The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
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Russia Ready to Help Evacuate Afghans Fleeing Taliban – FM

August 19, 2021



Afghans crowd on the tarmac of Kabul airport. **AFP**

Russia is ready to send airplanes to Afghanistan to evacuate Afghans fleeing the Taliban as well as Russians who wish to leave the country, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said Thursday.

Thousands of Afghan citizens have rushed to flee the country this week following the Taliban's swift takeover of Kabul, resulting in chaos at Kabul's airport that has led to the deaths of at least 12 people.

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"We are ready to provide Russian civil aviation services to ensure the flight of any number of Afghan citizens, including women and children, to any foreign countries that show interest in receiving and accommodating them," Interfax quoted Zakharova saying.

She added that Taliban leadership has guaranteed that it wouldn't interfere with these flights.

Zakharova stressed that evacuations of Russia's embassy personnel or its citizens are not currently being discussed.

Russia, China and Pakistan have been the only countries not to evacuate their embassies in Afghanistan following the Taliban's takeover.

Hoping to preserve regional stability, the Kremlin has taken a pragmatic approach toward the insurgent group as it has carried out a sweeping offensive across Afghanistan following the exit of U.S.-led forces.

Although Russia remains reluctant to fully acknowledge the legitimacy of Taliban rule, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov noted this week that the group has sent a "positive signal" with its initial assurances and that the militants are behaving in a "civilized manner."

The Taliban is a terrorist organization banned in Russia.

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