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A Syrian migrant's odyssey to freedom

Associated Press photographer Santi Palacios followed Mohammed Al Haj, a man who escaped from the conflict in Syria to find refuge in Germany, over a period of almost two years – and 4,000 kilometres

Sept 16, 2015
Mohammed reaches his destination in Germany. Here, he is convinced he could build a future. "Syrians work really hard. They'll crush rocks for a living," he said.



Sept 14, 2015
Mohammed is released by the Hungarians and crosses the border into Austria.

Sept 12, 2015
Mohammed is arrested after trying to run across the border into Hungary.

Sept 12, 2015
Mohammed, right, and his friend Abdul-Rahman Babelly sleep on a bus travelling from Presevo to the Serbian capital, Belgrade.



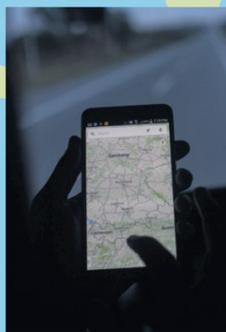
Sept 11, 2015
After crossing into Serbia, Mohammed's bus diverts to Presevo, where he waits with other migrants to get Serbian registration to allow them to continue their journey.



Sept 5-9, 2015
Mohammed waits for documentation on the island of Lesbos. He departs Sept 9 from Mytilene port to Athens' port of Piraeus.



Sept 10, 2015
Mohammed travels by bus from Athens to the Macedonian border. Armed with a Greek sim card, he checks maps and Facebook pages of other migrants on his smartphone, and chats on WhatsApp with Syrians who had taken the same route.



Sept 4, 2015
Mohammed takes a bus to the Turkish port of Ayvalik.

Sept 5, 2015
He makes the sea journey to the island of Lesbos, Greece.

Sept 2, 2015
The starting point of Mohammed's trip. He takes a bus to Izmir, Turkey.

April 2014
Mohammed Al Haj flees his hometown, where he worked in a front-line hospital.



Migrant crisis

Germany may use military planes to speed deportations

Pressure on Merkel builds within party

BERLIN // Germany could use army transport planes to deport asylum seekers whose asylum applications had been rejected, in an attempt to ease a mounting refugee crisis, the government said yesterday.

Chancellor Angela Merkel was under growing pressure over her handling of the crisis, with her popular support waning and

some in her conservative party wanting limits on refugee numbers.

Her government has long said it wanted to speed up the processing of asylum applications and that anyone who was rejected must leave, but there was a big backlog in deportations.

"If [economic grounds] is the only reason for being here, then we will have to say more strongly to these people: you must go home," Mrs Merkel said.

The government discussed options, including using army

transport aircraft to help deport people, not telling individuals that they would be sent home and tightening up rules that let some failed asylum seekers stay.

"Sending people back on commercial airlines takes priority but if there is insufficient capacity then ... we will consider making use of military aircraft," said government spokesman Steffen Seibert.

Germany was struggling to cope with an influx of about 10,000 refugees a day and expected at least 800,000 this year.

At least a third of migrants to Europe are coming from Balkan countries

An Allensbach poll published yesterday showed that 54 per cent of Germans asked were very worried about the refugee situation in their country, up from 40 per cent in August.

The number of new asylum applications to Germany far outnumbered deportations. By the end of September, about 193,000 people were registered as having no valid reason to claim asylum, of which more than 140,000 were granted "exceptional leave to stay", an interior ministry spokesman said.

Government figures showed that although many of those arriving in Germany were fleeing war in the Middle East, at least a third were economic migrants from Balkan countries who had little hope of staying legally.

Polls showed that support for Mrs Merkel and her party had fallen in the past few weeks, but 82 per cent of her Christian Democrat party members were happy with her as leader, the survey yesterday said.

★ Reuters

ARSON ATTACK KILLS BABY AND TODDLER

NEW DELHI // A baby and a toddler were killed in a house fire allegedly set by their upper caste neighbours in a village near the Indian capital. Afterwards, hundreds of angry residents placed the children's bodies on a main road near New Delhi to demand that the attackers be arrested. The two-year-old and nine-month-old were sleeping when their house was set on fire in Sunpedh on Monday night. Their mother was in a critical condition, while their father was also injured after trying to break down the locked door of the house. – AP

DEADLY PHILIPPINES TYPHOON SUBSIDES

CASIGURAN // A typhoon that dumped heavy rains on the northern Philippines, killing 58 people as it flattened houses and destroyed crops, petered out yesterday. Typhoon Koppu weakened from a tropical depression into a low pressure area, but authorities maintained a warning to ferries and fishermen on three northern islands not to go to sea. Floodwaters and the landslides they triggered on the main island of Luzon caused most of the deaths, said Romina Marasigan, a spokeswoman for the national disaster agency. – Reuters



Children may think the flooding is fun, but the death toll in a powerful storm in the Philippines has risen to 35. Francis R Malasig / EPA

POPE 'DOES NOT HAVE TUMOUR'

VATICAN CITY // The Vatican yesterday denied an Italian media report that Pope Francis has a benign brain tumour, calling the article "gravely irresponsible and unworthy of attention". The *Quotidiano Nazionale* newspaper reported on its front page yesterday that a Japanese doctor had secretly flown from Tuscany to the Vatican on a helicopter bearing the pope's white-and-yellow flag to examine the pope "some months ago". The article said the pontiff was diagnosed with "a small dark spot on the brain", but that it was curable. – Reuters

CHINESE DIPLOMATS DIE IN GUN ATTACK

MANILA // China's consul-general in the Philippines' second-biggest city was wounded and two of his staff members killed yesterday during a lunchtime gun attack at a restaurant. Staff at the Lighthouse restaurant in Cebu said a group of nine people had gathered in a private room to celebrate the birthday of the consul general, Song Ronghua. Two other Chinese guests at the lunch – a consular officer and her husband – were arrested on suspicion of involvement in the shootings. Police said Mr Song was in a stable condition in hospital. – AFP