

# 'U.S. detention centres are overcrowded'

Report by government agency says the situation at border facilities in Texas is 'a ticking time bomb'

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN  
WASHINGTON

An internal U.S. Government watchdog report has warned the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) of "serious overcrowding and prolonged detention" in border facilities in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas and has said the situation requires "immediate attention".

The report, from the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) of DHS, addressed to DHS Acting Secretary Kevin McAleenan, was released on Tuesday and came a day after a group of Democratic lawmakers strongly criticised the conditions of Texas detention facilities.

The report, based on five site visits, says it had issued a management alert on overcrowding in May 2019 and this is the final management alert. It has also published photographs of overcrowded spaces, some with standing room only. The inspectors say 8,000 individuals were being held at the time of the visit and that 3,400 or almost half were held for more



Confined to cages: A portion of the report reveals images of people penned into overcrowded Border Patrol facilities. ■ AP

than 72 hours, against Customs and Border Protection (CBP) guidelines.

The report also says that roughly 30% of the unaccompanied children in the facilities visited had been detained for longer than 72 hours, and in three of the five facilities children had no access to showers.

Two facilities had not provided access to hot meals for children, until the week of the OIG visit.

The report says that while Border Patrol tried to hold

children in as minimally restrictive circumstances as possible (such as by leaving room doors open), children who were in need of medical isolation were sometimes being held in cells.

## Asking for help

One panel of photographs shows 51 adult females in a room with a maximum capacity for 40 male juveniles and another room with 71 adult males in a room with maximum capacity for 41 adult females. "...at one facility,

some single adults were held in standing room only conditions for a week and at another, some single adults were held for more than a month in overcrowded cells," the report says.

The photos of these spaces shows detainees with their faces pressed against the glass screen of the room. One detainee can be seen holding a placard that says "HELP" and "40 DAY" and what appears to be "HERE" written on it. Others are seen making signs for help.

One of the facility managers called the situation a "ticking time-bomb", according to the report. Significantly, the report cautions of the dangers of overcrowding but mentions dangers to DHS agents first. "We are concerned that overcrowding and prolonged detention represent an immediate risk to the health and safety of DHS agents and officers, and to those detained..." it says, listing security risks such as detainees refusing to re-enter their cells after cleaning. "Border Patrol brought in

its special operations team to demonstrate it was prepared to use force if necessary," the report says.

The CBP plans to add a tent that will house single adults as part of its response to the situation, having already added two tents in the Rio Grande Valley, each capable of holding 500 people, the report says. Longer term housing is the responsibility of another DHS agency, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

"This report is even more troubling after the discovery of the vile, crude comments made on social media by some of those in CBP responsible for caring for migrant families and children," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in a statement, referring to a ProPublica report from earlier this week on a Facebook group of past and current border agents that had made light on migrant deaths and shared racist and sexist memes about female members of Congress who made border facility site visits in Texas on Monday.

# Baloch Liberation Army, a rebel force with many faces

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE  
NEW DELHI

The U.S. on Tuesday designated the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) as a terror organisation. "The BLA is an armed separatist group that targets security forces and civilians, mainly in ethnic Baloch areas of Pakistan," said the U.S. State Department in a statement.

The BLA, the armed wing of the Baloch movement, has carried out several violent attacks in Pakistan. It has about 6,000 cadre spread across the Balochistan Province and in the bordering areas of Afghanistan.

## Who are their leaders?

The BLA, which has been banned by Pakistan since 2006, has maintained a fluid leadership pattern.

In 2018, Aslam Baloch, the young radical leader of the BLA, was killed in a suicide bombing in Kandahar along with some of his followers. Unconfirmed reports suggest that Aslam had travelled to India in the past and met with people sympathetic to the Baloch cause.

The organisation lost a major supporter with the October 18 assassination of Kandahar police chief General Razik by the Taliban. Since the assassination of Aslam, the BLA has maintained silence about its leadership. It is known that regional commanders are playing a crucial role in steering the organisation at present.

Apart from the BLA, the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF), founded by Jumma Khan in 1964, is the other recognised armed militant organisation fighting for the cause of Baloch freedom. The BLF used to be popular once, but it is believed that most of the BLF fighters have merged with the BLA.

Almost all the militant Ba-



Pakistani security personnel in Quetta, Balochistan. ■ AFP

have suffered in the hands of the Pakistan military but do not espouse a direct military confrontation with the Pakistani state.

## India's approach

It is established that BLA commanders, in the past, had sought medical treatment in India's hospitals, often under disguise or with fake identity.

In one such case, a militant commander in charge of Khuzdar city was based in Delhi for at least six months in 2017 when he underwent extensive treatment for kidney-related ailments. Pakistan has blamed India for supporting the Baloch rebels.

It is known that the Baloch sardars like the late Akbar Bugti and Ghaus Bukhsh Bizenjo maintained warm personal ties with various Indian political figures. However, visits by militants are often under assumed identities unlike those by prominent well known leaders.

Another leader, who visited India last year, was Mama Qadeer. He has become a popular face of civil society movement after he launched a long march seeking the truth about his missing son, a Baloch activist.

## U.S. ban

Pakistan is expected to make it difficult for commanders and module chiefs of the BLA to travel in the region. The fighters are also likely to find fund-raising more difficult.

In a communication to *The Hindu*, Baloch rebels, however, have indicated that they are planning to intensify the struggle against Pakistan as they remain "the most popular" militant organisation in Balochistan despite Pakistan military's crackdown.

# Pakistan cracks down on Hafiz Saeed

REUTERS  
VIJAYTA SINGH  
LAHORE/NEW DELHI

Pakistani authorities announced a crackdown on Wednesday against Hafiz Saeed, leader of the group blamed for the deadly attacks on Mumbai in 2008, amid growing international pressure to act against militant groups.

Pakistan's counter-terrorism department said it had launched 23 cases against Saeed and 12 aides for using five trusts to collect funds and donations for the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), blamed by

India and the U.S. for the attacks in Mumbai that killed 166 people.

Two banned LeT-linked charities, the Jamaat-ud-Dawa and the Falah-i-Insaniyat Foundation, were also targeted, the department said in a statement.

## 'Assets will be frozen'

"All the assets of these organisations and individuals will be frozen and taken over by the state," said a counter-terrorism senior official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The counter-terrorism de-

partment said the action was in accordance with U.N. sanctions against the individuals and entities.

The move follows pressure from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which last year placed Pakistan on its "grey list" of countries with inadequate controls over money laundering and terrorism financing.

A diplomatic source in Delhi said the crackdown was a direct result of the FATF plenary's ultimatum to Pakistan to implement all the 27 points of action by October. The plenary met in Or-

lando, U.S., last month.

The source added Pakistan was pulled up on four counts, which included "no investigation done by Pakistan against terror funding done by UN designated terrorists". Other areas pertained to Pakistan include not freezing weapon stores, ammunition dumps of the terror outfits, lack of implementation of legal provisions for targeted financial sanctions against all UN designated entities and not stopping the sustenance allowance to terrorists given by the Pakistani government.

# Will exceed enrichment limit, says Iran

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
TEHRAN

Iran on Wednesday announced that it will exceed the enrichment limit it agreed for uranium under the 2015 nuclear deal, in response to other signatories' failure to provide sanctions relief. "On July 7, our enrichment level will no longer be 3.67%. We will increase (the enrichment level) beyond 3.67% to as much as we want," President Hassan Rouhani said.

## IN BRIEF



### After SC ruling, Trump abandons census change

WASHINGTON  
Following a Supreme Court ruling, President Donald Trump's government on Tuesday gave up a controversial attempt to put a question about citizenship on next year's census, handing a victory to those who argued the item would lead to discrimination against minority residents. ■ AFP

### 44 killed as air strike hits Libya migrant centre

TRIPOLI  
An air strike hit a detention centre for mainly African migrants in a suburb of the Libyan capital Tripoli late on Tuesday, killing at least 44 people and wounding more than 130. UN Libya envoy Ghassan Salame said the strike "clearly amounts to the level of a war crime". ■ AFP

# 9 get death, 25 life term for attack on Hasina

They are Opposition BNP activists

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
DHAKA

A court in Bangladesh on Wednesday sentenced to death nine Opposition activists over an attack on a train carrying current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina 25 years ago, a prosecutor said.

A further 25 activists from the main Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) were jailed for life and 13 other members jailed for 10 years by the court in Pabna, prosecutor Akhtaruzzaman Mukta said.

"Thirty-four of the convicts were present when the judge delivered the verdict. Others have been fugitive for years," Mr. Mukta said.

The BNP, whose leader Khaleda Zia was jailed last year for corruption in a case that her supporters say is politically motivated, said the new verdicts were



Sheikh Hasina

aimed at crippling the party. "It is a fabricated case and the verdict is a farce," BNP spokesman Rizvi Ahmed said, adding the judgement was "stage-managed" by the government.

The prosecutor said BNP activists shot at a train carrying the then Opposition leader Ms. Hasina and attacked it with molotov cocktails in September 1994 when it reached the Iswardi rail station, where Ms. Hasina was scheduled to address a rally.

# Hong Kong police arrest protesters

REUTERS  
HONG KONG

The Hong Kong police said on Wednesday it had arrested 12 people in connection with incidents on July 1, although it was unclear if they were among protesters who smashed their way into the city's legislature and ransacked the building.

The police said it also arrested six people linked to incidents the day before, and eight others suspected of being involved in the illegal disclosure online of police officers' private information.

Eleven of the 12 people arrested were males, and all were between the ages of 14 and 36, it said. Charges included "possession of offensive weapons, unlawful assembly, assaulting a police officer, (and) obstructing a police officer".

# IMF approves \$6 billion loan for Pakistan

\$1 billion to be released immediately

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
WASHINGTON

The International Monetary Fund Executive Board on Wednesday approved a \$6 billion, three-year loan for Pakistan to try to right the nation's economy.

The fund released \$1 billion to Pakistan immediately and said in a statement the programme aims to "support the authorities' economic reform programme" and to help "generate sustainable and balanced growth." The IMF will review Pakistan's performance quarterly over 39 months, phasing release of the additional aid over time.

The Imran Khan government agreed on the loan programme last month and announced plans to slash civil expenditures and freeze



Imran Khan

military spending while promising to substantially raise revenues to stem a yawning fiscal deficit, and pledging to collect 5.5 trillion rupees (\$36 billion) in taxes.

"Pakistan is facing a challenging economic environment, with lackluster growth, elevated inflation, high indebtedness and a weak external position," the result of a "legacy" of uneven policies, IMF mission chief Ernesto Ramirez Rigo said in a statement in June.

# Cannot reveal details of submersible fire: Russia

It belongs to category of state secrets'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
MOSCOW

The Kremlin on Wednesday said details of a fire that killed 14 crew on a deep-water submersible will not be made public because they include classified information.

The seamen died on Monday, but the disaster was only made public on Tuesday. Officials have given little information about the vessel or the circumstances of the accident.

Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said on Wednesday there were survivors of the accident, without clarifying how many. "This information cannot be made public completely," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said of the disaster. "It belongs to the category

of state secrets." "It is completely normal when this kind of information is not made public," Mr. Peskov said, adding that this was "within the law of the Russian Federation".

The Defence Ministry said the 14 crew were killed by inhaling poisonous fumes after a fire broke out on a "scientific research deep-sea submersible" studying the sea floor.

However the *Novaya Gazeta* newspaper cited sources as saying that the accident took place on an AS-12 nuclear mini-submarine, which is capable of going to extreme depths.

The presence of many senior ranking officers on board could suggest the submarine was not on an ordinary assignment.

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