

Group of weary refugees stuck at border

Associated Press

TABANOVCE, Macedonia — Yousif Shikhmous had such high hopes of starting a new life in Germany that when his son was born, the Syrian refugee named him Merkel. Only four months later, Shikhmous has seen all those dreams shattered after he and his family boarded what has become known as “The Last Train to Europe.”

The group of about 400 refugees from Syria and Iraq were among the last to enter Macedonia from Greece, where they got stuck this week when the Balkan countries started closing their borders, abruptly shutting the main migrant pathway to Europe.

The group of mostly women and small children had caught a northbound train that took them to the border with Serbia. But instead of moving on, they found themselves in a no-man’s-land between the Macedonian and Serbian frontiers — mired in a muddy limbo created by the latest chaos marking Europe’s worst migration crisis since World War II.

Thousands of people now are similarly stuck along the route through the Balkans that saw more than 1 million people surge out of Turkey, through Greece and toward the wealthier nations of Europe in 2015.

Refused permission to move onward, they are caught by the suddenly changing entry rules and living in dire conditions in small, donated tents. And more people fleeing war and poverty keep streaming out of the Middle East and elsewhere.

About 14,000 people are stranded on the Greek side of the border with Macedonia, and authorities hope to start relocating most of them from an overcrowded refugee camp there in the coming weeks. Tensions are running so high at the camp near the Greek village of Idomeni that fights over food broke out Friday as aid organizations distributed the supplies, leaving some people bloodied and limping.

It took two months for the Shikhmous family — 32-year-old Yousif, his 20-year-old wife, Dilan Haji, and young Merkel — to escape the Syrian civil war. Their journey began in the town of Hasaka in north-eastern Syria, where their son was born and named for German Chancellor Angela Merkel, even though they spell his name differently.

They went via Turkey and over the Aegean Sea to Greece, crossed the Greece-Macedonia border on foot, and boarded a special train to take the refugees to Serbia, paying about \$28



AP Photo/Boris Grdanoski

Syrian refugees try to light a fire in the mud among tents, in an improvised camp on the border line between Macedonia and Serbia near the northern Macedonian village of Tabanovce on Friday.



AP Photo/Boris Grdanoski

A Syrian refugee girl kneels on a tent, as men stand in front, in an improvised camp on the border line Friday.

per person.

They reached the Serbian border Monday, where they got off the train to cross the frontier on foot and be taken to a refugee center for processing to continue the journey north.

But nations along the Balkans route have been tightening border restrictions this month on migrants and refugees. This week, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia suddenly refused them transit.

The Shikhmous family and the other refugees never made it across the Serbian border, having been told it had been shut to them for good. Still technically in Macedonia, they can see the Serbian border police patrol about

50 yards away.

They also learned that Macedonian authorities would no longer take them, having already stamped their papers.

They found themselves trapped, with no shelter or help. For four nights, they have been staying in a sodden field.

“We want them to open the border and to go to Germany,” Shikhmous said. “I am waiting here for the border to open.”

They stayed in the field, with border police keeping guard behind barricades. As heavy rain started falling, the vast grass field turned into pools of water and ankle-deep mud, strewn with garbage and small fires for warmth.

Obama: ‘Absolutist’ view won’t solve encryption debate

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — President Barack Obama said Friday that the encryption versus national security debate, currently being played out in Apple’s legal fight against the federal government, won’t be settled by taking an “absolutist view.”

Addressing an audience of tech enthusiasts meeting in the Texas capital, Obama said both values are important.

He restated his commitment to strong encryption, but also asked how will government catch child pornographers or disrupt terrorist plots if smartphones and other electronic devices are made ways that keep law enforcement from accessing the data stored on them.

“My conclusion, so far, is you cannot take an absolutist view on this,” Obama said at the South by Southwest Interactive festival.

During a question-and-answer session with Evan Smith, CEO and editor in chief of *The Texas Tribune*, Smith asked Obama “where do you come down” on the question of balancing law enforcement’s needs with an individual’s right to privacy.

Obama said government shouldn’t be able to “just willy nilly” get into smartphones that are full of very personal data. But at the same time, while asserting he’s “way on the civil liberties side,” Obama said “there has to be some concession” to be able to get to the information in certain cases.

The president was not asked to comment on the litigation between Apple and the FBI.

Apple and the federal government are embroiled in a legal fight over Apple’s refusal to help the FBI access

an iPhone used in last year’s terrorist attack San Bernardino, California, in which 14 people were killed. The FBI wants Apple to create a program specifically for that particular phone to help the bureau review the data on it. Apple has refused, and says to do what the government is asking would set a terrible precedent.

Obama used his appearance at the decades-old festival to encourage the audience of tech enthusiasts to use their skills and imagination to “tackle big problems in new ways.” He said the administration is using technology to make people’s lives better, and cited as an example the streamlining of federal applications. But he urged industry leaders and entrepreneurs to use technology to help increase voter participation.

Climate fingerprints still valid if found in wild weather

By SETH BORENSTEIN
AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON

Climate science has progressed so much that experts can accurately detect global warming’s fingerprints on certain extreme weather events, such as a heat wave, according to a high-level scientific advisory panel.

For years scientists have given almost a rote response to the question of whether an instance of weird weather was from global warming, insisting that they can’t attribute any single event to climate change. But “the science has advanced to the point that this is no longer true as an unqualified blanket statement,” the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine reported.

Starting in 2004, dozens of complex peer-reviewed studies found the odds of some extreme events — but by no means all — were goosed by man-made climate change. This new field of finding global warming fingerprints is scientifically valid, the academies said in a 163-page report released Friday. The private non-profit has advised the government on complex, science-oriented issues since the days of President Abraham Lincoln.

When it comes to heat waves, droughts, heavy rain and some other events, scientists who do rigorous research can say whether they were more likely or more severe because of man-made global warming, said academies report chairman David Titley, a Pennsylvania State University meteorology professor. And that matters.

“While we plan for climate, we live in weather,” Titley, a retired Navy admiral, said in an interview. “These extremes are making climate real when in fact they are attributable to climate change.”

Not all weird weather can be blamed with any degree of certainty on global warming, according to the report.

“For a certain class and type of event there is a human fingerprint,” said report co-author Marshall Shepherd, a University of Georgia meteorology professor. The report says there is “high confidence” in studies looking for climate change connections between extreme hot and cold temperatures, such as the Russian heat wave of 2010. There’s medium confidence in efforts trying to attribute droughts and extreme rainfall.

Hurricanes and other tropical cyclones, wildfires and severe thunderstorms are on the low end of the confidence

range, the report found.

In some cases heat and lack of rain combine and the studies find a viable connection to global warming, such as in the recent four-year California drought and the drought that hit Syria and neighbors, Titley said.

“The fog of uncertainty that obscured the human role in individual events is finally lifting,” said Princeton University professor Michael Oppenheimer. He wasn’t part of the study, but is on the board of Climate Central, which manages a large climate attribution project.

Good attribution studies are based on what Titley calls a “three-legged stool” of observational records of decades of past events, detailed understanding of the physics that cause the weird weather itself, and sophisticated computer models that simulate the chances of the extreme event if there were no man-made, heat-trapping gases warming the atmosphere.

“It’s just like an autopsy,” said Martin Hoerling, a National Oceanic Atmospheric and Administration research meteorologist who has conducted several attribution studies, finding a climate change connection in some events and not finding a link in others. “We’re following the data wherever it goes.”

Titley said attribution studies are “based in physical science and statistics that don’t value Republicans or Democrats. The ice just melts. This has nothing to do with politics.”

These studies don’t say an event was 100 percent caused by climate change. They usually say chances were increased by a certain fraction.

Katharine Hayhoe, a Texas Tech climate scientist who wasn’t part of the study, praised the work: It is “very important to clarify to people how no event is black or white: No individual weather event can be said to be ‘solely’ human nor ‘solely’ natural any more. They are somewhere on the sliding scale between.”

But other scientists don’t like the idea of looking at single events.

Climate change caused by man “has fingerprints in every weather event we experience today,” wrote Oklahoma University meteorology professor Jason Furtado, who wasn’t part of the study. “Disentangling the contribution of climate change with natural variability for a single event is not fruitful or currently possible in my opinion.”

Teen finds possible MH370 debris

The Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG — A South African teenager vacationing in Mozambique may have found part of a wing from missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, which his family dismissed as “rubbish” and his mother nearly threw away, he said Friday.

On Dec. 30, Liam Lotter was strolling on a beach in southern Mozambique, near the resort town of Xai Xai, when he spotted a gray piece of debris washed up on the sand, he recalled. It had rivet holes along the edge and the number 676EB stamped on it, convincing him he had found a piece of an aircraft. So he dragged the piece back to his family’s vacation home.

“It was so waterlogged at that time, it was quite heavy. I struggled to pick it up,” he told The Associated Press in a telephone interview. The curved piece of debris is about 3.3 feet long, and about half that length wide, his father Casper Lotter said.

His parents dismissed it as a “piece of rubbish” that was probably debris from a boat, with his uncle making fun of him for dragging it around, but the 18-year-old insisted on bringing it back to South Africa to research the fragment.



Candace Lotter via AP

Liam Lotter poses with a piece of debris thought to be part of the missing Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370, in Wartburg 22 miles out of Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, Friday.

“He was adamant he wanted to bring it home because it had a number on it,” said Casper Lotter, adding that his son is not an aviation enthusiast but was simply drawn to the piece of debris.

Back home in Wartburg in KwaZulu-Natal province, the piece was stored with the

family’s angling gear and almost forgotten as Lotter focused on his final year in high school. His mother even tried to throw it out, he said.

The Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777 jet vanished with 239 people on board while flying from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing on March 8, 2014.

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