

## GERMANY MUST ACT NOW TO STOP RE-RUN OF REFUGEE CRISIS, MERKEL RIVAL SAYS

**AACHEN:** Germany needs to take action now to prevent a re-run of 2015, when some 890,000 migrants arrived in the country, Chancellor Angela Merkel's Social Democrat challenger for a September election told Reuters yesterday.

In September 2015, Merkel threw open Germany's borders to thousands of migrants to avoid a humanitarian disaster - a move that later hit her popularity and boosted the anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD), though her conservatives have since recovered and support for the AfD has dropped. Martin Schulz, whose Social Democrats

(SPD) are lagging far behind Merkel in the polls ahead of a Sept. 24 election, warned against a repeat scenario after more than 93,000 mainly sub-Saharan African and Bangladeshi migrants have arrived by boat in southern Italy so far in 2017, up 17 percent on the same period last year.

"The numbers in Italy are worrying - thousands per day," he said in an interview in the western German city of Aachen. "If we don't want a repeat of what we experienced in 2015 we need to take action now as the Italians are reaching their limit in terms of what they can do." Other European Union

countries need to help Italy, such as by taking in refugees, he added.

### Logistical help

Schulz said he had spoken to European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker yesterday about what financial or logistical help Brussels might be able to offer countries prepared to take in refugees and said he would speak to both the Italian government and the Commission about this during the week. In an interview with the Bild am Sonntag newspaper, Schulz said the situation was "highly explosive" and suggested he wanted to

turn it into an election campaign issue, saying: "Those who play for time and try to ignore the topic until the election are acting in a very cynical way."

Migrant arrivals in Germany have been far lower this year than in the previous two years, with data from the Interior Ministry showing the number of new arrivals seeking asylum fell to 90,389 in the first half of 2017, about half as many as in the year-earlier period. Last year, some 280,000 migrants arrived in Germany - a sharp drop compared with 2015 - and the refugee issue has not yet played a major role in the election campaign. —Reuters

The latest Emnid poll showed Merkel's conservatives on 38 percent and the SPD on 25 percent. Horst Seehofer, leader of the Christian Social Union (CSU) - the Bavarian sister party to Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU) - told the Welt am Sonntag newspaper the situation was calm now but added: "We all know that the wave of migrants will continue." The CSU, which takes a tougher tone on migrants than Merkel's CDU, has long called for an upper limit on the numbers arriving and Seehofer yesterday repeated his call for a cap of 200,000 per year. Merkel has rejected a cap. —Reuters

## DIVIDED UK, UNCERTAIN ELECTION COULD PUT THE BRAKES ON BREXIT

### WORK ON EU DIVORCE HAS ALREADY SLOWED TO A CRAWL

**LONDON:** Lucy Harris thinks Britain's decision to leave the European Union is a dream come true. Nick Hopkinson thinks it's a nightmare. The two Britons - a "leave" supporter and a "remainer" - represent the great divide in a country that stepped into the unknown just over a year ago, when British voters decided by 52 percent to 48 percent to end more than four decades of EU membership.

They are also as uncertain as the rest of the country about what Brexit will look like, and even when it will happen. Since the shock referendum result, work on negotiating the divorce from the EU has slowed to a crawl as the scale and complexity of the challenge becomes clearer. Harris, founder of the pro-Brexit group Leavers of London, says she is hopeful, rather than confident, that Britain will really cut its ties with the EU.

"If we haven't finalized it, then anything's still up for grabs," she said. "Everything is still to play for." She's not the only Brexiteer, as those who support leaving the EU are called, to be concerned. After an election last month clipped the wings of Britain's Conservative government, remainers are gaining in confidence. "Since the general election I've been more optimistic that at least we're headed toward soft Brexit, and hopefully we can reverse Brexit altogether," said Hopkinson, chairman of pro-EU group London4Europe. "Obviously the government is toughing it out, showing a brave face. But I think its brittle attitude toward Brexit will break and snap."

### New divide

Many on both sides of the divide had assumed the picture would be clearer by now. But the road to Brexit has not run smoothly. First the British government lost a Supreme Court battle over whether a vote in Parliament was needed to begin the Brexit process. Once the vote was held, and won, Prime Minister Theresa May's Conservative government officially triggered the two-year countdown to exit, starting a race to untangle four decades of intertwined laws and regulations by March 2019.

Then, May called an early election in a bid



**LONDON:** In this Saturday, June 25, 2016 file photo, the front pages of Britain's newspapers report on the EU referendum result. —AP

to strengthen her hand in EU negotiations. Instead, voters stripped May's Conservatives of their parliamentary majority, severely denting May's authority - and her ability to hold together a party split between its pro- and anti-EU wings. Since the June 8 election, government ministers have been at war, providing the media with a string of disparaging, anonymously sourced stories about one another. Much of the sniping has targeted Treasury chief Philip Hammond, the most senior minister in favor of a compromise "soft Brexit" to cushion the economic shock of leaving the bloc.

The result is a disunited British government and an increasingly impatient EU. EU officials have slammed British proposals so far as vague and inadequate. The first substantive round of divorce talks in Brussels last week failed to produce a breakthrough, as the EU's chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, said Britain must clarify its positions in key areas. Barnier said "fundamental" differences

remain on one of the biggest issues - the status of 3 million EU citizens living in Britain and 1 million UK nationals who reside in other European countries. A British proposal to grant permanent residency to Europeans in the UK was dismissed by the European Parliament as insufficient and burdensome. There's also a fight looming over the multi-billion-euro bill that Britain must pay to meet previous commitments it made as an EU member. British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson recently asserted the bloc could "go whistle" if it thought Britain would settle a big exit tab.

### Britain's goals

"I am not hearing any whistling. Just the clock ticking," Barnier replied. EU officials insist there can be no discussion of a future trade deal with Britain until "sufficient progress" has been made on citizens' rights, the exit bill and the status of the Irish border. "We don't seem to be much further on now

than we were just after the referendum," said Tim Bale, professor of politics at Queen Mary University of London. "I'm not sure anybody knows just how this is going to go. I'm not sure the government has got its negotiating goals sorted. I'm not sure the EU really knows what (Britain's goals) are either."

"I think we are going to find it very, very hard to meet this two-year deadline before we crash out." The prospect of tumbling out of the bloc - with its frictionless single market in goods and services - and into a world of tariffs and trade barriers has given Britain's economy the jitters. The pound has lost more than 10 percent of its value against the dollar in the last year, economic growth has slowed and manufacturing output has begun to fall.

Employers' organization the Confederation of British Industry says the uncertainty is threatening jobs. The group says to ease the pain, Britain should remain in the EU's single market and customs union during a transitional period after Brexit. That idea has support from many lawmakers, both Conservative and Labour, but could bring the wrath of pro-Brexit Conservatives down on the already shaky May government. That could trigger a party leadership challenge or even a new election - and more delays and chaos.

In the meantime, there is little sign the country has heeded May's repeated calls to unite. A post-referendum spike in hate crimes against Europeans and others has subsided, but across the country families have fought and friendships have been strained over Brexit. "It has created divisions that just weren't there," said Hopkinson, who calls the forces unleashed by Brexit a "nightmare."

On that, he and Harris agree. Harris set up Leavers of London as a support group after finding her views out of synch with many others in her 20-something age group. "I was fed up with being called a xenophobe," she said. "You start this conversation and it gets really bad very quickly." She strongly believes Britain will be better off outside the EU. But, she predicts: "We're in for a bumpy ride, both sides." —AP

## CALIFORNIA WILDFIRE SLOWS, RESIDENTS TRY TO RECOVER

**LOS ANGELES:** Steve Valdez was back at work Saturday at a hardware store, days after his home and those of his neighbors were incinerated in a gigantic wildfire that swept through a rural area of California near Yosemite National Park. "This is a hardware store in a small town. There are people out there who depend upon us to get power, to get water, to get their equipment fixed," said Valdez, a clerk at Coast Hardware Do It Best in Mariposa. "They're getting stuff to get by."

The aggressive wildfire sweeping through the Sierra Nevada foothills covered with dense brush and dead trees has destroyed 60 homes and 64 other buildings. It spared Mariposa, a historic Gold Rush-era town but burned homes nearby. The blaze that erupted on July 16 scorched nearly 118 square miles (305 sq. kilometers) of trees and grass and continued to threaten about 1,500 homes, but its spread had slowed drastically.

"They are still out in front of an uncontrolled fire but the fire isn't moving at 30 mph, the fire is crawling along," fire spokesman Brandon Vaccaro said. Nearly 4,500 firefighters, air tankers and fleets of helicopters and bulldozers fought the blaze by chopping firebreaks and dumping rivers of water and fire retardant.

### Wet winter

The blaze fed on long grass that sprouted from a wet winter along with brush that had been struck by five years of drought and trees killed off by a beetle infestation. In some places, the

flames were so fierce that "every bit of vegetation is gone and you're down to the scorched earth," Vaccaro said. The fire grew by up to 30,000 acres a day at its peak, but by the weekend the growth rate was down to about 1,000 acres a day despite dry, blistering weather, he said. The blaze, moving northeast, was 40 percent contained but it could take another two weeks for firefighters to fully surround it, Vaccaro said. The smoke blurred the scenic vistas of Yosemite National Park, about 35 miles west of the fire. Tourists expecting the grandeur of falls and granite peaks instead saw hazy gray silhouettes. Ken Welsh, 60, of New Zealand said he had been prepared to be "blown away by a Technicolor dream" at Yosemite.

He shrugged his shoulders and headed back to the car. "It leaves a lot to the imagination, doesn't it?" he told the Los Angeles Times. At its peak, the blaze forced about 5,000 people to evacuate. Some roads remained closed but Mariposa, with a population of about 2,000, was coming back to life. People were coming into the hardware store for plumbing parts and electrical cords a day after evacuations were lifted.

Valdez said he decided to work even though his 4,400-square-foot home was among those destroyed. "Older people know that everything heals," said Valdez, 60. "Everything gets better if you just keep plugging away." Valdez and his wife had 20 minutes to grab a few photographs, bills and some family Bibles before they fled the encroaching flames. —AP



**CHICAGO:** Dr Shandrea Boyd (R) shoots at a target as instructor Will Smith looks on during her concealed carry certification test at the Eagle Sports gun range. —AFP

## CHICAGO WOMEN WORRIED ABOUT VIOLENCE JOIN UP WITH GUN CLUBS

**OAK FOREST:** Her hands slowed by rheumatoid arthritis, 71-year-old Marietta Crowder stands in front of her paper target, steadies her gun and pulls the trigger. Shots are fired in quick succession. Crowder is perhaps not the typical patron of a gun club. But she is one of seven women learning to safely handle firearms at a shooting range in a suburb of Chicago, a city wracked by gun violence and a soaring murder rate.

"My husband influenced me and we thought about it a long time. Maybe you need a gun these days, in your house at least," said Crowder, who lives in a gated community with her retired banker husband. A fellow retiree, Javondlynn Dunagan, came up with the idea of gun training classes geared toward women, and for the "Ladies of Steel" gun club - after successful training, the women gather twice a month to practice their skills.

Dunagan served as a parole officer for 25 years before finishing her career in January, but had rarely held a gun when dealing with convicts. She said she started carrying one after divorcing her police officer husband. "I was at home by myself with my daughter, and I was used to having a firearm in a home with my ex-husband," she explained. "So, I wanted to make sure that we were safe." But Dunagan noticed something curious when she visited gun ranges around Chicago to practice. "I noticed that I never saw two women at the range together or a group of ladies," she recounted.

### 'Scared of guns'

Dunagan was particularly struck by the lack of African-American women like herself interested in learning how to use firearms. "I started asking friends and they said, 'Yeah, I'm scared of guns.'" That answer prompted her to start JMD Defense & Investigations, offering gun training programs geared towards women. The "investigations" side of the business will debut next year. Dunagan also offers classes such as the "Mommy & Me Self-Defense Class," where women can bring their daughters, ages 8-18 years, to learn hand-to-hand combat.

"That came about because my daughter was going to college four years ago and she couldn't find a self-defense class on the south side of Chicago," Dunagan said. Her clients are from the predominantly African-American communities in Chicago's south side, in or near neighborhoods struggling with runaway gun violence.

Chicago does not have the worst crime rate in the nation, but owing to its large population-it's the third-biggest US city-it has seen a staggering number of killings and shootings. By mid-July, there had been 1,557 shootings and 369 people murdered so far this year, according to the Chicago Police Department. Gangs and the drug trade are behind most of the shootings, and they are indiscriminate. Just this week, a 78-year-old man was wounded in one shooting, and a six-year-old girl and her four-year-old brother were wounded in another. All survived. —AFP



**MARIPOSA:** An air tanker drops retardant while battling a wildfire. —AP

## News

in brief

### Shoot drug traffickers who resist: Indonesia Prez

**JAKARTA:** Indonesia's President Joko Widodo has ordered the police to shoot drug traffickers who resist arrest in the latest effort to eradicate drug use in the country. In a speech to one of Indonesia's political parties late Friday, Widodo urged law enforcers to crack-down on drug dealers in Indonesia. "Be firm. Especially to foreign drug dealers who enter the country. If they resist even the slightest, just shoot them," Widodo said. The Indonesian Narcotics Agency recorded there are 6 million drug users in the archipelago out of its 255 million people, a situation the president labeled "drug emergency." But Widodo's remarks prompted criticism from human rights activists.

### Tibetan student sets himself alight in India

**NEW DELHI:** A Tibetan student who self-immolated in an act of protest against Chinese rule in the Himalayan region has died in an Indian hospital, a doctor said yesterday. Tenzin Choeying, 19, succumbed to critical burn injuries in New Delhi a week after shouting "Victory to Tibet" and setting fire to himself at a university campus in Varanasi, in India's northern Uttar Pradesh state. "He died on Saturday days after he was shifted from a Varanasi hospital for specialized treatment," a medical superintendent said. His body will be handed over to the authorities after a postmortem.

### Indian gang held for stealing 50 million liters of crude oil

**NEW DELHI:** Police in Rajasthan have cracked a criminal syndicate accused of smuggling more than 50 million liters of crude oil inside water tankers from India's largest onshore oilfield, an official said yesterday. The theft at the Cairn India oilfield went undetected for nearly six years until police in the western desert state arrested 25 people this week for involvement in the sophisticated smuggling network. Local media reported \$7.75 million worth of oil could have been stolen in total from the oilfield run by a subsidiary of British mining giant Vedanta Resources.

### Robot finds possible melted fuel in Fukushima reactor

**TOKYO:** Lava-like rocks believed to be melted nuclear fuel have been spotted inside Japan's stricken Fukushima reactor by an underwater robot, the plant's operator said at the end of a three-day inspection. Large amounts of the solidified lumps and deposit were spotted for the first time by the robot on the floor of the primary containment vessel underneath the core of Fukushima's No. 3 reactor, the Tokyo Electric Power Co (TEPCO) said. "There is a high possibility that the solidified objects are mixtures of melted metal and fuel that fell from the vessel," a TEPCO spokesman said, adding that the company was planning further analysis of the images.

### Mass protest calls to curb incense burning in Taiwan

**TAIPEI:** The sound of clanging cymbals and blaring horns filled downtown Taipei yesterday as thousands marched in a colorful Taoist procession, protesting a government call to cut back on the burning of incense sticks. About 100 temples took part in the demonstration, where performers carried statues of Taoist gods on their shoulders while others danced in larger-than-life costumes. Taipei police said more than 10,000 people took part in the protest. Officials have been pushing to curb the practice of burning incense sticks and paper money along with lighting firecrackers to combat pollution on the island. —Agencies

## RUSSIANS MARCH AGAINST STATE INTERNET CRACKDOWN

**MOSCOW:** Around 1,000 people marched through central Moscow yesterday to protest against the government's harsh legislative controls on the internet. Demonstrators at the rally, which was authorized by city authorities, shouted slogans including "No to censorship, no to dictatorship!" and "Down with the police state!" Some adapted a popular slogan from opposition rallies against President Vladimir Putin's rule, shouting "Russia without Putin and censorship!" Police said that around 800 people attended the protest, which was organized by Pamas opposition party, headed by former prime minister Mikhail Kasyanov. An AFP journalist estimated the turnout at 1,000 to 1,500.

OVD Info website, which monitors detentions of political activists, said three had been detained, one for giving out leaflets promoting opposition leader Alexei Navalny. Pavel Rassudov, 34, the former head of the Pirate Party campaign group, said at the march that "restrictions on the internet began in 2011," as the opposition to Putin held mass rallies in Moscow. "The authorities realised the Internet was a tool for mobilisation, that it brings people out onto the streets," Rassudov said.

Another marcher, Lyudmila Toporova, 56, said she came to the rally because "Freedom is the most important thing in life. That's why I'm here." Russia in recent years has moved to impose restrictions on internet use, blacklisting web pages for extremist content and prosecuted a growing number of individuals for posting online. Since January 1, internet companies have been required to store all users' personal data at centres in Russia and provide it to the authorities on demand. —AFP