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HUNGARY SEALS OFF SERBIA BORDER

GERMANY DEMANDS EU SUMMIT ON MIGRANT CRISIS

BERLIN: Germany yesterday called for an EU summit on Europe's biggest migrant crisis since World War II, as Hungary sealed off its border with Serbia to stem a record influx of newcomers. And 22 more refugees including four children and 11 women died in yet another shipwreck while trying to reach Europe, where more than half a million people have arrived this year to seek safe haven. "Time is running out," German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned, calling for a meeting next week to end the squabbling that has grown more acrimonious since eastern members flatly refused to accept EU-set quotas for absorbing refugees. "We can manage this," she insisted, while defending Berlin's shock decision on Sunday to reinstate border controls on security grounds. Her call for a crisis summit won backing from visiting Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann who warned of a "humanitarian catastrophe" if Europe failed to take a united stance on the crisis, saying "no-one who is in search of protection must lose their lives."

Berlin's move to bring back border controls has had a domino effect, with Austria, Slovakia and Hungary also reimposing identity checks in a further blow to Europe's vaunted passport-free Schengen zone. Meanwhile, Hungarian authorities yesterday effectively sealed the border with Serbia, blocking a gap in a razor-wire barrier where many of the migrants passed through, pushing them towards the nearby official crossing point at Roszke.

But the Roszke crossing and another at Asothalom, 22 kilometres (13 miles) to the east, were both shut yesterday, leaving several hundred people stuck on the Serbian side.

woman holding a child on the Serbian side of the border.

Around 300 people were gathered at the site, some walking alongside the razorwire fence searching in vain for an opening, watched by a group of some 20 Hungarian riot police.

"It was really bad last night," said Bashir, a 17-year-old Afghan schoolboy who arrived an hour after the border closed at midnight. "It was cold, particularly for families with little babies," he told AFP. The closure came as Hungarian police made their first arrests under harsh new laws which came into effect at midnight. The legislation imposes a sentence of up to three years for crossing the frontier illegally or damaging the border fence.

Hungary, which has seen some 200,000 migrants enter the country this year, is also rushing to complete a controversial four-metre high barrier along its border with non-EU Serbia.

With Poland and the Netherlands also considering border controls, there are fears the Schengen system could collapse, even though states are permitted to impose temporary controls for security reasons. Germany's decision to reimpose border checks caused long traffic jams on the frontier with Austria where 63,000 asylum seekers have crossed this month. Since then, the pace of new arrivals has slowed with some 2,000 people crossing, police said.

EU ministers had on Monday failed to reach agreement on a plan to share out 120,000 refugees, prompting German Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel to say Europe had "disgraced itself".

The system was proposed as a way of easing the burden on frontline states such as Hungary, Greece and Italy, but it has been



HORGOS: Refugees wait at the closed border station between Serbia and Hungary in Horgos, Serbia, yesterday. Hungary has declared a state of emergency in two of its southern counties bordering Serbia because of the migration crisis, giving special powers to police and other authorities. — AP

rejected out of hand by several eastern member states, prompting German Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere to propose cutting EU funds to those who refuse to accept their fair share.

More than 500,000

As the political debate raged on, new figures from the EU's Frontex border agency showed more than half a million people had arrived in the year to August 31, almost dou-

ble the figure for the whole of 2014. Meanwhile on the ground, at least 22 people drowned yesterday when their boat sank off Turkey, as rescue workers pulled another 249 to safety. And police blocked hundreds of others from trying to find an alternative route to Europe by land, officials said.

The route across the Aegean Sea from Turkey to Greece has become the busiest for migrants and refugees fleeing conflicts and misery in Syria, Iraq and other Middle Eastern

and Asian countries to Europe. From Greece, they travel through the western Balkans into Hungary then heading on to Germany, via Austria.

"If we could work and live in safety we wouldn't be here," explained the Afghan teenager waiting in vain to cross into Hungary. "How are we supposed to live (in Afghanistan) with no future? If I die I want it to be for something, for something good, for my rights." — AFP

'Really bad night'

"Why are they doing this?" asked an Afghan

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