

Profiting from human misery

Traffickers 'netted up to £4b last yr': Europol chief

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Human smugglers made a record profit last year of between \$3bn and \$6bn (£2bn-£4bn) by exploiting the misery of refugees -- which means governments must up their game or risk further growth of this ruthless industry, the head of Europol has told The Independent yesterday.

The business of human smuggling is now in the "Champions League" of criminal enterprises in Europe, Rob Wainwright said, close to rivaling the trade in illicit drugs. New research by the EU's law enforcement body based on debriefings with 1,500 asylum-seekers, refugees and economic migrants showed that 90 per cent had paid a criminal gang to reach Europe.

With the UNHCR estimating that more than a million people have fled war, poverty and persecution in the past year risking their lives on the clandestine journey to Europe, that "means a lot of people making a lot of money", Wainwright said.

"We also know that, on average, each migrant is paying between \$3,000 and \$6,000 to a criminal facilitator for their journey. So you do the simple math, and you're up to a turnover in 2015 of



between \$3bn- \$6bn. They are big figures. It's running into billions of dollars made by criminal networks in one year alone in Europe."

"Last year has been seismic in the development of the people-smuggling trade in Europe in particular, and we are now talking about its being a multibillion-dollar industry in the way it hasn't before, and the Champion's League of criminal sectors in Europe alongside drugs."

The criminal networks stretch from sub-Saharan Africa to Scandinavia, with tens of thousands of people involved in the trade. Wainwright said that Europol identified 10,700 suspects last year alone, hinting at the scale of the illicit enterprise. The facilitators range from petty criminals, making fake passports, to taxi drivers taking migrants across countries and over borders, to established organised crime syndicates.



Iranian President Hassan Rouhani (C) is greeted during a session at the Iranian parliament to present the draft budget for the next Iranian fiscal year in Tehran yesterday. Iran has "opened a new chapter" in its ties with the world, Rouhani said, hours after sanctions were lifted under its historic nuclear deal with global powers.

PHOTO: REUTERS

All happy except Israel

Says Rouhani, claims deal is a win for all negotiating parties

AP, Tehran

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said yesterday that the official implementation of the landmark deal reached between Tehran and six world powers has satisfied all parties except radical extremists.

Speaking before the parliament in comments broadcast live on state television, Rouhani said, "In (implementing) the **IRAN NUKE SANCTIONS END** deal, all are happy except Zionists, warmongers, sowers of discord among Islamic nations and extremists in the US. The rest are happy."

Rouhani said the deal has "opened new windows for engagement with the world."

A strong supporter of the agreement, Rouhani sent out a celebratory tweet calling it a "glorious victory" late Saturday night while the speeches in Vienna were still taking place.

Rouhani also said the deal was a win for all negotiating parties and all factions inside

Iran. "Nobody has been defeated in the deal neither inside the country nor the countries that were negotiating with us," he said, referring to the United States, Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany.

Rouhani said Iran should use the expected influx of money and investments to spark the "economic mutation" of the country, creating jobs and enhancing quality-of-life for Iranian citizens. Iran has been suffering double-digit inflation and unemployment rates for years.

He also said Iran now needs political tranquility to best benefit from the new economic reality. "All should prevent any domestic and foreign trivialities that thwart us," he said. "Any irrelevant and diverting dispute is against national expedience."

Meanwhile, four Iranian-American citizens freed by Iran in a prisoner swap with the United States have left Tehran and are flying to Bern in Switzerland, Iranian state television reported yesterday.

3 US prisoners freed by Iran reach Geneva

CNN.COM

A plane carrying three of the four Americans freed by Iran as part of a prisoner swap has landed in Switzerland, one of the men's family members and a US State Department official said in tweets yesterday.

A Swiss plane believed to be carrying Washington Post journalist Jason Rezaian, Marine veteran Amir Hekmati and Christian pastor Saeed Abedini had landed, but government officials did not officially confirm who was aboard. The group will board another plane headed to a US base in Germany.

Abedini's wife sent the tweet saying the three had landed in Switzerland, and a US State Department special presidential envoy tweeted that he was looking forward to meeting them in Switzerland.

"Overwhelmed to greet Jason #Rezaian, his wife, Yegi, mother, Mary + Saeed #Abedini + Amir #Hekmati to #Geneva after safely departing #Iran," the State Department's Brett McGurk tweeted.

White House officials earlier yesterday said recently detained student Matthew Trevithick, who was released -- but not as part of the prisoner swap -- had left Iran. There were no additional details.

A fifth prisoner, identified by US officials as Nosratollah Khosravi-Roodsari, decided not to leave Iran, senior White House officials said.

Tourist areas in Kuala Lumpur being targeted

Warns Malaysia minister after the arrest of 'IS bomber'

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

Tourist areas of Malaysia's main city Kuala Lumpur are being targeted, a senior minister said yesterday, following the arrest of a bombing suspect and a deadly attack in neighbouring Indonesia last week.

Federal Territories Minister Adnan Mansor said the upscale district of Bangsar, top tourist destination Bukit Bintang, as well as some shopping malls were among those at risk, although police cast doubt on the warning.

"We are aware of the threats so we are on standby for any possible event," Adnan said. "We will look into seeking the help of the defence department in order to secure these locations if the need arises."

The minister did not supply details of any specific threats, and Kuala Lumpur police chief Tajudin Isa assured tourists and the general public the areas he mentioned were safe.

"The security at all public places have been intensified and we are doing all we can to monitor suspicious activities," he told reporters.

Tajudin said he was not sure where Adnan received his information.

Malaysian police chief Khalid Abu Bakar on Saturday announced the arrest of a 28-year-old insurance agent suspected of plotting a "lone wolf" attack on an entertainment outlet and a government building.

The suspect, who was arrested on Friday in Kuala Lumpur, allegedly received orders from Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) leaders in Syria to launch the attacks, Khalid said, without providing any details.

Leave independence 'hallucination'

China tells Taiwan after DPP wins a convincing victory

Reuters, Beijing

Taiwan should abandon its "hallucinations" about pushing for independence, as any moves towards it would be a "poison", Chinese state-run media said after a landslide victory for the island's independence-leaning opposition.

Tsai Ing-wen and her Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) won a convincing victory in both presidential and parliamentary elections on Saturday, in what could usher in a new round of instability with China, which claims self-ruled Taiwan as its own.

Tsai pledged to maintain peace with its giant neighbour China, while China's Taiwan Affairs Office warned it would oppose any move towards independence and that Beijing was determined to defend the country's sovereignty.

Reacting to Tsai's victory, China's government-controlled media used noticeably less shrill language than that levelled at Chen Shui-bian, the DPP's last president, and noted her pledges for peace and to maintain the "status quo" with China.

But the official Xinhua news agency also warned any moves towards independence were like a "poison" that would cause Taiwan to perish.

"If there is no peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan's new authority will find the sufferings of the people it wishes to resolve on the economy, livelihood and its youth will be as useless as looking for fish in a tree," it said.



Refugees from Syria present flowers to passers-by as they demonstrate against violence near the Cologne main train station in Cologne, western Germany on Saturday, where hundreds of women were groped and robbed in a throng of mostly Arab and North African men during New Year's festivities.

PHOTO: AFP

Woman throws ink at Kejriwal in Delhi

TNN, New Delhi

A function organised by the Aam Aadmi Party to thank people of Delhi for the success of the odd-even plan turned messy when a woman threw ink at chief minister Arvind Kejriwal who was addressing a large gathering yesterday. AAP has accused the BJP of scripting the entire incident.



Waving some documents, a woman swiftly moved towards the dais at the Chhatrasal Stadium where Kejriwal was standing and threw ink - several drops of which landed on chief minister's face. The woman also threw the documents which she was carrying shouting about a scam. Security personnel immediately surrounded the chief minister, some of them rushed to reign in the woman. "Let her go, leave her. Whenever something good happens in Delhi, this is what happens," Kejriwal said asking the security men to stop.

While being whisked away, the woman spoke to the media and claimed to be a part of Aam Aadmi Sena, a splinter group of the Aam Aadmi Party. She also said that her name is Bhavna and that she works in the Punjab unit of the Aam Aadmi Sena.

"The Delhi government has orchestrated a CNG scam in the name of odd-even plan, I have proof. I sought an appointment from the chief minister but wasn't given time," she said. Bhavna was taken to the Model Town police station in north Delhi for interrogation.

OPINION ON CHARTER Sri Lanka turns to social media for help

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's prime minister yesterday announced officials would use social media to seek public opinion on a proposed new constitution aimed at preventing a return to ethnic war.

Ranil Wickremesinghe said Sri Lanka will use social media to help draft a new statute to devolve more powers to minority Tamils and ensure unity after decades of war.

"Sri Lanka could be the first country to get views expressed on social media (to contribute to) drafting a new constitution," he said. "We want to seek the view and opinions of young people. Participate in this process."

Sites such as Facebook and Twitter played a key role in supporting Wickremesinghe's election in August.

Laser wall alongside Indo-Pak border soon

PTI, New Delhi

More than 40 vulnerable unfenced stretches along the India-Pakistan border will be covered by laser walls soon with the home ministry giving it a top priority to check any infiltration of terrorists in the wake of the Pathankot attack.

All these riverine stretches located in Punjab will be covered by the laser wall technology developed by Border Security Force to completely eliminate the chances of breach of the international border by Pakistan-based terror groups, a home ministry official said.

A laser wall is a mechanism to detect objects passing the line of sight between the laser source and the detector. A laser beam over a river sets off a loud siren in case of a breach.

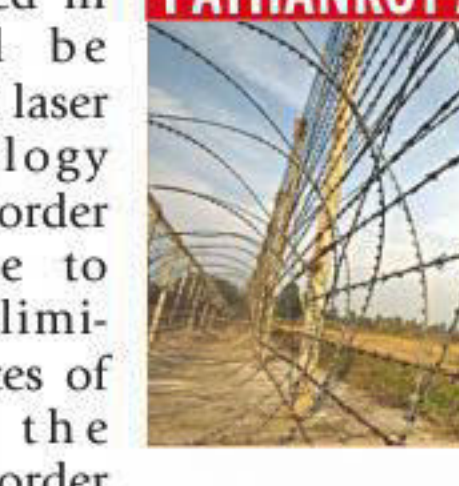
As of now, only 5-6 out of around 40 vulnerable points are covered by

laser walls. This beam over the river sets off a loud siren in the case of a breach.

The suspected infiltration point of Ujj river in Bamiyal used by the six Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorists before storming the Pathankot air base was not covered by a laser wall.

A camera to keep watch over the 130-metre-wide river bed was found to be not recording the footage. BSF has covered this stretch by putting up a laser wall last week before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Pathankot air base

on January 9. The border guarding force had started putting up laser walls on unfenced riverine stretches of international border last year in Jammu sector, which was more prone to terrorist intrusions till three terrorists carried out attack in Gurdaspur in Punjab in July last



PATHANKOT AFTERMATH

Suicide blast kills 14 in Afghan city

Taliban denies responsibility for the attack

AFP, Jalalabad

At least 14 people were killed when a suicide bomber struck the home of a prominent politician in Jalalabad yesterday, officials said, in the second deadly attack in the eastern Afghan city in less than a week.

The Taliban denied responsibility for the bombing, which also left 13 people wounded on the eve of a new round of four-country negotiations aimed at restarting peace talks with the insurgents.

The carnage came during a "jirga", an assembly of tribal leaders, at the home of politician Obaidullah Shinwari, who escaped unscathed.

"Fourteen people were killed and 13 others injured when a suicide bomber detonated his explosives in the house of Shinwari," said Najibullah Kamawal, the health director of Nangarhar province, of which Jalalabad is the capital.

Ambulances rushed to the scene, which was littered with pieces of human flesh, sandals and charred debris.

Shinwari is a well-known member of Nangarhar's provincial council and his family is said to be actively involved in local politics.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani strongly condemned the attack, warning security forces will go after the culprits with "all its strength".

"When terrorists lose the ability to fight face-to-face with our security forces, then they target public places and kill our innocent people," Ghani said in a statement.

"The government will fight those who shed the blood of our innocent people."

The bombing is the latest deadly attack in the city since Wednesday, when Islamic State (IS) jihadists claimed

NEWS IN brief

Youth 'wasting time' online: Suu Kyi

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi, who was forced to spend years of solitude under house arrest, has hit out at young people "wasting time" on computer games and social networking. "Our lifestyles are changing nowadays as technology improves," she wrote in a public letter.

Burkina attack: Death toll rises to 29

AFP, Ouagadougou

At least 29 people, including at least 12 foreigners, were killed in an al-Qaeda attack on a top hotel in Burkina Faso, an unprecedented strike in the capital illustrating the expanding reach of regional jihadists. The country declared three days of national mourning following the attack.

Qatar provides 1,000 homes for Gazans

AFP, Khan Yunis

Qatar on Saturday provided more than 1,000 apartments to residents of the Gaza Strip whose homes were destroyed in the 2014 war between Israel and the Islamist Palestinian movement Hamas. The 50-day conflict killed 2,200 Palestinians.

Pak PM to visit Saudi, Iran 'to ease tension'

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif will lead a high-level delegation to Saudi Arabia and Iran this week to try to ease tension between the Muslim countries, a minister said yesterday. Information minister Pervez Rashid told AFP Sharif would travel to Riyadh today and Tehran tomorrow.