Deaths highlight children’s plight in migrant surge to US

Migrants fall prey to misleading travel information

Turkey, Iraq to boost anti-terrorism cooperation

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ANKARA: Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday said Ankara and Baghdad would deepen cooperation against terrorism after tensions last month over Turkish air strikes against Kurdish militants in Iraq. “We know the importance of working together to be successful in our fight against terror; God willing, in the future we will deepen our cooperation in this area,” Erdogan told a press conference in Ankara with his Iraqi counterpart Barham Saleh.

Erdogan said there were threats to both countries from “terrorist organizations” such as the Islamic State group, Kurdish militants and the group blamed for a failed coup in 2016. “Iraq wants real cooperation and strategic partnership with Turkey,” Saleh said, which would “serve not just the two countries but the whole region”. The talks come after the Turkish ambassador to Baghdad was summoned last month to protest against “repeated” Turkish air strikes on Iraqi territory.

Baghdad at the time denounced the strikes as a “violation of its sovereignty” after Ankara hit Kurdish militant positions in the northern Sinjar and Mount Karajak regions. Turkish warplanes have often bombed hideouts of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which has waged an insurgency against Turkey since 1984 and is blacklisted as a terrorist group by Ankara and its Western allies.

The Turkish defence ministry earlier said warplanes had struck PKK targets in the Zap, Metina, Avasin-Bayan and Gara regions on Wednesday. Erdogan has threatened to expand Turkey’s fight against the PKK to Iraq and launch an operation against the group in Sinjar.—AFP

Rights activist, UK detainee plan Tehran jail hunger strike


“We are urging for an immediate action to be taken,” they said in a joint letter. Initially arrested in 2015, Mohammadi was sentenced to 10 years in prison for “forming and managing an illegal group”, among other charges. Zaghari-Ratcliffe was arrested in 2016 and is serving a five-year jail sentence for alleged sedition.

“Nazanin is currently having medical treatment blocked for lumps in her breasts, for neurological care over her neck pains and numbness in her arms and legs, and seeing an outside psychiatrist has been banned,” her husband Richard Ratcliffe told AFP. “These are all being personally blocked by the head of Evin clinic, Mr Khani, despite having been approved by the prison doctor.” Mohammadi was the spokeswoman for the now-outlawed Defenders of Human Rights Centre, which was co-founded by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi.

“We are severely disturbed and concerned by this prevention of specialist care approved by the prison doctor and strongly protest against it,” Mohammadi and Zaghari-Ratcliffe said, according to the joint letter, originally published on Ebadi’s website. “In protest to this illegal, inhuman and unlawful behaviour, and to express our concerns for our health and survival at this denial of specialist treatment, despite taking daily medicines, we will go on hunger strike from January 14 to 16. “We are urging for an immediate action to be taken.” “We announce that in the event of the authorities failure to address these concerns and them further endangering our health, we will take further actions. “The authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran are to be held responsible for the potential consequences.”—AFP

Deaths highlight children’s plight in migrant surge to US

NENTON, Guatemala: The death of two Guatemalan children in the United States within weeks of each other has highlighted why there are so many children among Central American migrants heading north: smugglers tell them families have a better chance of being allowed in by US border guards, witnesses told AFP. Agustin Gomez was one such migrant who decided to risk the trip.

Gomez’s relatives in his western, mainly indigenous municipality of Nenton near the Mexican border said he had heard rumors that bringing along his eight-year-old son Felipe might ease his way. Felipe died in a New Mexico hospital on Christmas Day, only a week after they were both detained by Texas border guards after crossing the border illegally. US authorities investigating the case say Felipe died after presenting with flu symptoms.

Just two weeks earlier, Guatemala had been rocked by the death of seven-year-old indigenous girl Jakelin Caal, admitted to hospital suffering from dehydration. She made the journey alongside her 29-year-old father Nery from the Mayan town of Raxruha in northern Guatemala. Though the surge of Guatemalan migrants to the US-Mexico border is caused largely by the country’s dire poverty and violence, Guatemalan migration activist Roxana Palma, told AFP there are messages circulating on social media that carrying children gives a greater “guarantee” of establishing themselves in the United States.

Keeping kids from gangs’ clutches

There seems little doubt that the main spur for the migrants is abject poverty at home. But taking children with them is also a way for their parents to prevent them being recruited by gangs, migration experts told AFP.

Smugglers-nicknamed “Coyotes”—blatantly lie about immigration procedures in the United States and do little for migrants beyond holding out the prospect of a better life, said Palma.

“Unfortunately, they are the ones who misinform people about how to get to the United States ‘safely’,” she said. According to another expert, “there was special treatment for parents who came with children” to the United States under the previous US administration of President Barack Obama, but that ended with Donald Trump’s arrival at the White House. “The smugglers continue to say that you can enter with children; that’s no longer valid,” said the expert, who requested anonymity in order to speak freely about the subject.

Social media messages

“We are also seeing how networks of coyotes recruit, how they make people pay and then deceive them,” said Danilo Rivera, coordinator of the Central American Institute of Development and Social Studies (INCEDES). Rivera said they were aware of cases in the indigenous western Guatemala where networks use local radio to make announcements of false offers of visas and travel to the United States “immediately and safely.”

Guatemalan authorities “aren’t doing a lot” to thwart this false and misleading travel information, nor does it do enough to root out the causes of emigration, said Rivera. According to studies by the International Migration Organization (OIM), the majority of Guatemalan migrants sent back by Mexico and the United States come from western Guatemala, the country’s poorest region. Pascual Domingo’s father and two brothers, who previously set out from his village, were detained by Texas border guards after crossing the border illegally. US authorities investigating the case say Felipe died after presenting with flu symptoms.

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