

International

UK government talks tough on immigration - again

‘We are talking about people with good reason to seek asylum in UK’

LONDON: Accusing asylum seekers of “abusing the system” and urging the need to “take back control”, the UK government is once again talking tough on immigration. But its latest pledge to reduce crossings from northern France in small boats comes with a blatant promise to defy international conventions.

“It’s not racist for anyone... to want to control our borders, it’s not bigoted to say that we have too many asylum seekers who are abusing the system,” said Home Secretary Suella Braverman. The stance earned Braverman, whose parents emigrated to Britain from Kenya and Mauritius in the 1960s, a standing ovation at this week’s Conservative party’s annual conference.

The 42-year-old anti-EU right-winger, who has been in the job for the past month, pointedly vowed to get tough on asylum seekers who do not “meet the needs of the country”. “If you deliberately enter the United Kingdom illegally from a safe country, you should be swiftly returned to your home country or relocated to Rwanda. That is where your asylum claim will be considered,” she said.

Successive Conservative governments since 2010 have been promising to drastically reduce the number of migrants but to no avail. Since the beginning of the year, a record 33,500 people have crossed the Channel in small boats.

More than half of them came from Afghanistan (18 percent), Albania (18 percent) or Iran (15 percent), according to the Home Office. Since 2018, Iranians and Iraqis have accounted for almost half of all migrants intercepted on the route.

US targets ‘senior’ IS jihadist in Syria

BEIRUT: American forces targeted a “senior” member of the jihadist Islamic State group Thursday in a pre-dawn raid on northeastern Syria, the US military’s Central Command said. The operation is the latest US effort to clamp down on IS jihadists who have been territorially defeated but still orchestrate attacks in Syria and neighbouring Iraq.

“Centcom forces conducted a raid in northeast Syria targeting a senior ISIS official,” spokesman Colonel Joe Buccino said in an emailed statement to AFP, without elaborating. Syria’s state broadcaster had said a US airborne operation involving multiple helicopters left one person dead and saw several others captured in a government-controlled area of Syria’s northeast, which is mostly dominated by Kurdish forces.

The targeted village, Muluk Saray, lies 17 kilometres (10 miles) south of the Kurdish-held city of Qamishli and is controlled by pro-regime militias, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Thursday’s raid is the first such airborne operation in government-held territory since the start of Syria’s war in 2011, added the Britain-based war monitor.

The person killed in the operation “had been a resident of the area for years”, said the Observatory which relies on a wide network of sources in Syria. At least two people were captured alive in the operation, including a Syrian and an Iraqi, the monitor said.

Little-known target

A resident of the village said three US helicopters carrying troops had landed in the operation. US forces raided a house, killing one person and taking

Gunman kills at least 37 in Thai...

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nursery and the attacker parked his car and shot four of them dead,” she told AFP. “The shooter smashed down the door with his leg and then came inside and started slashing the children’s heads with a knife.”

Footage after the incident showed distraught parents weeping in a shelter outside the nursery, a yellow single-storey building set in a garden. The 34-year-old gunman was a former police sergeant suspended in January and sacked in June for drug use, Damrongsak told reporters. “As far as I know he was due in court tomorrow for a drug-related trial,” he said. He said the attacker was in a manic state but it was unknown whether it was drug-related. “What happened today will be a lesson to prevent this happening again in the future,” he said.

Damrongsak said the pistol used had been purchased legally and was a privately owned weapon, not police property. Witness Paweena Purichan, 31, said the attacker was well known in the area as a drug addict. She told AFP she encountered Panya driving erratically as he fled the scene. “The attacker rammied a motorbike into two people who were injured. I sped off to get away from him,” she said. “There was blood everywhere.”

Video Paweena posted online showed a woman lying injured in a roadside bush after apparently being knocked off her motorbike by Panya. Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha ordered the national police chief to “fast-track an investigation” and said he would travel to the scene of the attack on Friday. “This should not happen. This absolutely should not happen,” Prayut told reporters. “I am extremely sorry for those who were injured and lost (their loved ones).” A government spokesman said flags would fly at half-mast on Friday to honor those

‘Diversions’
Zoe Gardner, an expert on British migration and asylum systems, said while the pro-Brexit Tories have never managed to reduce immigration, they have made a tougher for asylum seekers to settle. “For a long time, it (immigration policy) has been a way to gain support, when every other area of policy seems to be a failure for them,” she told AFP.

“Every time the government of Boris Johnson had a bad week in the newspapers, you can be sure they would announce another plan to target immigrants just to distract people.” The strategy, though, is in danger of running out of steam, she added.

Britons are overwhelmingly in favour of taking in refugees, according to polls, but are now more concerned about a cost-of-living crisis. Proposing to ban access to asylum would be a violation of the UN Refugee Convention to which Britain is a signatory.

It states that a migrant can travel in any way he or she wishes or can-to a country to seek refuge, without being harmed by the mode of arrival. For some experts, such a ban would result in court action, just as it did when the government attempted to deport the first batch of failed asylum seekers to Rwanda.

In June, a plane bound for Kigali was grounded after last-minute legal challenges in the English courts, and a ruling at the European Court of Human Rights. Braverman, a former attorney general and successor to another hardliner Priti Patel, blasted the ruling of the “foreign court”, which Britain helped set up after World War II. She told conference delegates with a smile that her “dream” for Christmas would be to see “a front page of The Telegraph with a plane taking off to Rwanda”.



AL MALIKIYAH, Syria: File photo shows US soldiers walk during a joint military exercise between forces of the US-led “Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve” coalition against the Islamic State (IS) group and members of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the countryside of the Syrian town of al-Malikiya. —AFP

several others captive, the resident told AFP on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

“They used loudspeakers to call on residents to stay indoors” during the operation, the resident said. The resident identified the victim as Abu Hayel, a little-known displaced person from Hassakeh province.

The United States leads a military coalition battling IS in Syria. In July, the Pentagon said it killed Syria’s top IS jihadist in a drone strike in the northern part of the country. Centcom said he had been “one of the top five” IS leaders.

The July strike came five months after a nighttime US raid in the town of Atme, which led to the death of the overall Islamic State leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Qurashi. US officials said Qurashi died when he detonated a bomb to avoid capture. —AFP

killed in the attack.

Thailand forms part of Southeast Asia’s so-called Golden Triangle which has long been an infamous hotspot for the trafficking and abuse of drugs. Surging supplies of methamphetamine have sent street prices crashing in Thailand to all-time lows, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. The mass killing comes less than a month after an army officer shot dead two colleagues at a military training base in the capital Bangkok.

While Thailand has high rates of gun ownership, mass shootings are rare. But in the past year, there have been at least two other cases of shooting murders by serving soldiers, according to local media. In 2020, in one of the kingdom’s deadliest incidents in recent years, a soldier gunned down 29 people in a 17-hour rampage and wounded scores more before he was shot dead by commandos.

That mass shooting, linked to a debt dispute between gunman Sergeant-Major Jakrapanth Thomma and a senior officer, triggered public anger against the military. The soldier was able to steal assault rifles from an army depot before embarking on his killing spree, posting live updates on social media as he did so. Military top brass were at pains to portray the killer as a rogue soldier.

The US embassy in Bangkok expressed condolences to the victims and their families after the latest tragedy, while Amnesty International said “hearts go out” to those affected. “I am shocked to hear of the horrific events in Thailand this morning. My thoughts are with all those affected and the first responders,” British Prime Minister Liz Truss tweeted. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese tweeted it was “impossible to comprehend the heartbreak of this horrific news”. — AFP



BIRMINGHAM, United Kingdom: Conservative MP Priti Patel attends the third day of the annual Conservative Party Conference in Birmingham, central England. —AFP

No other way

According to Braverman’s own department, 94 percent of the 50,000 or so migrants who arrived in the UK across the Channel between January 2018 and June 2022 applied for asylum. Some 82 percent of those applicants were still waiting for a decision, but the

majority who have received a response were successful. “We are talking about people with good reason to seek asylum in UK, with no other way of doing so because the government has closed the majority of other options”, said Daniel Sohege, a refugee law specialist who heads the association Stand For All. —AFP

Iranian Kurd exiles in Iraq under fire as protests rage

SULAIMANIYAH, Iraq: As protests flare across Iraq over the death of young Iranian Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini, the Kurdistan region of neighbouring Iraq has paid a price, coming under bombardment from the Islamic republic’s forces.

Their target is the long-exiled Iranian Kurdish opposition, installed in Iraq under Saddam Hussein during his war with Iran in the 1980s.

Tehran regards these armed factions as “terrorists” and accuses them of attacking its territory.

A general in Iran has charged that the Kurdish opposition groups have been inciting the Mahsa Amini protests in Iranian Kurdistan, in the face of a lethal crackdown by the security forces.

Amini, 22, was pronounced dead on September 16, days after Iran’s notorious morality police detained her for allegedly breaching Iran’s strict dress code for women.

According to Adel Bakawan, director of the French Centre for Research on Iraq (CFRI), Iran needed to “find an enemy” to blame for stoking the nationwide protests.

“The weakest link that could be targeted without provoking consequences was the Iranian Kurds,” he said.

On September 28, Iran unleashed a deluge of fire on positions of Kurdish militants in northern Iraq, killing 14 people and wounding 58, including civilians. It has followed up with less bloody attacks.

On Monday, Iran’s foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani reiterated Tehran’s accusation against these

groups, saying they threaten the country’s national security. However, experts say the far-left groups have practically ceased all military activity, focusing on political action instead.

Protected presence

Any fighters they still have could be viewed as reservists, keeping up training.

Iranian Kurdish journalist Raza Manochari said there has been an agreement since the 1990s between such groups and the government of Iraq’s own Kurdistan region.

It protects their deployment, “and in exchange, they do not engage in military activities, to avoid causing problems for relations with Iran”, he said.

Manochari, who has himself lived in Iraq for eight years, highlighted the ties between Kurds in the two countries: they speak the same Sorani dialect, and many have relatives on both sides of the border.

Massud Barzani, leader of Iraq’s Kurdistan Democratic Party and former president of the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region, was born in 1946 in Iran.

He is the son of iconic Kurdish nationalist leader Mulla Mustafa Barzani, a head of the only breakaway state in Kurdish history founded in the Iranian town of Mahabad until it was crushed by Iranian troops in 1946 after a year.

Today, Iran’s Kurdish minority—about 10 million people out of a population of 83 million—complain of marginalisation. “In Iran, the Kurds don’t have many basic cultural and political rights,” said Shivan Fazil, researcher at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

“The right of education in their mother tongue continues to be outlawed,” he said. Their plight is bleaker than that of Kurds elsewhere in the region, Fazil said, citing Kurds in parliament in Turkey since 2015, a de facto autonomy in northeast Syria and the regional Kurdish government in northern Iraq. —AFP

French author Annie Ernaux...

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The chairman of the Nobel Committee, Anders Olsson, told AFP the Academy was taken with her “frankness”. “She is direct and brief and that is something that you never forget. That is very specific to her, it’s her special voice,” he said. He told Swedish news agency TT that Ernaux had been under consideration “for many years”. She debuted with the novel “Cleaned Out” in 1974, a cool-eyed but harrowing account of an abortion she went through while a student and which she had kept secret from her family.

But it was her fourth book, “A Man’s Place” from 1983 - a dispassionate portrait of her father and the social milieu that formed him - that started her literary breakthrough. She went on to

write a portrait of her mother in 1987, “A Woman’s Story”, which with “severe brevity” was a “wonderful tribute to a strong woman”, the Academy noted.

Outside France, recognition has come more recently, notably after the English translation of her key 2008 work, “The Years”, which was nominated for the prestigious Man Booker International Prize in 2019. In it, Ernaux used family photographs as well as scraps of popular culture to recall her life and explore the impact of bigger historical events.

The film “The Happening”, based on another 2000 account of her abortion, won the Golden Lion at last year’s Venice Film Festival. The Nobel Prize comes with a medal and a prize sum of 10 million Swedish kronor (about \$911,400). Ernaux will receive the award from King Carl XVI Gustaf at a ceremony in Stockholm on Dec 10, the anniversary of the 1896 death of scientist Alfred Nobel who created the prizes in his last will and testament. — AFP

Nobel Prize for Literature 2022

“For the courage and clinical acuity with which she uncovers the roots, estrangements and collective restraints of personal memory”

Annie Ernaux

French | Age: 82 | Born in Lillebonne, Normandy (FRA) | Literature professor in the Paris suburb of Cergy-Pontoise

• Published over 20 books, many of which have been school texts in France for decades

• Pioneer of France’s “autofiction” genre, which gives narrative form to real-life experience



• Has become a trailblazer for a whole generation of French writers from tough and immigrant backgrounds

• Her uncompromising work, written in plain language, offers one of the most insightful windows into the social life of modern France

• Her writing “consistently and from different angles, examines a life marked by strong disparities regarding gender, language and class”: Nobel Academy

*Adapted into a movie and nominated for a BAFTA award this year

**Nominated for the Booker International Prize in 2019

Source: nobelprize.org/AFP Photo

NOTABLE WORKS

Cleaned Out (French title: Les armoires vides; published: 1974)

A Man’s Place (La place, 1984)

A Woman’s Story (Une femme, 1988)

Shame (La honte, 1997)

Happening* (Levenement, 2000)

The Possession (L’occupation, 2002)

The Years** (Les anneés, 2008)

A Girl’s Story (Memoire de fille, 2016)