

International

France suspends expulsions of migrants to Afghanistan

8,886 asylum applications was applied by Afghans in 2020

PARIS: France last month suspended expelling Afghan migrants whose asylum applications had been rejected, due to the deteriorating security situation in the country as the Taliban presses an offensive, the government said yesterday. The French interior ministry told AFP in a statement that the policy had been in place since early July, after similar announcements of the suspension of such expulsions by Germany and the Netherlands.

"We are watching the situation closely alongside our European partners," the French interior ministry said. Afghans in 2020 accounted for the most asylum requests in France, with 8,886 applications. Germany and the Netherlands said Wednesday they have stopped forced repatriations of Afghan migrants because of deteriorating security in Afghanistan, a sharp change from their previous position. Officials had said as late as Tuesday that both governments had joined their counterparts in Austria, Belgium, Denmark and Greece to write to the EU's executive arm saying they should be allowed to press on with expulsions of Afghan migrants if their asylum bids fail.

Afghanistan urged the EU in July to cease forced deportations of Afghan migrants for three months as security forces battle the Taliban offensive ahead of the full US military pullout from Afghanistan on August 31. The Taliban have overrun 10 provincial capitals in a week in a lightning offensive, the latest the strategic Afghan city of Ghazni, just 150 kilometers (95 miles) from Kabul.

The government has now effectively lost most of northern and western Afghanistan and is left holding a scattered collection of contested cities also dangerously at risk of falling to the Taliban. The conflict has escalated dramatically since May, when US-led

forces began the final stage of a troop withdrawal due to end later this month following a 20-year occupation. Nordic countries to offer asylum for Afghan staff

Roughly 45 Afghans employed by Denmark in the conflict-hit country will be offered temporary asylum as international troops withdraw, with other Nordic countries set to follow suit. "We have a joint responsibility to help those Afghans who are now under threat because of their ties and contribution to Denmark's engagement in Afghanistan," the Danish foreign ministry said in a statement late on Wednesday, noting that the country's security situation was "grave".

Afghans who worked for the Danish armed forces or embassy will be offered evacuation to Denmark and a two-year residence permit, the ministry said. Finland's Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto said the government was exploring ways of evacuating "at least dozens" of Afghans who have worked for the Nordic nation, echoing a similar promise from neighboring Sweden.

International coalition forces are due to complete their withdrawal from Afghanistan next month against a backdrop of swelling violence as cities previously under government control continue to fall to the Taliban. Last month the first group of Afghans employed by the United States were evacuated, with Germany and the UK also relocating their local staff. The Taliban is thought to have killed hundreds of Afghans who have worked for overseas forces, and their families. Denmark and several other EU countries last week urged the European Commission to continue to allow deportations of rejected Afghan asylum seekers, despite a call from Kabul to halt the returns. —AFP

"l'Électorat", rather than "les Électeurs et les Électrices"—the masculine and feminine forms of the word "voters". But formats like "les Electeur.rice.s" have now started appearing. France's education ministry has recently banned the use of such formulations, and in neighbouring Switzerland, a string of politicians, mainly from the right, are also campaigning for them to be wiped off the page. Benjamin Roduit of The Centre party brought forward a motion in parliament in March which has yet to be debated—asking the Swiss federal administration to adhere to the established rules of the French language.

How would you like your 'buerger'?

In June, the Swiss Federal Chancellery banned the use in German of asterisks and other signs that include the masculine, feminine and non-binary forms of words, believing they do not achieve their aim—and instead "cause a whole host of linguistic problems". It gave as an example this sentence: "Der*die Leiter*in bezeichnet eine*n geeignete*n Mitarbeiter*in, die*der ihn*sie bei Abwesenheit vertritt", which means "the director shall designate a suitable member of staff to replace him/her in his/her absence." For the word "citizens" in its plural form—"Buerger" for men and "Buergerinnen" for women, which turns into "Buerger" if both men and women are involved—the federal administration will now simply use both in succession.

In French, though, some have been using the formulation "citoyen-nete" for citizens, with the "ne" denoting women and the "x" for those uncomfortable with either the masculine or feminine spelling. In recent months, Switzerland's French-language public television service RTS has also fanned the flames by replacing "Bonsoir tous" ("good evening, everyone", using the masculine plural "tous") with "Bonsoir et bienvenue"—a neutral "good evening and welcome". The Swiss branch of Defend the French Language wrote an open letter asking RTS to reverse the change. Branch president Aurele Challet is also attempting to gather enough signatures to trigger a public vote on the issue. The initiative "aims to ban so-called inclusive writing throughout Switzerland". —AFP



GHAZNI, Afghanistan: A Taliban fighter stands guard at the entrance of the police headquarters in Ghazni yesterday as Taliban move closer to Afghan capital after taking Ghazni city. —AFP

Swiss voters may get last word on 'inclusive' writing

GENEVA, Switzerland: Ensuring gender neutrality in writing is a tricky business, and nowhere more so than in Switzerland which uses four languages and may soon put the issue to the popular vote. Furious over inclusive writing making its way into officialdom, the media and schools, the Swiss branch of the Defend the French Language association is hoping to gather enough signatures to trigger a vote, as is possible under the country's direct democracy system. Wrestling with language is part of the national identity in Switzerland, where German, French and Italian are used—plus a fourth official language: Romansh. French and Italian nouns have either a masculine or feminine gender, while German nouns have a masculine, feminine or neutral gender.

In French, Italian and German grammar, the masculine takes precedence over the feminine in situations describing both men and women—a rule that activists for gender equality say instills the idea that men are superior to women.

As a result, there has been a rapidly spreading trend of filling words up with dots and stars to include their masculine, feminine and sometimes non-binary forms all in one go. But critics say this is going too far, butchering the written language and creating an unreadable mess.

Since the 1990s, the Swiss government has tried to avoid the problem by leaning towards neutral terminology, where possible, in the three main languages. For example, communications in French referring voters get around the issue by referring to the electorate,

Germany to end Afghanistan aid if Taliban take power

BERLIN, Germany: Germany said yesterday that it would stop sending financial support to Afghanistan in the event that the Taliban succeeded in seizing power in the country. Speaking to the German broadcaster ZDF, Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said the Taliban know that Afghanistan cannot survive without international aid. "We will not send another cent to this country if the Taliban take complete control, introduce Sharia law and turn it into a caliphate," Maas said. Germany sends Afghanistan 430 million euros (\$504 million) in aid a year, making it one of the biggest donors to the strife-hit nation. Since international troops began their withdrawal from Afghanistan in May, the Taliban have taken control of large swathes of territory. Most recently, the Taliban seized the provincial capital Ghazni, 150 kilometers (90 miles) from the capital Kabul. German soldiers were deployed as part of a NATO force in Afghanistan for nearly 20 years until June.

Speaking to radio station Deutschlandfunk, German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer confirmed that Afghans who had worked with German forces locally would be brought to Germany to protect them from Taliban retaliation. "There's a clear commitment to get them out of there," Kramp-Karrenbauer said, but added that there was a "bottleneck" in Afghanistan, limiting exits. Local officials will only allow Afghan citizens to leave the country if they have a passport, which many do not. "Without these travel documents, people can't get to the airport or on the plane," Kramp-Karrenbauer said. "The foreign ministry is seeking to dissuade the Afghan government from using this practice." When asked about the gains made by Taliban insurgents in the country in his interview with ZDF, Maas referred back to the decision of the United States to withdraw from the country. "This meant that all NATO forces had to leave the country as well, because without American capabilities... no one country can send their soldiers there safely," Maas said. —AFP