

THE WORLD



PHOTOS BY THOMAS DE WOUTERS

BORN AS A REFUGEE

Many mothers give birth along the migrant route to Europe

BY NICK KIRKPATRICK

Lamar took his very first steps next to a barbed-wire fence.

Just outside of his mother's tent, the fence was known by nearly 60,000 migrants trapped in Greece as another hurdle in their long journey deeper into Europe. Before the Idomeni camp in Greece was cleared in May, it was on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe — a way station for as many as 14,000 desperate asylum seekers like Lamar's mother, Shaimaa.

Shaimaa, 26, said earlier this year that she had left her home in Deir al-Zour, Syria, four years ago and hoped to get to Germany to join her husband. Her son Lamar was born in Turkey during her journey to Europe. He is one of many children born along the migrant route in countries foreign to their parents.

"Are we all ready to accept these newborns as Europeans?" photographer Thomas de Wouters asks. De Wouters spent several months this year in Greece, Macedonia and Serbia photographing migrant mothers-to-be, whose children will be born in Europe. He refers to them as the "first European refugees."

"The pictures plunge the public into the reality of those children who live their very first days on the European soil," De Wouters wrote in an artist's statement.

The series is part of a larger project that reflects on the responsibility of Europeans in the face of disunity. The photographer doesn't provide answers, just a glimpse of humanity in the lives of his subjects.

"Is it enough to be born in a country to acquire citizenship? The question is political but also moral," he said. "Newborns on the European soil lead us to reflect on our own consciousness, to look deep inside us, and to question our responsibilities."

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TOP: Shaimaa, who left Syria four years earlier, watches her son Lamar take his first steps at the Idomeni refugee camp in Greece. Shaimaa was hoping to get to Germany to join her husband.

ABOVE: Four-day-old Siwar, the seventh child of Iraqi parents Shami and Saba, was born in Gevgelija, Macedonia.



LEFT: In Macedonia, Jamila, 21, was seven months pregnant with her third child. She and her husband, Taha, fled Syria.

ABOVE: Avian was 23 and seven months pregnant when she was photographed in Idomeni, Greece, with her younger brother and her parents, Muhamed and Rania. They are from Syria.

DIGEST

IRAQ

Militants driven from town near famed ruins

Iraqi troops entered a town south of Mosul on Sunday near where Islamic State militants destroyed artifacts at an ancient Assyrian archaeological site, while special forces fended off suicide bombers during a cautious advance into the northern city.

The push into Nimrud was the most significant gain in several days for government forces, potentially opening up the area for teams to assess the damage done to the famed ruins just outside the town.

Troops are converging from several fronts on Mosul, the biggest urban area under Islamic State control, as part of an offensive launched last month.

The special forces have advanced the farthest and hold a handful of districts on the city's eastern edge, but their progress has slowed in the face of fierce resistance in dense urban

neighborhoods.

The operation's commander said troops took Nimrud, about 19 miles south of Mosul, after heavy fighting. It was unclear whether they had liberated the nearby 13th-century B.C. archaeological site, which the Islamic State destroyed with explosives, according to videos they released.

Col. John Dorrian, a U.S. military spokesman, lauded the "important gain" but warned, "As Iraqi forces get closer to Mosul, everything becomes more difficult as they like to leave behind a few fighters to spoil the advance."

— *Associated Press*

BULGARIA

Leader resigns after party's election loss

Bulgarian Prime Minister Boiko Borisov announced his resignation after exit polls showed his party losing badly in Sunday's runoff presidential election.

Surveys by several polling

organizations showed Rumen Radev, 53, a former nonpartisan chief of the air force, taking about 58 percent of the vote.

Tsetska Tsacheva, 58, a lawyer and member of Borisov's center-right party, had about 36 percent.

The new president will have to grapple with a possible rise in migrants from neighboring Turkey and growing tensions between Russia and the West.

In the first round of voting, Radev surprisingly finished first with 25 percent of the vote, followed by Tsacheva with 22 percent.

Bulgaria, which joined the European Union a decade ago, remains the poorest member of the 28-nation bloc. It also is a NATO member, but many Bulgarians still feel a cultural and historical affinity with Russia.

— *Associated Press*

BURMA

Fierce fighting reported in Rakhine state

Burma's government on

Sunday reported fierce fighting in the western state of Rakhine, where the army has been conducting counterinsurgency operations since nine police officers were killed in attacks along the border with Bangladesh last month.

The fighting, reported in an Information Ministry statement, comes as human rights groups have been accusing the army of abuses against members of the Muslim Rohingya ethnic minority, especially since last month's attacks. Recent reports accuse soldiers of killing, raping and burning the homes of the long-persecuted Rohingya.

The statement said government troops were ambushed Saturday morning by about 60 attackers armed with guns, knives and spears. It said one soldier and at least six attackers were killed, adding that an army officer died in a later battle against 500 armed men, which ended when two air force helicopters joined the fight.

The attackers weren't identified, but the army has

aligned with Rakhine Buddhists against Rohingya since intercommunal conflict erupted in 2012.

Although many Rohingya have lived in Burma for generations, they are widely regarded as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

— *Associated Press*

Violence kills dozens in northern Syria

At least 11 children were among 23 people killed in northern Syria as pro-government forces kept up their campaign against opposition areas in the country's north, while rebels shelled a government-held district in Aleppo city. The state news agency said the shelling killed four people. At least eight other people were killed in a suspected airstrike on a crossing point connecting Kurdish-held areas with rebel areas in northern Aleppo province, Kurdish forces said. The violence comes a day after troops repelled a rebel offensive on western parts of Aleppo city launched in October.

Pro-Russia candidate likely to

win Moldova election: Igor Dodon, a pro-Moscow candidate for president, appeared poised to win the presidential election in Moldova, netting about 56 percent of the vote with nearly 90 percent of the ballots counted. Dodon has promised to restore ties with Moscow. Rival Maia Sandu, a former World Bank official, was polling at 44 percent. Dodon has tapped into popular anger at corruption under the pro-European government.

Israeli bill to recognize West Bank outposts is approved: An Israeli committee approved a bill that, if adopted, would legalize outposts built without government permission in the West Bank, territory that Palestinians seek for their future state. It still needs to pass several stages before it can be adopted. The bill was partly meant to stop the evacuation of the Amona outpost. The Supreme Court ruled that it was built on private Palestinian land and must be demolished by Dec. 25.

— *From news services*