

BUREAUCRACY: FIRST STOP FOR ARRIVALS IN GERMANY

PASSAU: In the corner of a vast industrial complex above this southeastern German city, Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans and others get their first taste of the country's infamous bureaucracy. "Saff," "soura," "basamat" - form a line, photo, fingerprint - are among the dozen phonetically-spelled Arabic words scrawled onto a sheet of paper to help German police communicate with the seemingly endless flood of people who pour out of buses at Passau's central registration center.

It is here that they formally declare their intention to seek asylum after days and sometimes weeks trekking through Europe. The city has been pushed to the forefront of Germany's effort to cope with the tens of thousands hoping to start a better life far from the hardship and dangers of the countries they've left behind. And the strain of that effort shows on the faces of migrants and German police alike.

New arrivals enter one of two giant halls once used to build specialized trucks. The lingering smell of motor oil barely masks the odor of people who have traveled hundreds of miles without a change of clothes or a chance to wash. They are greeted by officers wearing surgical gloves and protective vests. Every migrant receives a paper wristband with a number - his or her passport for the next 12 to 24 hours at Danziger Strasse 49.

Next comes a mugshot, followed by a search. Officers are on the lookout for dangerous objects, but also identity papers that might cast doubt on a person's claim to be from Syria, which almost guarantees he or she will get asylum in Germany. In the coming hours, migrants get time to wash, eat and rest. Many, especially children, need medical care. "The doctor is pretty busy," said Stephan Wittenzeller, a spokesman for Germany's federal police, which runs the center. Ali Hisham Abed, a burly 24-year-old, sits with his friends near the center of the room. When asked why he fled his native Iraq, he produces a UN refugee card that shows he first sought refuge in Syria, before the war there forced him to move on again. Now he dreams of Sweden, a country where he says he has friends.

Few complaints

If they are lucky, people at the center get called up quickly for a personal interview. But with at least 400 arriving daily since Sunday, some are forced to wait till the next morning to complete their registration. Mezloun Shiekho from Hasakah, a Kurdish town in Syria, has been at the center for more than 24 hours and is still waiting for his interview. But he has few complaints.

"They took care of us," he said in English. "Food, beds, medicine... It was very good." Shiekho compares it with his reception in Hungary, where he says police mistreated him, and his experience with traffickers, whom he paid 4,000 Euros to take him from Turkey to Germany before they abandoned him halfway, in Serbia. At the interview, migrants are accompanied by an interpreter. They are also fingerprinted. An officer man-

ning an ID machine explains that she takes 640 fingerprints - four each from 160 people - on a busy day's shift.

In an adjacent room, a dozen officers painstakingly type up the information that has been collected on each person. Only once it has been entered into the database can they move on to the second hall - even bigger than the first, with space for some 750 people. The sound is deafening. Children are crying, teenage boys are laughing, and everywhere men and women are trying to sleep; only a baby lying on a field cot seems at peace. In the middle, a police officer keeps a precise tally of how many people are in the building.

Is there Wi-Fi?

One officer says the most common questions he gets are: When are we leaving, where are we going, is there Wi-Fi? Another looks grimly toward a group of migrants smoking inside the building, even though they have been told not to. Despite the conditions, those waiting to move on remain stoic.

Omar, a 17-year-old from Afghanistan's Baghlan province who declined to give his last name because he feared for his family's safety, said he has been experienced nothing but kindness since arriving in Passau. His eyes light up as he explains how he wants to resume his studies in Germany. Back in Afghanistan, the Taliban prevented him from going to school, and his father sold everything the family had so that his son could afford the journey to Europe.

"I crossed the borders of seven countries by foot," he said. "Now I want to go to Munich. I have a friend, I'm trying to contact him on Facebook." Omar may have to wait a while. Many of those registered in Passau are taken to nearby Deggendorf, and then on to other shelters across the country in accordance with the rules of German bureaucracy. There they wait, sometimes for a year or more, to learn whether they will be granted asylum. Wittenzeller is proud of the registration system at Danziger Strasse 49. "They invented it two months ago and now it works like a factory production line."

Half of refugees traumatized

Meanwhile, at least half of the refugees who have come to Germany have mental health problems because of trauma suffered in war or during their dangerous escapes, said the chamber of psychotherapists yesterday. More than 70 percent had witnessed violence and more than half had become victims of violence, often torture, themselves, said the chamber's president Dietrich Munz. "At least half of the refugees have a psychological illness," Munz told a Berlin press conference, citing empirical studies from recent years, before the recent surge in refugee arrivals. Most common were post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, sometimes so severe that patients are suicidal. Forty per cent of refugee children had witnessed violence, and "26 percent had to watch family members being attacked," said the professional body. — Agencies

Main entry point

In the past few months, Hungary has become a main entry point into the European Union for migrants, many of them war refugees from Syria and Iraq, with more than 200,000 entering the country so far this year. Almost all entered from the southern border with Serbia and passed through Hungary quickly on their way to Germany or other wealthy Western European nations.

Hungarian authorities also said yesterday that they have arrested a total of 519 migrants who tried to cross the border since tough new laws



HORGOS: A refugee reacts after Hungarian riot police use water cannon to push back refugees at the Hungarian border with Serbia. — AFP

HUNGARIAN POLICE USE TEAR GAS, WATER ON MIGRANTS AT BORDER

'DID NOT EXPECT SUCH BRUTALITY AND INHUMANE TREATMENT'

HORGOS: Hungarian police used tear gas and water cannons on hundreds of migrants who broke through a razor wire fence on the border with Serbia yesterday, while migrants prevented from moving through Hungary increasingly began taking a longer route into Western Europe through Croatia. Frustrated migrants blocked on the Serbian side of the border threw plastic water bottles and rocks at helmeted riot police and chanted demands that the border be re-opened. Police responded with tear gas and water cannons.

"We fled wars and violence and did not expect such brutality and inhumane treatment in Europe," said Amir Hassan, an Iraqi who was soaking wet from the water cannon and trying to wash tear gas from his eyes. "Shame on you, Hungarians," he shouted pointing in the direction of the shielded Hungarian policemen who were firing volleys of tear gas canisters directly into the crowd.

The clashes took place at a small border crossing in the Serbian village Horgos, a short distance from the main border crossing into Hungary. Serbian authorities sent ambulances to the site but it wasn't immediately clear how many people were injured. Before the tensions escalated, some women had pushed to the front of the crowd and held small babies and children above their heads as they faced police in an obvious appeal for mercy, but no one made it through.

went into effect on Tuesday that make it a crime to cross from Serbia anywhere other than at legal checkpoints. Authorities launched 46 criminal prosecutions and found two Iraqi men guilty, the first convictions based on the new laws.

Two men were expelled from Hungary, with one banned from re-entering the country for one year, the other banned for two years. Televised images from a courthouse in Szeged earlier showed four Iraqi men who were charged with their hands tied in front of them and their shoelaces removed ahead of trial.

Syrian President Bashar Assad yesterday blamed Europe for the crisis, saying it's a direct result of the West's support for extremists in Syria over the past four years.

In an interview with Russian media, Assad accused Europe of supporting "terrorism" and providing "protection for terrorists, calling them moderates." "How can one be indignant about a drowned child and remain silent about the deaths of thousands of children, elderly people, women and men killed by terrorists in Syria?" Assad said.

Hungary's foreign minister denied that closed borders and tough new laws signal callousness toward refugees, repeating the government's claim that most of those entering Hungary are actually economic migrants. "Based on our history, we are always in solidarity with the refugees," Peter Szijarto told The Associated Press in an interview. "What we're saying is that we cannot accept economic migrants because we cannot bear the burden of that."

Most of the migrants who had hoped to cross into Hungary were still trapped along the border in Horgos, however. Many were confused about whether to keep waiting or to try to enter the EU through Croatia, a longer and less direct path into Western Europe. Melita Sunjic, a spokeswoman for the UN refugee agency, said that early in the day the migrants were refusing to leave the border but changed their minds because of news and rumors

going around that Croatia's borders were open.

Most hope to reach Germany, where Chancellor Angela Merkel's government has said it expects some 800,000 refugees to arrive this year alone. The vice chancellor has said the number could even reach 1 million.

"I don't know what to do - stay here or try some other way to cross the border," said Ahmed Sami from Aleppo, Syria. "We walked and traveled for hundreds, thousands of kilometers only to be stopped meters from the European Union. My wife and children cannot stand on their feet any more. This is tragic."

'We are ready'

At least two buses with about 100 people were seen leaving for the Croatian border from Kanjiza, a Serbian town on the border with Hungary. About 300 crossed into Tovarnik, Croatia, after they were bused to the Serbian border town of Sid on an all-night ride from Macedonia.

Croatian Prime Minister Zoran Milanovic criticized Hungary's decision to seal its border with Serbia for migrants and said Croatia will not do the same. "We are ready to accept these people, regardless of their religion and the color of their skin, and direct them to the destinations where they wish to go, Germany and Scandinavia," Milanovic told lawmakers in Parliament.

"Barbed wire in Europe in the 21st century is not an answer, it's a threat," Milanovic said. Migrants have avoided Croatia in the past because they must still go into Hungary or Slovenia before reaching Austria or Germany.

Elsewhere in Europe migrants remained on the move. Greek police said about 5,000 refugees and migrants crossed the country's northern border with Macedonia in the 24 hours from Tuesday morning to yesterday morning. Meanwhile, Austria began selective controls of vehicles at three main border crossings with Hungary as it tries to impose some order over the stream of people. — AP



PASSAU: Three month old baby Parwan from Afghanistan sleeps on a bed at the temporary registration center of the southern German border town. — AP

NIGERIA MULLS BOKO HARAM PRISONER AMNESTY IN RETURN FOR CHIBOK GIRLS

PARIS: President Muhammadu Buhari told AFP yesterday that Nigerian authorities were talking to Boko Haram prisoners in their custody and could offer them amnesty if the extremist group hands over more than 200 schoolgirls abducted last year. The Nigerian leader added that he was confident "conventional" attacks by the group would be rooted out by November-but cautioned that deadly suicide attacks were likely to continue.

"The few (prisoners) we are holding, we are trying to see whether we can negotiate with them for the release of the Chibok girls," Buhari said in an interview in Paris during a three-day visit to France. "If the Boko Haram leadership eventually agrees to turn over the Chibok girls to us-the complete number-then we may decide to give them (the prisoners) amnesty."

Boko Haram fighters stormed a school in the remote northeastern Nigerian town of Chibok on April 14 last year, seizing 276 girls who were preparing for end-of-year exams in an abduction that shocked the world. Fifty-seven escaped, but nothing has been heard of the 219 others since May last year, when about 100 of them appeared in a Boko Haram video, dressed in Muslim attire and reciting the Quran.

Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau has since said they have all converted to Islam and been "married off". Buhari, who has promised to stamp out the group's bloody six-year insurgency, said the government would not release any prisoners unless it was convinced it could "get the girls in reasonably healthy condition". But he cau-

tioned that negotiating with Boko Haram militants was fraught with difficulties. "We are trying to establish if they are bona fide, how useful they are in Boko Haram, have they reached a position of leadership where their absence is of relevance to the operation of Boko Haram?" he said.

'Occasional bombings' won't stop

Boko Haram's insurgency, which has claimed more than 15,000 lives and forced 1.5 million others out of their homes, has intensified since Buhari came to power on May 29 on the back of a historic election win. While it has lost territory it once controlled in northeastern Nigeria, the group has nevertheless stepped up deadly ambushes in its traditional heartland and across the border in Cameroon and Chad.

In August, Buhari gave a brand new set of military chiefs a three-month deadline to end the insurgency. He said yesterday he was confident this deadline would be respected-but only on Boko Haram's "conventional" assaults and not necessarily on the random suicide attacks that have killed hundreds since he took office.

"The main conventional attacks, where Boko Haram use armoured cars they took from Nigerian troops, or mounted machine-guns on pick-ups and so on, we believe by the end of the three months, we will see the back of that," he said.

"What may not absolutely stop is the occasional bombings by the use of improvised explosive devices," he cautioned. "We do not expect a 100 percent stoppage of the insurgency." — AFP

'CORBYNOMICS' LIGHTS UP BRITAIN POLITICS WITH RADICAL MESSAGE

LONDON: Victorious Labor leader Jeremy Corbyn's socialist agenda of nationalizations and high taxes is in sharp contrast to the free-market policies favored in Britain for decades, even by his own party. The 66-year-old MP was elected by a landslide on Saturday, and has promised to fight government austerity, despite the Conservatives winning a surprise majority in May's general election.

"Austerity is actually a political choice that this government has taken and they're imposing it on the poorest and most vulnerable in our society," Corbyn said to trade union delegates on Tuesday. Corbyn declared his intentions by appointing John McDonnell, a controversial far-left ally, as his shadow finance minister. The shadow minister's appointment sparked immediate criticism, even from within Labor ranks and he has already become a favorite target of the right-wing media.

Return of the state

Corbyn and his finance spokesman aim to use a cocktail of interventionist policies-already called "Corbynomics"-to roll back the government's policies to boost free enterprise and shrink the state. He said welfare cuts "have had disastrous, appalling consequences" and had "the effect of socially cleansing many parts of our towns and cities".

The pair advocate establishing a national investment bank to help develop innovative industries and to finance infrastructure programs worth billions of pounds. Public funds would be boosted by taking more tax from the rich while the central Bank of England could lose its independence and be ordered to print more money in a "people's quantitative easing".

Corbyn also calls for the nationalization of certain industries, particularly the railway sector that was privatized in the early 1990s. It was a decision that Labor did not reverse during more than a decade in power, and would be completely at odds with the current government and its belief in private ownership. For the workers themselves, the new party leader wants an increase in the minimum wage and an end to "zero hour" contracts that allow companies to hire people



LONDON: Newly elected Labor opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn (left) speaks facing British Prime Minister David Cameron (right) during the weekly Prime Minister's Questions in the Houses of Parliament. — AFP

with no guarantee of minimum hours. Corbyn's program contrasts with former leader Ed Miliband and his claims to be "pro-business". It is also a clean break from the era of "New Labor"-the centrist platform that catapulted Tony Blair into power in 1997 and which was developed by Gordon Brown when he took over in 2007.

"Ed Miliband had moved Labor to the left from Gordon Brown's days (contributing to the size of Labor's defeat), and Corbyn will provide cause for a further leap left," Erik Nielsen, chief economist at Unicredit, wrote in a note to clients. Unsurprisingly, employers have shown little enthusiasm at Corbyn's triumph, even if his policies have little chance of being implemented soon.

The Financial Times reacted to Corbyn's election with an editorial calling it a "disastrous choice". Corbyn is odds on not to be Labor leader when the next election comes around in five years' time, and even if he is, the party is long

odds to defeat the Conservatives. "From renationalizing the railways, to raising taxes on businesses and increasing government spending, Mr Corbyn has proposed some policies in the leadership campaign that we believe would undermine our open and competitive economy," said Simon Walker, director general at the Institute of Directors.

One area of particular concern is Corbyn's ambiguous relationship with the European Union, which the business community is largely in favor of. Corbyn dislikes the bloc's free-market policies and has not ruled out campaigning for Britain to exit the union during the in-out referendum promised by Cameron before the end of 2017. Cameron went further, suggesting that Corbyn posed a risk to the fabric of British society. "The Labor Party is now a threat to our national security, our economic security and your family's security," he wrote on Twitter. — AFP