

International

'I feel like I'm going crazy': Migrant health crumbles

Self-harm, attempted suicide on the rise in Greece

ATHENS: A mental health emergency is unfolding in migrant camps on Greece's islands, fuelled by poor living conditions, neglect and violence, charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said yesterday. Medical staff have seen a sharp increase in people trying to get help after attempting suicide, harming themselves or suffering psychotic episodes, it said in a report.

More than 13,000 migrants and refugees, mostly Syrians and Iraqis fleeing years of war, are living in five camps on Greek islands close to Turkey, government figures show. Four of those camps are holding two to three times as many people as they were designed for. "Every day our teams treat patients who tell us that they would prefer to have died in their country than be trapped here," said Jayne Grimes, manager of MSF's mental health activities on the island of Samos.

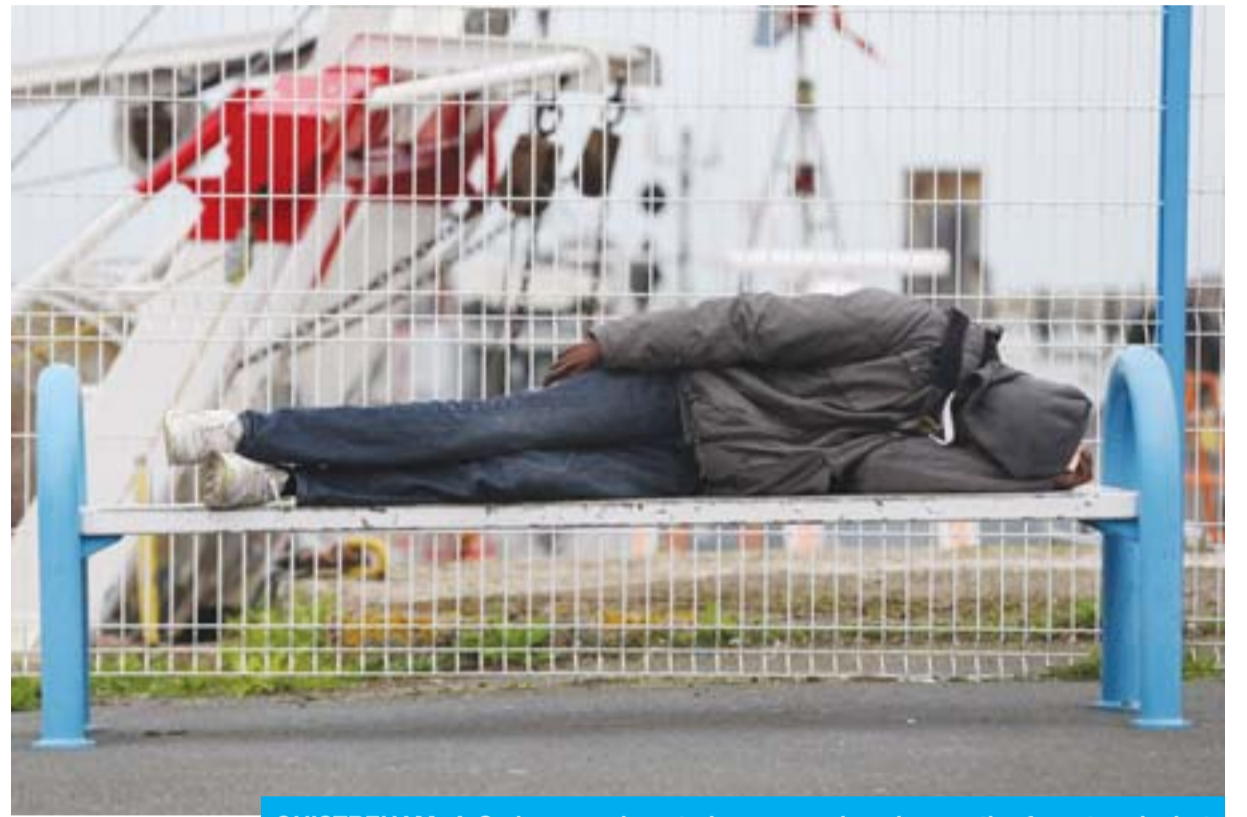
The charity said six or seven new patients had visited its clinic on the nearby island of Lesbos each week over the summer following suicide attempts, self-harm or psychotic episodes, 50 percent more than the previous three months. Violence which many experienced on the journey or in Greece was one factor aggravating mental distress, MSF said. "I know I need to find hope, but when the night falls and I see where I am, I feel like I'm going crazy," it quoted a Syrian

man as saying. The 25-year-old said he was haunted by the images of people dying of hunger in front of him in the long-besieged town of Madaya. "I still remember the taste of the leaves and the smell of death," he said. On Samos, more than 3,000 people are crammed into facilities designed to hold 700, and about 400 live in the woods. In one Lesbos camp, about 1,500 people are in makeshift shelters or tents without flooring or heating, the UN refugee agency says. In August, MSF found nearly three-quarters of new mental health patients on Lesbos needed to be referred to a psychiatrist, up from just over a third in the nine months from October 2016 to June 2017.

The report quoted a 41-year-old man, who said he had been tortured in a Syrian prison. When he visited a Lesbos hospital, he said he was told he would have to wait eight months to see a psychiatrist. "When I heard that, I felt like dying," he said. A 29-year-old Syrian woman, on Lesbos with her family, told the MSF researchers the uncertainty over the future was "crushing us. It is killing us inside." While the number of arrivals to Greece has slowed significantly since a European Union deal with Turkey to block the route in March last year, a recent sharp rise in arrivals has put pressure on government-run facilities.— Reuters



Violence and poor conditions aggravate distress



OUISTREHAM: A Sudanese migrant sleeps on a bench near the ferry terminal at the harbor of Ouistreham, near Caen, northwestern France.—AFP

The rise of Kim Jong-Un's sister and image maker



Kim Yo-Jong (left), vice department director of the Central Committee of the Worker's Party of Korea (WPK) and younger sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un (right), inspect the Sin Islet defense company in Kangwon province. —AFP

SEOUL: With her elevation to North Korea's powerful politburo, leader Kim Jong-Un's little sister—and chief image-maker has established herself as the most powerful woman in the nuclear-armed state's political hierarchy. Kim Yo-Jong's promotion to membership of the North's top decision-making body underlines, analysts say, the level of trust her brother places in one of his closest aides and confidantes. Ruling North Korea has always been a family business, but one where the substantial personal benefits on offer are matched by the potential for a catastrophic—and sometimes fatal—fall from grace.

Kim Jong-Un's half-brother, Jong-Nam died in agony at a Malaysian airport earlier this year, poisoned by nerve agent—wielding assassins in a hit that North Korea watchers say must have been given the nod by the leader himself. Yo-Jong is believed to be in her late 20s, making her the youngest member of the reshuffled Workers' Party politburo that was unveiled at the weekend. She is the only one of Kim Jong-Un's siblings to hold an official title and in a family tree complicated by their father Kim Jong-Il's various marriages and partnerships—enjoys a special relationship with her brother in that they also share the same mother.

"They share a life-long bond and her promotion to the politburo means Kim Jong-Un has complete trust in her," said Professor Yang Moo-Jin of the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul. "She could be the one to take over from Kim in the event of his absence," Yang said. Like her brother, Yo-Jong was partly educated

in Switzerland and her first explicit appearance in North Korea's state media came in 2009 when she accompanied her father on a visit to an agricultural university.

She became a regular member of Kim Jong-Il's entourage until his death in 2011 and featured prominently in official photos of the funeral, mourning alongside her brother. After Kim Jong-Un took over the leadership, her public career in the party propaganda department progressed in leaps and bounds and, in 2014, she was listed as a "vice department director" in the party's central committee. According to Michael Madden, editor of the North Korea Leadership Watch website, her official propaganda role made her "the leading image maker for her brother and (North Korea) as a whole."

With the exception of Kim Jong-Un's wife, Ri Sol-Ju, Yo-Jong is the only relative with whom the supreme leader is known to have a close relationship. External recognition of her position and influence came earlier this year when she was named among

seven North Korean officials targeted with US sanctions for "ongoing and serious human rights abuses and censorship activities." Cheong Seong-Chang a senior researcher at the Sejong Institute think-tank in Seoul said her promotion to the politburo presaged a more visible presence at the top of the political hierarchy. "She is expected to play increasingly greater roles down the road," Cheong said.

North Korea watchers have long speculated that Yo-Jong was being groomed to play the same leadership supporting role as her once powerful aunt, Kim Kyong-Hui. Kyong-Hui was a close aide to her own brother and late leader Kim Jong-Il for decades, assuming senior positions in the party and becoming a four-star general in 2010. But she largely disappeared from public view after her husband Jang Song-Thaek was executed in 2013 for charges including treason. She and Jang had been seen as the ultimate Pyongyang power couple, and instrumental in smoothing Kim Jong-Un's transition to power, before Jang fell from grace.— AFP

it from us," he said. Commons make up more than a third of India's total land area. They include grazing grounds, some forest land, ponds, rivers and other areas that all members of a rural community can access and use. They provide food, water, fodder, firewood and livelihoods to rural communities, particularly the poor, while also helping recharge groundwater and maintain the land's ecological balance.

As the population grew and demand for land rose, commons were taken over for industrial and development projects, including roads, mines, power plants and homes. "Access to the commons and its resources has long been a customary right of rural communities," said Shantanu Sinha Roy, a manager at advocacy Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) which helped Hastinapur regain control of its commons. "But that right has been increasingly denied. When communities regain control, their livelihoods improve, and the land regains its original character, with the soil and water conserved," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Insecure rights

The majority of land conflicts in India are related to common land, according to a study by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Common land in India has deteriorated by about half over the last five decades because of encroachments, insecure tenure rights for local communities and a lack of trust in communities in managing them, according to data from FES. Many were classified as "wastelands" or government land and diverted for quarrying, biofuel cultivation, mines and other commercial purposes, displacing and depriving local communities.—Reuters

Thousands turn out for Myanmar interfaith prayer

YANGON: Tens of thousands of people filled a football stadium in Yangon for an interfaith prayer ceremony yesterday, a show of unity in a country seared by ethnically-charged violence against the Muslim Rohingya on its western border.

Buddhist monks, nuns, Christians Hindus and Muslims were among those that poured into the arena to pray for peace in Myanmar's western Rakhine state—the epicenter of brutal communal bloodshed that erupted in late August.

The border region was plunged into crisis after Rohingya militants attacked police posts, sparking a military backlash that has driven more than half a million of the Muslim minority from their homes. The mass exodus of refugees has shocked and alarmed the globe, with the UN accusing the army of waging an ethnic cleansing campaign against a group that has faced years of persecution. But the conflict is viewed differently inside mainly Buddhist Myanmar, where the Rohingya are widely loathed and branded as foreign invaders, despite their long roots in the country.—AFP

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Al Shuhada Street, P.O. Box 26302 Safat 13124 Kuwait
Tel: (965) 2245 5550 - Fax: (965) 2243 8391
mhrs.kw@jwmarriott.com
jwmarriottkuwait.com
dining@jwmarriottkuwait.com

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KUWAIT CITY

Villagers in Rajasthan reclaim common land with maps and petitions

HASTINAPUR: It took residents of Hastinapur village in the Indian state of Rajasthan three years of poring over maps, demarcating boundaries, and numerous petitions and visits to local officials to regain control of their traditional common land. But the wait - and the effort - were worth it, they say. The 35 hectares of land now registered to the community have changed the lives of the 50 families because they are now able to safely graze their cattle, meet most of their need of fodder and firewood, and supplement their incomes.

The lush green grounds teeming with native trees and scrub were once arid, encroached by a neighboring village. They are testament to the success the state has had with restoring the commons even as industrial demand for land rises. "Before we got back the land, the women had to walk some distance to graze the cattle, cut firewood, and we had to buy additional fodder," Gopal Jat, a village elder, said as he sat in the shade of a leafy jamun tree.

"Now we can graze our cattle without worries, the women and children need not go anywhere else for fodder or firewood, and we earn some money from selling produce. It took time, but this is our land now, no one can take