

She was born without legs, but she didn't stop trying

AFP | Serjilla, Syria

Eight-year-old Maya Merhi had to struggle around a Syrian displaced persons camp on artificial limbs made of plastic tubing and tin cans.

But now the girl, who was born with no legs due to a congenital condition, is walking on new prosthetics after undergoing treatment in Turkey.

Pictures of her plight in Syria, were seen around the world in June, and she was taken to Istanbul for the life-changing procedure.

Dressed in a pink sweater and matching shoes, Maya on Saturday was able for the first

walk along the rutted roads of the Serjilla camp after arriving back.

Finally she joined in the games and dancing with the other children.

"I was so happy when I saw her walking," says her father Mohammed, sitting in their makeshift tent.

"The whole family and all our loved ones were so happy."

Mohammed suffers the same condition as his daughter, known as congenital amputation

which means the person is born without lower limbs.

He cobbled together the homemade prosthetics on which she used to shuffle around the camp.

Originally from Aleppo region, the father and daughter had to move to rebel-held Idlib province as fighting from Syria's civil war began to rage around their home.

After the pictures of Maya's difficulties sparked attention across the globe, the Turkish Red Crescent intervened.

The father and

daughter were evacuated from Syria by the Turkish authorities and brought to Istanbul for treatment at a specialised clinic.

Mohammed received prosthetic limbs as well, but admits that he isn't yet as steady on them as his daughter.

Sitting on a foam mattress, his daughter unwraps the artificial legs and attaches them.

"To begin with there were difficulties getting used to them," says her uncle Hussein, who accompanied his brother and niece to Turkey.

"All of a sudden she found herself up high on the new prosthetics."



Maya Merhi removes her artificial legs inside a tent at the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp of Serjilla



Maya Merhi (L) poses for a picture with the support of crutches next to her brother and disabled father



Maya Merhi (C) stands among her friends in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp of Serjilla in northwestern Syria, next to Bab al-Hawa border crossing with Turkey

Syrian Maya Merhi poses for a picture in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp of Serjilla in northwestern Syria next to Bab al-Hawa border crossing with Turkey. Eight-year-old Maya, born with no legs due to a congenital condition, had to struggle around the Syrian camp on artificial limbs made of plastic tubing and tin cans. Today, the girl can walk thanks to her new prosthetics after undergoing treatment in Turkey.

Siberian serial killer cop convicted of more murders

AFP | Moscow, Russia

ASiberian policeman who raped and killed women after offering them late-night rides was found guilty of dozens more murders yesterday, making him Russia's most prolific serial killer of recent times.

A court in the city of Irkutsk found Mikhail Popkov guilty of 56 murders between 1992 and 2007, sentencing him to a second life term. He was already in prison after being convicted of killing 22 women in 2015.

Popkov offered rides to women late at night, sometimes in his police car, while off-duty around his city of Angarsk near Irkutsk.

He killed them using weapons including a hammer and an axe, then dumped their bodies in the woods, at the side of the road and in a local cemetery.

He was also found guilty of raping 10 of the women.

Popkov described himself as a "cleaner" who was purging his home city of prostitutes. All but one of his victims were women between the ages of 16 and 40.



Mikhail Popkov stands inside a defendants' cage during a court hearing in Irkutsk

His other victim was a policeman.

The grey-haired 54-year-old appeared in court in prison uniform, his head bowed, Russian television showed. He will be

sent to a prison that is exclusively for convicts serving life terms, nicknamed the "Black Dolphin."

As part of his sentence -- a rare case in Russia of a convicted murderer being given a second

life sentence -- Popkov was also deprived of his police pension.

Covered his tracks

Prosecutors have described Popkov as having "a pathologi-



Popkov was caught in 2012 after investigators re-examined the case and carried out DNA testing of residents, focusing on those who drove a make of car that matched tracks found at crime scenes

cal attraction to killing people" but he was ruled sane enough to stand trial. Investigators had suspected a policeman was behind the crime because of the way the killer covered his tracks.

The murders took place while he was a serving police officer and after he left the force in 1998. In a 2017 interview with

Russia's Meduza website, Popkov said he gave women lifts and targeted those who were drunk or living in a way he saw as immoral, saying that "any society condemns the behaviour of a debauched woman".

While already in jail, he confessed to 59 further murders but was convicted only of 56 on Monday because investigators had not managed to prove three of the crimes took place, *Interfax news agency* reported, citing the court's press service.

Investigators said they uncovered the remains of some of the victims' bodies based on Popkov's account, as well as finding murder weapons including axes, chisels and knives.

The number of killings for which he has been convicted exceeds the totals of several notorious murderers in Russia and the ex-Soviet Union.

"Chessboard Killer" Alexander Pichushkin was sentenced to life in prison in 2007 for 48 murders and Andrei Chikatilo was convicted of 52 Soviet-era murders.