highly publicised cost-cutting drive.

Auction official Mohammad Asif said the vehicles could bring in about 2 billion rupees (\$16 million) to the cash-strapped government's coffers, although that estimate depends on finding buyers for four bullet-proof Mercedes, estimated in value together at 1 billion rupees.

The auction has been billed as part of Khan's drive to give "the nation's wealth to its rightful owners", though critics say most of the new government's



People visit an auction of government owned used cars at the premises of Prime Minister House in Islamabad

cost-cutting measures are more symbolism than significant savings.

"It is a change of mindset," Khan said in a speech on Friday.

"I will be counting every single rupee I have to spend on me."

Auctions of aging govern-

ment vehicles, for example, have taken place for years, though not so publicised.

The 36 Mercedes and BMW vehicles was a larger number than at previous auctions - and the sale offered bullet-proof luxury sedans estimated to be worth 250 million rupees (about \$2 million) each.

Still, nearly three-quarters of the 101 vehicles on offer were more than 10 years old, some noticeably knocked about. Two were 32-year-old Toyota Corollas.

Even if the auction were to bring in its projected 2 billion rupees, that is a drop in the bucket compared with the government's 5.9 trillion rupee (\$48.19 billion) budget, which projects a 1.7 trillion rupees in deficit spending.

Turkey bolsters military presence in Syria's Idlib

Istanbul, Turkey

Turkey's military has sent its most significant batch of reinforcements to the northwestern Syrian province of Idlib in weeks, reports said Monday, as Ankara seeks to prevent a Moscow-backed assault by forces of President Bashar al-Assad.

The reports came as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan prepared to meet his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in Sochi in a new bid to warn the Kremlin against seeking to take rebel-held Idlib by force.



Imran Khan, Pakistan's new premier

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IMRAN KHAN

PAKISTAN'S NEW PREMIER

Afghan refugees in particular suspiciously, with police accusing them of harassment and extortion. Many say they have overstayed their welcome.

In 2016 a wave of forced repatriations sparked fears of a humanitarian crisis, with Human Rights Watch issuing a scathing report describing Pakistan's "coercive" approach. It accused the government of arbitrary detentions and other violations.

The United Nations refugee agency welcomed Khan's announcement Monday.

"We will continue to work closely with the Government of Pakistan on this issue in the coming weeks," spokesman Qaiser Khan Afridi said.

Superbug kills 6 newborns in SA

Johannesburg, South Africa

An outbreak of the Klebsiella pneumonia superbug that killed six newborns at a government hospital in Johannesburg has forced medics to close the facility's neo-natal and maternity wards.

The Thelle Mogoerane hospital in the eastern Johannesburg township of Vosloorus has been in the grip of the antibiotic-resistant bacteria since July 11.

Philippine ex-general jailed

Manila, Philippines

A retired Philippine army general was sentenced on Monday to decades behind bars over the 2006 disappearance of two activists.

Jovito Palparan, dubbed "The Butcher" by leftist groups for his brutal anti-insurgency tactics against communist guerillas, was convicted of kidnapping and handed a minimum term of 20 years by a court in Bulacan province.

New evidence: Russia claims Ukraine downed flight MH17

Moscow, Russia

Russia's defence ministry yesterday said it was releasing fresh information to back its claim that the missile that downed a Malaysia Airlines flight over war-torn Ukraine in 2014 was fired by Kiev's forces.

At a briefing, the ministry said it was releasing the BUK missile's serial number for the first time and said that it was produced and sent to Ukraine in the Soviet era and had not been returned to Russian territory.

Russia has denied any responsibility for the shooting-down of the plane and has presented a number of theories pointing the finger at Kiev.

The Boeing 777 flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur crashed outside the rebel stronghold of Donetsk on July 17, 2014, killing all 298 on board, most of them Dutch nationals.

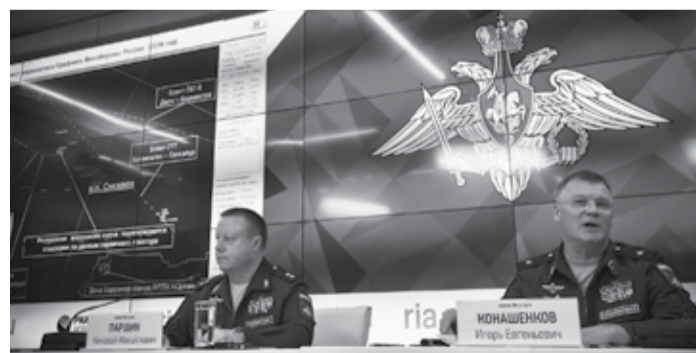
The European Union imposed damaging economic sanctions on Russia afterwards, blaming Russian-backed rebels in eastern Ukraine who shot down a number of other planes.

A top Dutch investigator said his team had concluded that the plane was shot down by a Russian-made BUK missile from a Russian military brigade in the southwestern city of Kursk.

The Netherlands and Australia in May directly blamed Russia for the attack.

"The missile with the serial number 886847379 intended for the BUK missile system on December 29, 1986 was sent by rail transport to military unit number 20152

NIKOLAI PARSHIN,
A SENIOR MILITARY OFFICIAL



Russia's defence ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov (R) and the Chief of the Main Rocket and Artillery Department Lt. Gen. Nikolai Parshin attend a press briefing

"The missile with the serial number 886847379 intended for the BUK missile system on December 29, 1986 was sent by rail transport to military unit number 20152," said a senior military official, Nikolai Parshin, quoted by RIA Novosti state

news agency.

He said the military unit referred to was based in Ukraine, then a Soviet republic, adding that this information was classified "top secret."

"After the breakup of the Soviet Union, it (the missile) was not brought onto Russian soil and was incorporated into the Ukrainian armed forces," he said. Russia said it had sent the information on the missile to the Netherlands.

The ministry also said that video footage used by an international commission investigating the incident showing the BUK missile being transported into rebel-held eastern Ukraine was faked.