



This file photo taken on November 5, 1934 shows Mohandas Karmachand Gandhi (C), also known as "Mahatma" (Great soul) Gandhi speaking during a meeting of the All India Congress in Bombay (Now Mumbai). Authorities in Ghana announced their intention to "relocate" a statue of Mahatma Gandhi, given recently by India to the University of Accra, following the publication of a petition denouncing the "racism" of the late leader Indian independence. The statue was inaugurated in June 2016 on the campus by the Indian President Pranab Mukherjee as a symbol of the close relationship between Ghana and India. — AFP

DOZENS OF AFGHAN TROOPS MISSING FROM MILITARY TRAINING IN US IN LESS THAN TWO YEARS

WASHINGTON: Forty-four Afghan troops visiting the United States for military training have gone missing in less than two years, presumably in an effort to live and work illegally in America, Pentagon officials said.

Although the number of disappearances is relatively small—some 2,200 Afghan troops have received military training in the United States since 2007—the incidents raise questions about security and screening procedures for the programs.

They are also potentially embarrassing for US President Barack Obama's administration, which has spent billions of dollars training Afghan troops as Washington seeks to extricate itself from the costly, 15-year-old war. The disclosure could fuel criticism by supporters of Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump, who has accused the Obama administration of failing to properly vet immigrants from Muslim-majority countries and has pledged a much tougher stance if he wins.

Run away soliders

While other foreign troops on US military training visits have sometimes run away, a US defense official said that the frequency of Afghan troops going missing was concerning and "out of the ordinary."

Since September alone, eight Afghan troops have left military bases without authorization, Pentagon spokesman Adam Stump told Reuters. He said the

total number of Afghan troops who have gone missing since January 2015 is 44, a number that has not previously been disclosed. "The Defense Department is assessing ways to strengthen eligibility criteria for training in ways that will reduce the likelihood of an individual Afghan willingly absconding from training in the US and going AWOL (absent without leave)," Stump said. Afghans in the US training program are vetted to ensure they have not participated in human rights abuses and are not affiliated with militant groups before being allowed into the United States, Stump said.

The defense official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, added there was no evidence any of those who had absconded had carried out crimes or posed a threat to the United States.

The Afghan army has occasionally been infiltrated by Taliban militants who have carried out attacks on Afghan and US troops, but such incidents have become less frequent due to tougher security measures.

Trump, whose other signature immigration plan is to build a wall on the US-Mexico border, has proposed a temporary ban on Muslims seeking to enter the country, and has said that law enforcement officers should engage in more racial profiling to curb the threat of attacks on American soil.

After Omar Mateen, whose father was born in Afghanistan, killed 49 people at a gay nightclub in Orlando in

June, Trump said an immigration ban would last until "we are in a position to properly screen these people coming into our country."

Billions of dollars in training

Washington has allocated more than \$60 billion since 2002 to train and equip Afghan troops, but security remains precarious and the Taliban are estimated to control more territory in Afghanistan than at any time since 2001 when the US invaded.

Earlier this year Obama shelved plans to cut the US force in Afghanistan nearly in half by year's end, opting instead to keep 8,400 troops there through the end of his presidency in January.

The military training program brings troops to the United States from around the world in order to build on military relations and improve capabilities for joint operations. In some cases, officials said, the Afghan students who went missing were in the United States for elite Army Ranger School and intelligence-gathering training. The officials did not identify the missing troops or their rank.

Even though the troops were in the United States for military training, they were not necessarily always on a military base. If students under the military program are absent from training for more than 24 hours, they are considered to be "absent without leave" (AWOL) and the Department of Homeland Security is notified. — Reuters

SOLDIER FROM MARYLAND KILLED ON PATROL IN AFGHANISTAN

BALTIMORE: The Pentagon says a soldier from Maryland was killed after being hit by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan while on patrol with Afghan forces in a north-eastern province bordering Pakistan.

The Department of Defense said in a news release that 31-year-old Staff Sgt. Adam S. Thomas of Takoma Park, Maryland, died Tuesday in Nangarhar Province. Officials say Thomas died from wounds sustained when his patrol triggered an improvised explosive device. Thomas was assigned to Company B, 2nd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), Fort Carson, Colorado. — AP

INDIAN POLICE ARREST 70 FOR TARGETING AMERICANS IN TAX SCAM

NEW DELHI: Indian police have arrested 70 people and are questioning hundreds more after uncovering a massive scam to cheat thousands of Americans out of millions of dollars by posing as US tax authorities and demanding unpaid taxes, a police officer said yesterday.

According to police in Mumbai, the yearlong scam involved running fake call centers which sent voice mail messages telling US nationals to call back because they owed back taxes. Those who called back and believed the threats would fork out thousands of dollars to "settle" their case, Mumbai police officer Parag Marere said yesterday.

The scam brought in more than \$150,000 a day, Marere said without giving a total sum. If the scam netted that amount daily, it would have made almost \$55 million in one year. Some victims were also told to buy gift vouchers from various companies, and hand over the voucher ID numbers which the impostors then used to make purchases, Marere said.

Police said they are likely to file charges against many of the 600 or more people still being questioned on suspicion of running the fake call centers, housed on several stories of a Mumbai office building.

Those arrested so far include several of the alleged ring-leaders, as well as people accused of providing equipment and setting up the fake call centers. The criminal charges filed against the suspects include extortion, impersonation and violations of India's information technology laws. "We are questioning those who were involved in the fraud, including those posing as tax investigators," Marere said.

Police raided the offices this week and seized hundreds of hard disks, high-end servers and other electronic equipment. Indian media reports said 70 percent of the scam's proceeds were retained by the suspects in India, while the rest was paid to collaborators in the US.

Indian news broadcaster NDTV reported that one US-based company allegedly collected the victims' personal information and passed it to the fake call centers. — AP



MUMBAI, INDIA: A police official, right, escorts two men outside the court in Thane yesterday. — AP