

AFGHAN WAR
UK fury over
Trump's Nato
front-line
remark

AFP, London

Britain said Donald Trump was “wrong to diminish” the role of Nato troops in Afghanistan, as a claim by the US president that they did not fight on the front line sparked outrage.

In an interview with Fox News aired on Thursday, Trump appeared unaware that 457 British soldiers died during the conflict in the South Asian country following the September 11 attacks on the United States.

“They’ll say they sent some troops to Afghanistan,” Trump told the US outlet, referring to Nato allies.

“And they did, they stayed a little back, a little off the front lines,” he added.

Trump also repeated his suggestion that Nato would not come to the aid of the United States if asked to do so.



In fact, following the 9/11 attacks, the UK and a number of other allies joined the US from 2001 in Afghanistan after it invoked Nato’s collective security clause.

As well as British forces, troops from other Nato ally countries including Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Denmark and others also died.

“Their sacrifice and that of other Nato forces was made in the service of collective security and in response to an attack on our ally,” Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s official spokesman said.

“We are incredibly proud of our armed forces and their service and sacrifice will never be forgotten,” he added.

Care Minister Stephen Kinnock earlier said he expected Starmer would bring the issue up with Trump. “I think he will, I’m sure, be raising this issue with the president... He’s incredibly proud of our armed forces, and he will make that clear to the president,” he said.

“It just doesn’t really add up what he said, because the fact of the matter is the only time that Article 5 has been invoked was to go to the aid of the United States after 9/11,” he added.



Supporters of ousted Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro, including health sector workers, demonstrate outside the UN headquarters in Caracas to demand his release on Thursday. Venezuelan lawmakers gave their initial backing to plans to throw open the oil sector to private investors, paving the way for the return of US energy majors -- a key demand of President Donald Trump.

PHOTO: AFP

Russia presses Donbas
claim ahead of UAE talks
Zelensky hopes first Ukraine-Russia-US talks in Abu
Dhabi are ‘step toward ending war’

AGENCIES

Russia said it was not dropping its key demand that Ukraine pull out of its eastern Donbas region, ahead of three-way talks between Ukrainian, Russian and American officials in the UAE later yesterday.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said territory remained the key issue and would be on the agenda for the talks, which look set to be the first direct public negotiations between Moscow and Kyiv on a plan being pushed by US President Donald Trump to end the almost four-year-long war.

“The Donbas issue is key. It will be discussed as will be the modality of how the three sides see it,” he tells journalists via a voice message. Speaking about the talks in Abu Dhabi - which he will be sending a Ukrainian delegation to - he says: “It’s a step - hopefully towards ending the war - but different things can happen.”

The Ukrainian president also says he discussed Donbas with President Trump in Davos on Thursday.

“Russia’s position is well known on the fact that Ukraine, Ukrainian armed forces, have to leave the territory of the Donbas. They must be withdrawn from there,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. “This is a very important condition,” he added.

Kyiv is under mounting US pressure to secure a peace deal in the nearly four-year-old war with



PHOTO: AFP

Ukrainian soldiers fire a BM-21 ‘Grad’ multiple rocket launcher toward Russian positions near Druzhkivka in Ukraine’s Donetsk region.

Moscow, which has demanded Ukraine give up its entire eastern area of Donbas before it stops fighting.

Putin’s demand that Ukraine surrender the 20 percent it still holds of the eastern Donetsk region have proven a key stumbling block.

Zelensky has refused to give up land that Russia has not been able to capture in four years of grinding, attritional warfare.

The Ukrainian leader added that a deal on US security guarantees for Kyiv was ready, and that he was only waiting on Trump for a

specific date and place to sign it.

Ukraine has sought strong security guarantees from allies in the event of a peace deal to prevent Russia, which has shown little interest in ending the war, from invading again.

Asked about using Moscow’s frozen assets to fund reconstruction on Russian territory, Zelensky dismissed as “nonsense” the idea of using the money to rebuild “their parts”.

Russia had previously floated the idea of using frozen assets to pay for the recovery of Russian-occupied territory inside Ukraine.

Japan PM
dissolves House
for February 8
snap polls

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi dissolved parliament yesterday ahead of a snap election on February 8, counting on her cabinet’s high poll numbers to steer her otherwise unpopular ruling party to victory.

The country’s first woman premier announced her intentions on Monday, seeking public backing for measures to shield households from rising living costs and increase spending on defence.

The speaker of parliament yesterday read out a letter, officially dissolving the lower house as lawmakers shouted the traditional rallying cry of “banzai”.

The ruling coalition of Takaichi’s Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Japan Innovation Party (JIP) has only a slim majority in the powerful lower chamber.

But Takaichi is hoping widespread support for her cabinet will help deliver her a stronger mandate even though the LDP itself is battling low approval ratings and a string of scandals. Her government has around 90 percent support among those under 30, according to a poll published at the end of December.

Pak police arrest
prominent
rights activist
Says lawyers’ group

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani police arrested a prominent rights activist and her husband yesterday as they were heading to a court hearing in Islamabad on “cyberterrorism” charges, her family and a lawyers’ association said.

Imaan Mazari, a 32-year-old lawyer and vocal critic of Pakistan’s military, faces a dozen charges but it was not immediately clear if yesterday’s detention was related to any of them.

Mazari and her husband, fellow lawyer Hadi Ali Chattha, were granted bail in a cybercrime case on Tuesday and the couple sought blanket bail to prevent arrest in any other cases so they could appear in subsequent proceedings.

Syed Wajid Ali Shah Gillani, president of the Islamabad High Court Bar Association, alleged in a video statement that police manhandled the couple before arresting them.

Mazari’s mother Shireen Mazari, a former minister of human rights, also said in a post on X that her daughter was arrested, alleging police used violence as she was detained.

Islamabad’s police force has not replied to an AFP request for comment.

Imaan Mazari told AFP on Tuesday that she and her husband feared arrest over undisclosed police cases, a move she said would be a “grave injustice”.

IMMIGRATION RAID
Fury over five-
year-old’s
detention in US
UN rights chief ‘astounded
by the now-routine abuse’
of migrants

AFP, Minneapolis

Democrats and local officials in Minneapolis expressed outrage Thursday at the detention of a five-year-old boy in a massive immigration crackdown, as US Vice President JD Vance defended federal agents’ actions.

Thousands of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents have been deployed to the Democratic-led city, as the administration of President Donald Trump presses its campaign to deport what it says are millions of illegal immigrants across the country.

The UN rights chief voiced astonishment yesterday at the US authorities’ “now-routine abuse” of migrants and refugees, urging Washington to “end practices that are tearing apart families”.

Vance confirmed Thursday that the five-year-old boy, Liam Conejo Ramos, was among those detained, but argued that agents were protecting the boy after his father “ran” from an immigration sweep.

“What are they supposed to do? Are they supposed to let a five-year-old child freeze to death?” he said. Democratic Texas congressman Joaquin Castro rejected that explanation, branding Homeland Security authorities “sick liars.”

MEDITERRANEAN SEA
French navy
boards tanker
‘from Russia’

AFP, Paris

France’s navy, with the help of allies, on Thursday boarded a tanker alleged to be from Russia’s sanction-busting “shadow fleet” in the Mediterranean, President Emmanuel Macron said.

“This morning, the French Navy boarded an oil tanker coming from Russia, subject to international sanctions and suspected of flying a false flag,” he said on X in English, adding the operation had been carried out “with the support of several of our allies”.

Local maritime authorities said the navy seized an oil tanker called “Grinch” between Spain and Morocco, after it started its journey in the Russian Arctic port of Murmansk.

A ship called “Grinch” is under UK sanctions, while another called “Carl” with the same registration number is sanctioned by the United States and European Union.

Ship tracking websites marinetrac and vesselfinder said the vessel had been flying a Comoros flag.

“After the team boarded, an examination of documents confirmed the doubts as to the regularity of the flag,” the Mediterranean Maritime Prefecture said.

The ship “is currently being escorted by the national navy to a point of anchorage for further verifications,” it added.

Images released by the French military showed masked soldiers boarding the Russia-linked ship in an operation involving a navy boat and two navy helicopters.

ICC yet to respond to BCB

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body that handles disputes involving the ICC, its member boards, players and officials.

However, it is not an appeal body against decisions of the ICC and can only examine whether ICC followed its own rules and procedures while making the decision.

The ICC had last formed a panel under this committee in 2018, when Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) demanded \$60 million as compensation from Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) for not honouring a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that required the two boards to play a number of bilateral series between 2015 and 2023. The three-member committee dismissed PCB’s compensation claims.

Meanwhile, Cultural Affairs Adviser Mostofa Sarwar Faruqui yesterday echoed the statements made by Asif Nazrul and BCB president Aminul Islam Bulbul on Thursday, accusing ICC of double standards.

“When India decides not to play in Pakistan, ICC

complies. When Pakistan doesn’t want to play in India, ICC complies. When Bangladesh requested the same for genuine security reasons, the ICC has done the opposite,” he wrote, referring to the Hybrid Model in ICC events that was employed in the fallout of India’s decision to not travel to Pakistan in last year’s ICC Champions Trophy.

“Just yesterday, a West Bengal-born Muslim man named Manjur Laskar was beaten to death on suspicion of being a Bangladeshi, reports The Telegraph of India. Shiv Sena leader Aditya Thackeray on Thursday warned about India playing Bangladesh in Mumbai, the very city where ICC wants Bangladesh to play a match. “If ICC - International Cricket Council really wants to portray itself as a body that treats all members fairly, it must take Bangladesh’s genuine concerns into cognisance and move the team’s matches from India to Sri Lanka no matter what. The onus is on the ICC to prove its neutrality,” he added.

According to an AFP report, the entire row has

also put India’s credentials as a host of global sporting events into question.

India are set to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games and are also in line to bid for the 2036 Olympics. However, the chaotic build-up to the T20 World Cup and the accusations of political interference could cast a shadow over its Olympic ambitions, reports AFP.

“The Bangladesh issue has reached where it has because it’s a political issue. There is no one in the ICC who can stand up to anything that the BCCI says or does. The BCCI and the ICC are the same thing at the moment,” AFP quoted Indian sports journalist Sharda Ugra.

The entire row began after Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman was left out by Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise Kolkata Knight Riders on January 3 under the directives of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), seemingly under pressure from right-wing politicians and religious leaders. BCB sent a relocation request to ICC the following day.

BNP ready to deliver change

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‘COUNTRY MUST BE
REBUILT’

Tarique said corruption and the destruction of institutions during the past regime have severely hindered the country’s progress.

“We have to rebuild it. To do that, democracy must be established. And why must it be established? Because only by democratically electing your representatives can you take your local problems to them,” he said.

He added, “In the elections held over the past 15 years, could you reach the so-called MPs? Could you take your area’s problems to them? You could not. That is why, if we want to solve local problems and develop the country, we must elect representatives democratically, not only in the national parliamentary election, but also at the municipal, upazila, and union parishad levels.”

The BNP leader

said accountability is essential and that elected representatives must understand what the people want.

“Just as I came to you today and listened to your problems, I expect future representatives at every level to meet the people directly, identify their problems, and take initiatives to solve them,” he said.

‘HOUSING OUR MAIN
PROBLEM’

During the event, Tarique invited several residents, including students, marginal workers, onto the stage to outline the main problems facing Bhashantek.

Van driver Md Juwel, who has lived in the area for 50 years, said, “We live in slums. Our main problem is housing. We need more support as we are poor. Our roads are also in very bad condition.”

Shanta, a homemaker, said there were no proper employment opportunities for

women in the area. Lili Akter, a resident of the nearby slum, demanded rehabilitation for slum dwellers, while university student Hena Akter called for the area to be developed in an orderly and well-planned manner.

Tarique assured them of addressing the issues.

During the programme, Tarique invited a woman from the audience onto the stage after she wanted to meet him. Once on stage, she, visibly emotional, apologised, saying she had once stolen guavas from trees at Tarique’s house.

In response, Tarique said a guava tree would be planted at her home.

The woman also alleged that during the Awami League’s tenure, a local party leader forcibly occupied her family’s land and harassed her relatives. She urged Tarique to look into the matter.

Tarique’s wife Zubaida Rahman and other BNP leaders were present at the programme.