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## Govt ‘mapping’ Afghans ahead of eviction push after Eid

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PESHAWAR:

Data is being gathered on Afghan migrants – including those legally resident in the country – ahead of a renewed eviction push slated to start after Eid, official sources told AFP on Tuesday. More than half a million Afghans fled Pakistan last year after the former government ordered undocumented migrants to leave or face arrest, as Islamabad-Kabul relations soured over security. Islamabad initially set a November 2023 deadline, however two officials, who asked to remain anonymous, said evictions would resume in the coming weeks. “This time, instructions have been given to also collect data and conduct mapping of legally resident Afghan citizens,” said a top government official in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P). A senior K-P police official said whilst “a final decision” has not yet been taken by the government, “police have sprung into action regarding Afghan

citizens". "The federal government has directed to not only collect data of legal and illegal Afghan citizens but also to conduct their mapping," he said.

Two officials, who asked not to be named, previously told AFP the renewed push to evict migrants will begin after Eid, set to be celebrated in April's second week. The interior ministry did not respond to a request for comment. Islamabad has previously said the massive eviction scheme is justified by security concerns and its faltering economy. But analysts say it is designed to pressure Kabul over rising attacks in the country's border regions with Afghanistan, where the Taliban government is accused of giving militants patronage and safe haven. The Taliban government has consistently denied the allegations. Millions of Afghans have poured into Pakistan over the years, fleeing decades of cascading conflict. Afghans who left Pakistan last year were only allowed to cross the border with limited belongings and cash, and arrived in the midst of one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Some had never set foot in Afghanistan before, having been born in Pakistan to Afghan parents. An estimated 600,000 arrived since the Taliban government seized power in August 2021 and imposed its stark interpretation of Islamic law. Before the first wave of evictions began, Islamabad estimated there were 1.7 million Afghans living illegally in the country. The stand-off between Islamabad and Kabul worsened last week when eight civilians were killed in Pakistani air strikes in Afghanistan's border regions, according to Taliban officials.

Islamabad's attack came after seven Pakistani troops were killed by militants on Pakistani soil, which President Asif Ali Zardari blamed on outside forces and vowed retribution.