US left Bagram without telling new commander

The United States left Afghanistan's Bagram Airfield after nearly 20 years by shutting off the electricity and slipping away in the night without notifying the base's new Afghan commander, who discovered the Americans' departure more than two hours after they left, Afghan military officials said.

The US announced on Friday it had completely vacated its biggest airfield in the country in advance of a final withdrawal by the end of August of all but a few hundred US troops from Afghanistan.

"We [heard] some rumor that the Americans had left Bagram … and finally by 7:00 in the morning, we understood that it was confirmed that they had already left Bagram," General Mir Asadullah Kohistani, Bagram's new commander, told The Associated Press.

Afghanistan's army showed off the sprawling airbase on Monday, allowing journalists to visit the heavily fortified compound.

"They (Americans) are completely out now and everything is under our control, including watchtowers, air traffic and the hospital," a senior Afghan government official told the Reuters news agency.

Bagram had long been a symbol of Western forces deployed to shore up the Afghan government now facing a Taliban offensive as most US and NATO forces withdraw.

The Taliban captured districts in Badakhshan and Kandahar provinces over the weekend, sending Afghan government forces fleeing across the border with Tajikistan. Taliban fighters last week launched an attack on the central Afghan city of Ghazni, on the highway linking the capital Kabul with the southern province of Kandahar.

On Monday at Bagram, dozens of vehicles left behind by the US stood on the premises while others zipped around with Afghan officials and personnel. Radars oscillated as soldiers stood on guard, and hundreds of Afghan security personnel moved into barracks that once housed US soldiers.

Afghan soldiers who wandered throughout the base that had once seen as many as 100,000 US troops were deeply critical of how the US left Bagram. "In one night they lost all the goodwill of 20 years by leaving the way they did, in the night, without telling the Afghan soldiers who were outside patrolling the area," said Afghan soldier Naematullah, who asked that only his one name be used.

Before the Afghan army could take control of the airfield, about an hour's drive from the Afghan capital Kabul, a small group of looters ransacked barrack after barrack and rummaged through giant storage tents before being evicted, Afghan military officials said.

"At first, we thought maybe they were Taliban," Abdul Raouf, a soldier of 10 years, told the AP. He said the US called from the Kabul airport and said "we are here at the airport in Kabul."

US Colonel Sonny Leggett, the official spokesman for the US military in Afghanistan, did not address the specific complaints of many Afghan soldiers, instead referring to a US statement issued last week.

The statement said the handover had been in the process soon after President Joe Biden's mid-April announcement that the US would withdraw its forces from Afghanistan. Leggett said in the statement that they had coordinated their departures with Afghanistan's leaders.

The US announced on July 2 it had completely vacated its biggest airfield in the country in advance of a final withdrawal the Pentagon said will be completed by the end of August.

Kohistani, the new commander of the airfield, insisted the Afghan National Security and Defense Force could hold on to the heavily fortified base despite a string of Taliban wins on the battlefield. The airfield also includes a prison with about 5,000 prisoners, many of them allegedly members of the Taliban.

Meanwhile, neighborhoods and markets in the shadow of the base were bracing for what comes next.

"It is not a problem for us if there are foreign forces [here] or they leave, but the fact that the Taliban are taking over districts at any moment affects our work," Wasim Shirzad, a shopkeeper, told Reuters.

Another shopkeeper, Nematullah Ferdaws, agreed: "Most shopkeepers do not invest … because they are hesitant about the country's future."

Monitoring Desk

Unprecedented U.S. dollar jump and people concerns

KABUL: Recently, the price of Afghani has unprecedentedly fallen to U.S. dollar, as foreign forces have to wrap up conflict and completely withdraw from Afghanistan.

In the country's exchange markets, one U.S. dollar is now exchanged with 81.60 afghani and over the past three days, one U.S. dollar was exchanged with 82.10 afghani, showing that the devaluation of the Afghani in recent years was unprecedented rising grave concerns among the people.

The rise of the dollar price has affected all segments of the society, especially ordinary people, with the lowest daily income and government employees with insufficient payment.

Scores of families, living below the poverty line due to lack of work and poor security, are now facing many grave challenges.

Nayem a taxi driver in Kabul said he can hardly find 200 Afghanis from morning to evening and complained about rising petroleum and foodstuffs' prices.

"In the last few days, the price of a liter of petrol has risen from 46 to 52 Afghanis (8.9 U.S. dollar) and it is difficult to earn money, on one hand and on the other, shopkeepers are very cruel and as soon as they hear a report, they double the rates," said Nayem the breadwinner of an eight family members, including five schoolchildren.

Although poverty has made life unbearable for him, as the only breadwinner of his family, he has to work as a taxi driver from dawn to dusk, to support his family.

The Central Bank, however, announced the government was monitoring all currency fluctuations and the Bank's Spokesman Esmatullah Kuhsar blamed the rising dollar price against afghani for the political situation and internal insecurity. "There is no economic reason for the rising dollar against Afghani," he said.

According to Kuhsar, Da Afghanistan Bank, as the Central Bank of Afghanistan, manages the stability of the local currency price in accordance to the established mechanism and offers 30 to 50 million U.S. dollars three times a week.

He went on as saying the new plan has been put in place for all transactions in Afghan currency and that these plans will be implemented in the near future.

Meanwhile, Haji Dadgol, deputy head of Money-Exchangers Union at Saray-e-Shahzada – the main Kabul Money Exchange Market blamed recent insecurity and poor market management for the rising dollar price against Afghani.

"Due to the ongoing extreme situation in the country, the people exchange all their money into dollars and that the amount of dollars offered for sale by the Central Bank is not enough," Dadgol added, warning that if the security situation continues worsening and foreign exchange market is not well managed, the price of Afghani will go lower than it is now.

Although the Central Bank is sure about controlling currency fluctuations in the country's market, the rising dollar price has laid negative impact on the lives of many people.

A shopkeeper in the Pul-e-Surkh, west of Kabul unanimously told The Kabul Times that the rise of U.S. dollar price has pushed up the prices of other imported raw materials, because traders count their goods in dollars, and all shopkeepers have to buy food from them at the dollar rate, except for soft drinks.

Not only raw materials being bought and sold in dollars, but most transactions, such as bid prices and rent of houses, apartments, office buildings for private companies, are set in dollars, he explained.

Sayed Naqibullh Haidari

Daughters in Afghan jail, two women take separate routes

By: Shaju Philip

Five years after their daughters left India to join the Islamic State (IS), and eventually got jailed in Afghanistan, two mothers in Kerala have chosen two separate paths for their return home.

On Monday, Bindu Sampath moved a petition in the Kerala High Court seeking directions to the Union Home and External Affairs ministries to facilitate the repatriation of her daughter Nimisha alias Fathima Isa and her four-year-old granddaughter.

On the same day, Mini, the mother of Merin alias Mirriam, told The Indian Express that her daughter should be brought back only if she has renounced the Islamic State and repented for her actions.

"I want to directly hear my daughter's present stand — whether she has any repentance and abandoned the IS. For us, the concern of the country is the bigger issue. What they have done is wrong… joining the IS was a crime. If they stick to the IS, we are not keen on getting my daughter back. Bring them only if they can come back as human beings who can love others," said Mini, who is based in Kochi.

Nimisha, a Hindu, and Merin, a Christian, accepted Islam and married two Christian brothers who had converted earlier to the same religion. They were among a 21-member group of men and women who left the country in May-June 2016 to join the IS.

According to security agencies, the group moved to the Islamic State-controlled Nangarhar region in Afghanistan. A few men from that group, including the husbands of Nimisha and Merin, are believed to have been killed in US strikes and their wives detained by Afghan authorities.

In December 2019, interviews of four women from Kerala — the other two are Sonia Sebastian alias Ayisha and Rafaella — were published under the title 'Khorasan Files: The Journey of Indian Islamic State Widows' by the website StratNewsGlobal.

Nimisha, 30, was a final-year BDS student at Century Dental College in Kasaragod when she got married to Bexin alias Isa. Merin, 26, had completed her BA in Communicative English in Kochi when she married Bestin alias Yahiya.

In her petition, Bindu pointed to the Interpol red corner notice issued against her daughter. Her plea said that "subject to a bilateral treaty for extradition, any person named in an Interpol Red Corner Notice must be provisionally arrested or otherwise detained after surrender till extradited to the Requesting Country".

"A provisional arrest in its natural sense connotes an arrest or detention, which is merely temporary in nature. There is an existing bilateral extradition treaty entered into in 2016 and in force since 2019 after ratification by both countries. Hence, in line with the Interpol Red Corner Notice, the Union Government is bound to take the necessary steps to effect extradition of the concerned accused persons," the plea stated. Bindu, who hails from Thiruvananthapuram, also said that the return of Nimisha and her daughter shall not pose a threat to national security and that the minor can be rehabilitated and reintegrated into society. "On the other hand, the due process of law can be followed in respect to Nimisha by the security agencies and courts of law, subject to conformity with the universal human rights, under the watchful eyes of the human rights organizations," the plea said. But Merin's mother Mini is blunt: the family has no plan to approach the court for her daughter. "I want to directly hear from my daughter that she has abandoned the terrorist organisation. Only then do I want to see her. I want to hear this from my daughter, not through anyone else. Let the Union Government give me an opportunity to speak to her," she said.

Mini said that if her daughter is still with the IS, she would be a danger to society. "One person's deeds should not cause pain to an entire community," she said.

Security forces push back Taliban attack in Samangan

KABUL: Afghan forces pushed back an attack by the Taliban on Hazrat Sultan district in the central province of Samangan on Monday evening, the provincial police said, adding that the clashes continued for many hours and ended shortly after midnight.

A spokesman for Samangan police, Munir Rahimi, said eight Taliban fighters were killed in the clashes.

Rejecting Taliban claim of capturing the district, he said the Taliban faced resistance by the security forces shortly after they started their attack on the district – which is located along the key northern highway that connects Kabul with Balkh province.

The Kabul Times