

STUDENTS BACK TO KENYA UNIV 9 MONTHS AFTER MASSACRE

GARISSA: Students trickled back yesterday for classes at a university in north-eastern Kenya where at least 148 people were killed by Islamist gunmen nine months ago. Security was tight but only around 20 students resumed classes at Garissa University, which had some 800 students before the massacre.

The high-profile assault on April 2, 2015 was the deadliest yet in Kenya by the Somali-led, Al-Qaeda-linked Shebab group. Nearly all the victims were students. Emotions were mixed for those returning. "I am very happy for the reopening...we went for our first lesson and we are really back to the university as normal," said Shamza Abdi, a student.

"There are some memories of a lot of our friends we lost here, but despite what happened, life must go on... we just pray for our friends," she added. The gunmen had lined up non-Muslim students for execution in what President Uhuru Kenyatta described at the time as a "barbaric medieval slaughter". The massacre was Kenya's deadliest attack since the 1998 bombing of the US embassy in Nairobi.

Most students, especially those who were not originally from Garissa, have transferred to other colleges. The students now returning are mainly those who come from the town, some 365 kilometers north of the capital Nairobi.

Security tightened

"We are really missing those students who were killed, and we are very bitter about it...the people of this area were really affected," said Hassan Kune Mire. "It is very important for us that learning has resumed, and that we shall continue with our education."

University principal Ahmed Osman Warfa, speaking last week when teachers returned, said security had been tightened with a new police post built within the compound and a perimeter fence planned. "I wish I was armed and trained on the use of firearms on that night, I would have fought with the attackers and at least ensure I have

saved some of my students from their killers," the principal said. Witnesses last week gave evidence in the ongoing trial of five men accused of supporting the attack. The four gunmen who carried out the massacre were all killed when Kenyan commandos stormed the building. Survivors described how the laughing gunmen taunted their victims amid scenes of total carnage.

Students, some who had to play dead among the pools of blood of their friends until they were rescued, said the gunmen shouted "We have come to kill and be killed" as they prowled the student dormitories shooting those they found. The Garissa attack followed the

2013 siege of the up market Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, when four Shebab gunmen killed at least 67 people. Last month Kenyan police warned of the risk of fresh attacks by Shebab insurgents, claiming they had split into rival factions inside Kenya, with some shifting allegiance from Al-Qaeda to Islamic State. The militants say their attacks are retaliation for the Kenyan military presence in Somalia and "war crimes" committed by Kenyan troops. Inside Somalia, they fight to overthrow the internationally-backed government in Mogadishu, which is protected by 22,000 African Union troops, including Kenyan soldiers. — AFP

TIGHTER BORDER CHECKS LEAVE MIGRANTS TRAPPED IN GREECE

ATHENS: Dreams rarely come true, at least not for long. For a few incredible months, the prospect of a better life in Europe seemed within grasp, attracting a wave of more than 1 million migrants from the war-torn, poverty-stricken Middle East and Africa. To get there, they risked their lives at sea and parted with fortunes. But a tightening of border controls closer to the promised lands of Germany and Sweden has left thousands trapped and destitute in the last place most want to be - financially wrecked Greece.

Ayman Daher, 29, from Lebanon, paid smugglers \$1,500 to squeeze onto a rubber boat with 80 people for the short and often deadly crossing from Turkey to the Greek island of Chios. His destination was Germany, where his father and three brothers live. "Life is good and safe there," Daher said. "In my country it is not." To reach Germany, he would have to traverse the western Balkans, starting with Macedonia on Greece's northern border - as hundreds of thousands did with relative ease for about five months last year. That happened because Balkan countries opened their borders in June to all transient asylum-seekers, in one of several policy lurches as a fragmented Europe vacillated between pity for refugees and concern over security and integrating huge numbers of immigrants.

But in late November the Balkan gateways started to close, and Greek officials fear they could be completely shut in coming months. Now, only Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis are deemed refugees and let through, with all others - about 12,000 of the 103,000 who entered Greece in December rejected as economic migrants.

'Countries are at war'

This seems absurd to Saleh Al Riyashy, 45, a former policeman from Yemen - whose civil war has been compounded by 10 months of airstrikes by a Saudi-led coalition. "Why does Macedonia only allow people from three countries through?" he said. "Other countries are at war too. My home was badly damaged in the fighting."

Al Riyashy and his family have spent the past week at Athens' Elaionas migrant camp, where about 560 people from 14 countries live in prefabricated homes. He wants to reach Sweden. As twilight falls outside the Hellenikon shelter - a former Olympic field hockey venue currently housing about 280 people - Iranian men play volleyball, a red line on the ground serving

as a notional net. Inside, migrants are coming to terms with their bleak future.

"I can't go back to Somalia," said English teacher Ali Heydar Aki, who hoped to settle in Europe and then bring his family. "I have sold half my house" to fund the trip. While it's unclear exactly how many are stuck in Greece, a comparison of arrivals there and in Macedonia since late November leaves about 38,000 people unaccounted for.

Greek immigration minister Ioannis Mouzalas' best guess is "a few thousand." "But (that's) a calculation based on experience, not something else," he said. Syed Mohammad Jamil, head of the Pakistani-Hellenic Cultural Society, says about 4,000 Pakistanis could be stuck in Greece, mostly still on the islands, and about as many Bangladeshis. "Every day we get ... phone calls from people in tears asking for help," he said. "We can't help - send them where? Germany, Spain, Italy, England? We can't."

All now face two legal options: To seek asylum in Greece - which has 25 percent unemployment and a crumbling welfare system - or volunteer for repatriation. Greek authorities have recorded an increase in both since Macedonia tightened controls. Karim Benazza, a Moroccan hotel worker in his 20s, has signed up to go home on Jan 18. "This is all I do now, smoke and smoke, but no money, no food," he said, lighting a cigarette outside the International Organization for Migration building. "There is nothing for us in Greece, and the Macedonian border is closed."

Daniel Esdras, IOM office head in Greece, sees a steep increase in voluntary repatriations, which the IOM organizes. About 800 people registered in December and 260 have been sent home. "It's one thing to return in handcuffs ... and quite another to go as a normal passenger with some money in your pocket, because we give them each 400 euros (\$435)," Esdras said.

Deportation awaits

Although able to continue north, Afghan Masoud Aziz, 23, will seek asylum in Greece. "I do not want to go to another country because it is difficult now, too (many) refugees go there," he said. Deportation awaits those who don't qualify for asylum and reject repatriation - with several hundred currently interned in Greece. About 20,000 were repatriated or deported last year. But most were Albanians, and only one in 10 from the Middle East and Africa. — AP



SACRAMENTO, California: Amanda Wilcox, a member of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, shows a photo of her daughter, Laura, who was killed in a shooting at a mental health clinic in 2001, following a hearing on gun violence on Monday. — AP

PROBE BLAMES MIGRANTS FOR NEW YEAR'S EVE VIOLENT ACTS

NEARLY ALL SUSPECTS 'OF FOREIGN ORIGIN'

COLOGNE: German authorities said yesterday that nearly all the suspects in a rash of New Year's Eve violence against women in Cologne were "of foreign origin", as foreigners came under attack amid surging tensions. Ralf Jaeger, the interior minister of North Rhine-Westphalia state, released initial findings of a criminal probe over the crime spree that has piled pressure on Chancellor Angela Merkel over her liberal stance towards refugees.

"Witness accounts and the report by the (local) police as well as findings by the federal police indicate that nearly all the people who committed these crimes were of foreign origin," he said. Although no formal charges have been laid, Jaeger said the attackers emerged from a group of more than 1,000 "Arab and North African" men who gathered between the main railway station and the city's iconic Gothic cathedral during the year-end festivities.

Amid concerns over reprisal assaults, police said a mob attacked a group of six Pakistanis late Sunday in Cologne, two of whom had to be hospitalized. Shortly afterwards, five unidentified assailants attacked a 39-year-old Syrian national, injuring him slightly.

After far-right protests erupted in Cologne during the weekend, a sister group of the xenophobic PEGIDA movement was due to hold another rally later yesterday in the eastern city of Leipzig. In the face of outrage over the New Year's Eve violence, Merkel has taken a tough line against convicted refugees. She has signaled her backing for changes to the law to ease expulsion rules, with officials within her ruling coalition expected to swiftly negotiate the proposals this week.

Police said late Sunday that more than a week on from New Year's Eve, some 516 complaints had now been lodged, including 40 percent that are related to sexual assault. Witnesses described terrifying scenes of hundreds of women running a gauntlet of groping hands, lewd insults and robberies in the mob violence.

'Assaults were planned'

The scale of the Cologne assaults has shocked Germany and put a spotlight on the 1.1 million asylum seekers who arrived in the country last year. It has also fuelled fear, with a poll published by the Bild am Sonntag newspaper saying that 39 percent of those surveyed felt police did not provide sufficient protection for the public at large, while 57 percent did.

And just under half (49 percent) believed the same sort of mob violence could hit their hometown, reported the newspaper which headlined its article with the question: "Is the New Year's Eve scandal the result of wrong policies?" A separate poll by broadcaster RTL found that 57 percent of Germans feared crime would rise along with the record influx of asylum seekers, while 40 percent disagreed.

Nevertheless a majority — 60 percent-said their opinion of foreigners has not changed, while 37 percent said they have become more critical and negative about newcomers. Justice Minister Heiko Maas has said he believed the violence in the western city of Cologne was organized. "For such a horde of people to meet and commit such crimes, it has to have been planned somehow," he told Bild am Sonntag newspaper. "No one can tell me that this was not coordinated or planned. The suspicion is that a specific date and an expected crowd was

picked," he said. Quoting confidential police reports, Bild am Sonntag said some North Africans had sent out calls using social networks for people to gather in Cologne on New Year's Eve. Separately in Hamburg, police said they had received 133 criminal complaints for similar violence during the northern city's own New Year's Eve celebrations.

Turning point?

With thousands of asylum seekers still streaming into Germany every day, Merkel has come under fire, even within her own conservative alliance, who want her to put a cap on the

number of refugees in the country.

Critics have questioned Germany's ability to integrate the unprecedented number of newcomers, many of whom hail from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Merkel had until now not wavered from her stance but has adopted a firmer tone after Cologne, even pledging to change the law to make it easier to expel convicted asylum seekers.

"It's not premature to speak of a turning point (after Cologne), or at least the reinforcing of a trend that had already started to take shape lately," Andreas Roedder, contemporary history professor at Mainz University said. — AFP

SPAIN'S PRINCESS, HUSBAND ON TRIAL IN LANDMARK GRAFT CASE

PALMA: Spain's Princess Cristina and her husband went on trial yesterday under intense global media scrutiny in a landmark corruption case that has outraged the country and sullied the monarchy's reputation.

Cristina, a 50-year-old mother-of-four with a master's degree from New York University, is the first Spanish royal to face criminal charges since the monarchy was reinstated following the 1975 death of dictator General Francisco Franco. The princess and her husband, former Olympic handball medalist Inaki Urdangarin, arrived together at a makeshift courtroom in Palma on the Mediterranean island of Mallorca as photographers snapped pictures and a police helicopter flew overhead. Following courtroom rules, they had to sit apart as judges read out the alleged crimes committed by the total of 18 suspects in the case, which alleges that Urdangarin embezzled public funds through a foundation he once chaired. Cristina has been charged with tax evasion while her husband is accused of the more serious crimes of embezzlement, influence peddling, document falsification, money laundering, forgery, breach of official duty and tax fraud. Almost immediately after the trial opened, Cristina's lawyers called for the case against her to be thrown out. Prosecutors have always refused to press charges against her, but under Spanish law, private entities can also file criminal

complaints-and that is just what anti-graft campaigners "Manos Limpias"-or "Clean Hands"-did.

Cristina's lawyers cited Spanish jurisprudence which allows an accused to escape trial if the victim of a crime does not back the charges-and in this case the alleged victim is the state. But Virginia Lopez Negrete, the lawyer representing "Manos Limpias", rejected the argument. "All citizens are equal before the law and as a result anachronistic doctrines cannot be applied" that would "privilege" the princess, she said.

Journalists from around the world have flocked to cover the trial, which was moved from a courthouse to a public administration school on the outskirts of Palma to accommodate the large number of reporters and lawyers. It comes as Spain seethes over repeated corruption scandals that have exposed politicians, trade unions, bankers and footballers, eroding Spaniards' faith in their institutions and elites after a major economic crisis and a government austerity drive.

"We have never had as much corruption in Spain's democratic history," said 45-year-old unemployed masseur Francisco Solana, one of a handful of protesters who gathered outside the courtroom. "No judge will dare send Princess Cristina to jail. I think justice is not equal for all, it favors the rich," added Solana who was wrapped in the yellow, red and purple flag of Spain's 1931-1939 second republic. — AFP



MALLORCA: Spain's Princess Cristina (right) and former Olympic handball player and husband of Spain's Princess Cristina, Inaki Urdangarin arrive for a hearing held in the courtroom in the Balearic School of Public Administration (EBAP) building in Palma de Mallorca. — AFP



ATHENS: In this photo taken on Saturday, Jan 9, 2016 a Pakistani man plays cricket as a boy covers his face at the Eleonas refugee camp. — AP

REFORMIST LAWMAKER ELECTED AS GREECE'S NEW OPPOSITION LEADER

ATHENS: Greece's conservative opposition New Democracy party elected a reformist on Sunday as its new leader. Former administrative reform minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis defeated party stalwart Evangelos Meimarakis in a leadership contest open to all party members. With only partial results available, Meimarakis called Mitsotakis to congratulate him on his victory.

Both candidates were seen as moderate, but Mitsotakis, the 47-year-old son of former New Democracy leader and Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis, was considered the change candidate. Mitsotakis is more clearly a market-friendly politician and less likely to use populist rhetoric.

And while Meimarakis has been an unsparring critic of left-wing premier Alexis Tsipras' government, Mitsotakis has promised an even tougher opposition line against what he called late Sunday a "populist...incompetent government."

Tsipras called Mitsotakis to congratulate him and invite him to a meeting this coming week, an invitation the new opposition leader accepted. But it is unlikely that their relationship will remain as courteous. Tsipras' Syriza party and government partners, the right-wing Independent Greeks, have repeatedly portrayed Mitsotakis as too will-

ing to do the bidding of Greece's creditors.

"New Democracy will now become a hardline neo-liberal party that will only do the bidding of the oligarchs, losing any connection with the people," the Independent Greeks said in a statement. Even Mitsotakis' opponents, however, largely refrained from referring to his status as a political family scion, at a time when nepotism and political dynasties have been convenient scapegoats for the ills of crisis-ridden Greece. Mitsotakis has created a profile of his own, distinct from his father's, and that of his elder sister, Dora Bakoyannis, who herself had unsuccessfully sought the party leadership in 2009.

Nonetheless, the family patriarch, 97, was there Sunday to congratulate his son and wish him to become prime minister in his turn. With 70 percent of polling, New Democracy officials announced that Mitsotakis was leading Meimarakis, 51 percent to 49 percent. About 400,000 people were eligible to vote. In the first round, held on Dec. 20, Meimarakis had led Mitsotakis, 39.8 percent to 28.5 percent. Two other candidates were eliminated. Meimarakis, 62, is a former minister and parliamentary speaker. He served as the New Democracy interim leader from July to November 2015. — AP