

## DEATH OF A BABY AS UNWANTED ROHINGYA HUNT FOR A HOME

**TEKNAF, Bangladesh:** Alam's short life ended yesterday in a dark, tattered tent in Bangladesh, the Rohingya child's skeletal body succumbing to illness contracted while fleeing Myanmar where his stateless people are under attack. He was six-months-old.

Alam died hours after arriving at a makeshift refugee camp close to Teknaf, the gateway to Cox's Bazar, a poor, densely populated coastal area already home to more than 230,000 Rohingya refugees.

But for the Rohingya, Bangladesh is far from a promised land. So far little or no aid has been provided for the new arrivals, with Bangladeshi authorities fearing food, medicine and shelter will encourage more to cross the border. With her child's emaciated body by her side, 22-year-old Nur Begum describes how a Myanmar army raid that killed her husband and two other children forced her to flee Rakhine State for Bangladesh with the tiny Alam.

After three-week trip with little food, Begum and her increasingly sick child made it to the camp in Leda, across the Bangladeshi border. But Alam's journey was at an end.

"I finally had some food in the camp and thought I would be able to feed him," his distraught mother told AFP. "But he left me before I had the chance." Her baby was buried yesterday, his body



Myanmar Rohingya migrant Nur Begum reacts after the death of her six-month-old son Alam in a refugee camp in Teknaf, in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district, yesterday. — AFP

washed and then carried to a Rohingya graveyard on a wooded hill near the camp. Up to 30,000 Rohingya have abandoned their homes in Myanmar since early October, after soldiers poured into the strip of land in western Rakhine state following deadly raids on border posts.

The refugees who have reached Cox's

Bazar so far have brought with them horrifying stories of gang rape and murder. The Myanmar army flatly denies the allegations. That Myanmar does not want its more than one million Rohingya population is not in dispute. It refuses them citizenship while many in the majority Buddhist country call the Muslim minority "Bengalis"—shorthand



Myanmar Rohingya refugees wash the body of six-month-old Alam before his burial in a refugee camp in Teknaf, in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district yesterday. — AFP

for illegal immigrants.

### Poorest of the poor

Bangladesh provides a mixed reception to the Rohingya. Although people around Cox's Bazar have centuries-long historical ties with the Rohingya, locals increasingly perceive the refugees as a crime-prone nuisance. Only 32,000

Rohingya are formally registered as refugees. The remaining 200,000 scratch an existence without help from government or charities.

And their numbers swell with every crisis across the border in Myanmar. To avoid more arrivals Dhaka has blocked refugee boats from landing and called for Myanmar to stop the exodus. — AFP

## PAKISTAN PM SHARIF NAMES BAJWA AS NEW ARMY CHIEF

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan's Prime Minister yesterday picked Lieutenant General Qamar Javed Bajwa to replace outgoing army chief Raheel Sharif, a popular military leader credited for improving security and driving back Islamist militant groups, his spokesman said. General Bajwa will likely take charge of the world's sixth-largest army by troop numbers in a formal handover on Tuesday, when General Sharif, who is no relation to prime minister Nawaz Sharif, formally retires. The appointment of Bajwa is expected to help reset fraught relations between the military and the civilian government in a nuclear-armed nation of 190 million people.

Meanwhile, four heavily-armed suicide bombers attacked a military facility in northwestern Pakistan yesterday and killed two soldiers, but failed to storm a busy mosque inside, the army said. A splinter group of the Pakistani Taliban, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan Jamaat-ur-Ahrar (TTP-JA), claimed responsibility for the attack on Ghalani Camp in Mohmand Agency that is part of the lawless Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) bordering Afghanistan.

A spokesman for TTP-JA, Ehsanullah Ehsan, said the Islamist group carried out the raid in an effort to set free fellow mili-

tants from custody of the security forces. The militants began their attack at 6 am local time (0100 GMT) and attempted to storm into a mosque where a large number of army recruits were present, the army said. "Wearing suicide jackets they opened fire and tried to rush inside the mosque. They were taken on and contained in the outer courtyard of the mosque," the military said in a statement.

Two of the attackers were shot dead and two detonated their explosive vests, preventing a "huge disaster", the army added. Pakistan's frontier regions, deeply conservative and hard to access due to rough terrain, have long been the sanctuary of fighters from Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and other militant groups.

In 2014, the army launched a major operation in other parts of FATA including North and South Waziristan against insurgents who routinely attacked government officials and civilians.

Most of the myriad militant groups that stage attacks inside Pakistan seek to overthrow the government to establish an Islamic theocracy and impose a stricter interpretation of the religion than is practiced in much of the country. — Reuters



HERAT: Taliban fighters react to a speech by their senior leader in the Shindand district of Herat province, Afghanistan, in this file photo. — AP

## TALEBAN LEADERS MAY HAVE 'RELOCATED' TO AFGHANISTAN

### SHIFT FROM PAKISTAN SIGNAL GROUP'S GROWING CONFIDENCE

**KABUL:** After operating out of Pakistan for more than a decade, the leaders of Afghanistan's Taliban movement may have moved back to their homeland to try to build on this year's gains in the war and to establish a permanent presence.

If confirmed, the move would be a sign of the Taliban's confidence in their fight against the US-backed government in Kabul. It could also be an attempt by the militants to distance themselves from Pakistan, which is accused of supporting the movement. The Taliban's leaders have been based in Pakistani cities, including Quetta, Karachi and Peshawar, since their rule in Afghanistan was overthrown in the 2001 US invasion after the 9/11 attacks.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the leadership shura, or council, relocated to Afghanistan "some months ago," although he would not say to where.

One Taliban official said the shura had moved to southern Helmand province, where the insurgents consider to be part of their heartland and where most of the opium that funds their operations is produced. The official refused to be identified because of security reasons.

Other Taliban sources said the justice, recruitment and religious councils had also moved to southern Afghanistan. The statements could not be independently confirmed. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's office said it had no confirmation that any such move had taken place.

"No intelligence confirms that the Taliban has shifted its shura to Afghanistan," said Haroon Chakhansuri, Ghani's spokesman. "We still believe they are still operating in their safe havens outside Afghanistan." Mujahid, however, said Kabul officials were aware of the moves, prompted by battlefield gains that the insurgents believed would put them in a strong position once talks with the Afghan government aimed at ending the war were restarted. Dialogue broke down earlier this year.

The insurgents have spread their footprint across Afghanistan since international combat troops scaled down in 2014. They have maintained multiple offensives and threatened at least three provincial capitals in recent months: Kunduz, in northern Kunduz province; Lashkhar Gar, in Helmand in the south; and Tirin Kot in Uruzgan.

The US military has conceded the insurgents have gained ground, although definitive break-downs are difficult to verify. This year, Afghan

security forces are believed to have suffered their worst losses since 2001, with the military estimating 2016 fatalities at more than 5,000 so far.

A permanent Taliban presence in Afghanistan would send a message to followers and fighters that the insurgents now control so much territory they can no longer be dislodged by government security forces, said Franz-Michael Mellbin, the European Union's ambassador in Kabul. He said he has not confirmed the reports, which have circulated for weeks. But such a move could also be part of "the Taliban's attempt to try to create a more independent position," he said, as "parts of the Taliban would like to be under less direct pressure from Pakistan."

Ghani has failed to make headway in efforts to fully engage Pakistan in cutting support for the Taliban and bringing them into a dialogue aimed at peace. After a year-long diplomatic offensive, Ghani in late 2015 cut ties with Islamabad and has since openly accused Pakistan of waging war on Afghanistan, using the Taliban as its proxy.

Pakistani authorities deny accusations that their powerful ISI intelligence agency supports the insurgents. With the major councils based in

Afghanistan, Pakistan's role could be reduced at a time when the Islamabad government is under pressure from the United States and major ally China to rein in what many see as its terrorist-supporting activities.

### Unity among leaders

If the move is confirmed, it could also indicate a unity among leaders, who have recently been portrayed by some observers, including the US military, as suffering widening divisions and struggling for cash - even though the opium production under their control has an annual export value of \$4 billion, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

The Taliban's leadership shura consists of 16 elected officials who oversee activity across Afghanistan, give permission for any changes in planning and strategy, and mediate disputes among military commanders. The military commanders include Mullah Yaqub, the son of the movement's founder, Mullah Mohammad Omar - who was declared dead last year - and Sirajuddin Haqqani, leader of the brutal Haqqani network and a co-deputy leader with Yaqub. — AP



Lt Gen Qamar Bajwa, the new chief of Pakistan Army.

## INDIAN LAWMAKER SLAMMED FOR \$7M HOME SPLURGE

**NEW DELHI:** An Indian politician is being slammed for spending \$7.3 million of taxpayers money on a palatial new home, built on an ancient architectural system and fitted with bullet-proof rooms. K Chandrasekhar Rao, chief minister of Telangana, moved to his official residence on Thursday amid the chanting of religious hymns by priests to ward off bad spirits. The 100,000-square-foot (9,000 metre) bungalow on a nine-acre plot has a movie theatre for 250 people, a conference hall for 700 people and bullet-proof offices and bathrooms for Rao and his politician son.

But the grand housewarming function did not impress social media users, who criticized Rao for a "criminal waste of money" and enjoying luxury on taxpayers' expense. "Shame! We've got feudal lords, not leaders.

Do we need a French style revolution, for them to get real?" Smiti Mahabir tweeted.

People also hit out at the politician for promoting superstition after his office released videos of the function showing Rao's spiritual guru performing religious rituals and "blessing" his official chair by briefly sitting on it. The politician is known for favouring Vastu Shastra, an ancient Hindu system of architecture.

Rao is planning to raze the state's main government complex to build a new Vastu compliant one because he believes the present structure is unlucky for the state. The proposed building will be constructed at an estimated cost of \$52 million. His government has appointed a full-time Vastu consultant to make all projects conform with the ancient building system. — AFP



HYDERABAD: This handout picture released by the Public Relation Department of the Government of Telangana and taken on November 24, 2016 shows Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao (center) taking part in a ritual to inaugurate his new home. — AFP

## AUSTRALIA ASKS TURKEY TO EXTRADITE TOP IS TERROR SUSPECT

**SYDNEY:** Australia is seeking the extradition of its most wanted Islamic State terror suspect who was thought to be dead but has been caught alive by Turkey, the government said yesterday.

The announcement followed a New York Times report that so-called Islamic State group operative Neil Prakash had been caught by Turkish forces several weeks ago as he tried to enter their country from Syria. "An individual we believe to be Neil Prakash has been arrested and detained in Turkey," a government spokesperson said in a statement.

"Prakash is subject to a formal extradition request from Australia." Prakash was a senior recruiter for Islamic State and has been linked to terror plots to kill Australians.

In May Prakash was reported dead by Canberra on advice from Washington that he had been killed in a US airstrike in northern Iraq. However, the Times said he was only

wounded, not killed, in Mosul on April 29. Prakash, who is in his early twenties, left Australia in 2013.

He has been linked to a failed Melbourne plot to behead a police officer in April last year, as well as to an 18-year-old who was killed after stabbing two police officers in Melbourne in 2014.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has called Prakash the senior Australian operative in IS. Reported to be of Indian, Fijian and Cambodian background, Prakash used the internet "to promote the evil ideology" of the jihadist group "and recruit Australian men, women and children-many of whom are either still in the conflict zone or dead." "Prakash and others ruthlessly target and groom our children-vulnerable children-with hateful propaganda of terrorism which perverts the religion of Islam," Turnbull told parliament in May. — AFP