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Ministry of Defence Fast-Tracked Afghan Resettlement After Sensitive Data Leak

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An Afghan national who posted confidential names from a Ministry of Defence (MoD) data breach on Facebook had his resettlement case expedited by British officials, raising new questions about transparency and fairness in the United Kingdom's Afghan relocation program.

In 2023, a spreadsheet containing sensitive personal information of nearly 19,000 Afghan applicants was mistakenly shared online due to a Ministry of Defence email error. One individual later posted screenshots of the document to a private Facebook group. As a result, officials acted swiftly, moving the person's case to the front of the queue under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), a scheme designed to relocate those who supported British forces during operations in Afghanistan.

Court documents have since revealed that this case was one of several prioritized following the leak. Internal communications from within the MoD indicate that the decision was made due to concerns that the individual might share further details publicly if not offered immediate assistance. To contain the damage, the government issued a rarely used super-injunction, a court order banning not just the reporting of the breach but any mention that such an injunction existed. This prevented the public or affected individuals from knowing the extent of the failure for nearly a year.

Critics have raised concerns about whether this response was proportionate or fair. Legal experts and advocacy groups suggest that fast-tracking one case due to public exposure potentially disadvantages others still waiting for resettlement, many of whom remain in dangerous situations.

The MoD has defended its actions, stating that the move was made in response to an "immediate security risk," not as special treatment. The Defence Secretary confirmed that procedures are now under review, with efforts underway to ensure all cases are assessed based on risk and eligibility alone.

Meanwhile, legal action is mounting. At least 1,000 Afghans whose names appeared in the leaked data are seeking compensation. Many claim the breach put their lives in jeopardy, with potential damages running into tens of millions of pounds.

This incident has brought renewed scrutiny to the government's handling of the Afghan evacuation effort and the administration of ARAP. While national security was cited as a justification for secrecy, the episode has exposed significant flaws in data protection and case prioritization, raising concerns about accountability at the heart of government.