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Carrum Downs to a Congo jail

The amazing African adventures
of Jayden Irving

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Labor admits mistakes as arrivals hit 45,953

EXCLUSIVE
Samantha Maiden

LABOR is moving to unpick its failed asylum-seeker policy by cracking down on those who destroy their passports before boarding boats to Australia.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd admits Labor has made mistakes in its handling of asylum seekers, with 45,953 having arrived here by boat under its watch.

Foreign Affairs Minister Bob Carr warned that without action, people smugglers would control Australia's immigration program and unauthorised arrivals by boat could reach 40,000 people a year.

The *Sunday Herald Sun* can reveal that Labor will introduce changes to try to stem the flow of boat arrivals, including 223 people in the past four days.

These include moving against people who deliberately destroy their passports or ID papers before boarding people-smuggling boats in Indonesia.

These people will now go to the back of the processing queue.

Also, the Government will seek new deals with Indonesia and other countries similar to that which exists with Sri Lanka, which allows us to send bogus asylum seekers home.

A review is under way into how refugee claims are processed and will tackle concerns our acceptance rate is too high.

The Government will also move children out of detention, starting with 18 of 300 children detained in Tasmania.

Despite Labor's promise not to lock up children, there are now 1800 in detention.

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Picture: TONY GODDARD

NO HELL ON A SURFBOARD

Aussie's prison ordeal in Congo

James Dowling

AVICTORIAN surfer survived 25 days locked in a notorious Democratic Republic of the Congo prison after a travelling adventure went horribly wrong. It took an extraordinary diplomatic effort by three nations — and the help of his mother — to make sure Jayden Irving made it safely home. The 22-year-old from Carrum Downs feared he would die in a cell harbouring mass murderers, warlords and the central African regime's political enemies. A relatively innocuous issue with his visa turned into a string of bizarre accusations that the lifesaver was plotting to bomb the president or even interfere with the country's fibre-optic cable network. The first Mr Irving's parents knew of his plight was when he bribed a guard to send a distressing text message. "Hey mum, my son, son," he wrote. "I'm in jail again congo doesn't like me. But this time it can be much more than 5 days."

His only contact with the outside world was an Australian diplomat from our embassy in Harare, Zimbabwe. She brought him food and lobbied for his release. How Mr Irving came to the attention of the DRC's notorious intelligence unit, Agence Nationale de Renseignement, was a mixture of bad luck and poor timing. His story begins early last year when he hatched a plan to hitchhike along the west coast of Africa, finding and surfing the region's remote beaches. Friends were aghast that he would want to travel through Africa's most



Safe now: Jayden and mum Carole in Melbourne this week.

Picture: TONY GOUGH

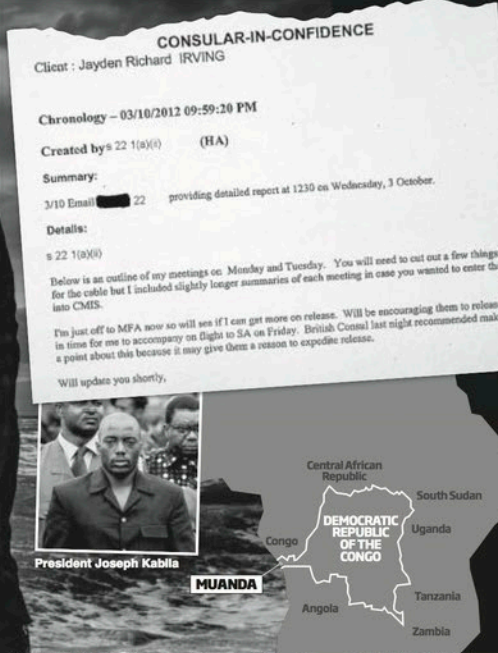
troubled and war-torn countries. "I tried to coax a bunch of different friends along with me but they were all like, 'You are an idiot, it's dangerous, you are going to die,'" Mr Irving said. The free spirit set off for South Africa alone in February last year. There, at a hostel near the surfing mecca of Jefferys Bay, he convinced local Lydon Alves to join him. On their seven-month journey to the west coast of Africa, finding and surfing the region's remote beaches. Friends were aghast that he would want to travel through Africa's most

war from 1998-2007 and saw five million people killed. There is still violent dissent and high crime rates. The Australian Government advises against all travel. The two surfers travelled like locals, spending three days on the back of an overcrowded truck with their surfboards and then weeks wading through thick jungle to reach the DRC's tiny strip of seafront on Africa's west coast. They met about "three white people". "We were roughing it big time — Westeners back to a Third World standard of living," Mr Irving said. When they finally reached the DRC beaches in early September last year they set up camp in Muanda. Unwittingly, they were

very near the beach house of President Joseph Kabila. The DRC was preparing for a high-level meeting of Francophile leaders and security services were on high alert. The presence of two white men quickly drew the attention of authorities. "The three white people we had met were all businessmen. So us two ruffians were assumed to be mercenaries," Mr Irving said. The pair were soon confronted at their beachside camp by men brandishing AK47s, beating them and screaming in French for them to get in a car. The gunmen — from immigration — refused to show ID and the surfers feared being driven off and executed. Mr Irving refused to get in the car, casually offering

bribes to his interrogators. But this was rebuffed. "When they didn't want money we really thought we were in trouble," Mr Irving said. "Every customs official that comes to us wanted money. It was called the 'African handshake'." "That's all I thought these guys wanted." Twice Mr Irving came close to freedom. On both occasions he was released from the detention centre and boarded a boat to cross the river to Brazzaville, in the neighbouring Republic of the Congo, and each time caused of the wild claims of terrorism to be eventually levelled at them. At first, the surfers were treated as immigration detainees, transferred from police cell to police cell and back to immigration

detention in the capital, Kinshasa. But Mr Irving was not fed for the first two days. With his strength waning he knew he needed to take drastic action, so he faked a seizure in his cell, forcing guards to provide him with medical attention and a meal of beans and rice. "I was then shifted to a smaller cell where he was treated as a "VIP" with rebel leaders, mass murderers and rapists. It was also a cell from which many prisoners vanished. "We accepted we would never leave that country or that cell. People don't come back from there," he said. The savvy traveller had luckily stashed money in his belongings and bribed



DPA* and set diplomatic wheels in motion. "I would go into work and people would ask me why I was so calm," he said. "I wasn't calm though. "I would see a photo of Jayden and think, 'My God, I am never going to see my son again.' "I wanted to get on a plane and say, 'Give me back my son.'"

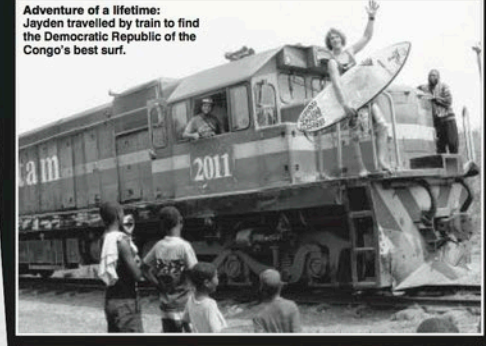
Back in the DRC, Mr Irving was blindfolded, handcuffed and led by armed guards to the National Intelligence Agency headquarters. There he was grilled on his travels and eventually shown a picture of a bomb he was alleged to have had at his camp site, but which had been planted. He was then taken to the intelligence unit's jail.

"The cell was 25 sweaty people in 40C heat walking back and forward, a guy half dead in the corner, and one meal a day," Mr Irving said. "Occasionally someone would start screaming for no reason. At night you would hear the chanting and prayers of men who are praying that God will kill them because they can't stand the cell anymore." He was then shifted to a smaller cell where he was treated as a "VIP" with rebel leaders, mass murderers and rapists. It was also a cell from which many prisoners vanished. "We accepted we would never leave that country or that cell. People don't come back from there," he said. The savvy traveller had luckily stashed money in his belongings and bribed

guards to bring it to him. "With money I could get extra food from the other prisoners or \$US50 would get me the use of a phone." Any extra supplies he received from the diplomat would be shared among his cellmates to curry favour. Unbeknown to Mr Irving, the Aussie diplomat had developed a contact who had the ear of the DRC's interior minister. The political pressure brought to bear by the Australian, Canadian and South Africans to help Mr Irving and Mr Alves are revealed in a string of diplomatic cables seen by the *Sunday Herald Sun*. Mr Irving's plight even reached the ears of then-PM Julia Gillard and Foreign Affairs Minister Bob Carr. Canada took up Mr

Irving's cause because Australia does not have an embassy in the DRC. The Canadian ambassador and the Australian diplomat attended meetings with DRC officials. The Canadians gently reminded the DRC that the country's human rights record would be in the spotlight during the French-speaking summit. The Australian diplomat even tactfully discussed the Australian Government's aid program before pointedly raising the case of Mr Irving. In a cable to Canberra, the diplomat outlined her meetings with a DRC official five days before Mr Irving and his mate were released. "I kept the focus on our bilateral relationship

(assistance to the humanitarian crisis via the International Red Cross, scholarships etc)," the cable reads. "At the end of the meeting, I outlined the case and he agreed that it was something that should be dealt with quickly and said he would brief the minister. "This matter is now being taken seriously by the people who have the ability to push for it to be resolved," it read. It was this lobbying and an ultimatum from the South African embassy that the pair be released or charged that eventually secured their freedom. "I owe my life to anyone involved in the process," Mr Irving said. "But mostly to my friend (Lydon) who kept my sanity



Hellhole: Inside one of the filthy Congolese jail cells where he was locked up for a month.

Bond jets in for Lions

WHO better to have barking for your team than a Bond? British actor Daniel Craig arrived in Sydney on Friday before last night's British Lions v Wallabies clash at ANZ Stadium. Craig, 45, flew first-class on Qantas and was spotted arriving at Sydney Airport on Friday morning. He is a massive rugby fan and once played for Holyvale RFC.

DON'T MISS TV TODAY

SOFT REPORTS

AUSTRALIA'S MOST PROVOCATIVE VOICE

10.00-10.30am

EDITORIAL: New Kevin's good first week ends in a mess with two brutal reminders of Old Kevin.

INTERVIEW: Gillard goes and Labor's near-ban on the show ends after 2½ years ... with Labor Frontbencher Ed Husic, on the new Kevin, his Koran and ending the culture of complaint.

PANEL: The panel - Professor Judith Sloan and former NSW Labor Minister John Della Bosca - on Tony Abbott dodging debate and Kevin Rudd making up policies.

MEET THE PRESS

- Justice Minister Jason Clare
- Father Frank Brennan on asylum seekers
- One on one with Ellyse Perry
- Royal baby countdown - Charles Miranda from London, monarchist Chris Whitaker, Kidspot editor Alex Brooks.

10.30-11.30am

Breast milk upset

MOTHERS having trouble breastfeeding may be showing early signs of diabetes, doctors warn. Research has revealed insulin plays an important part in the production of breast milk. Mothers who struggle with feeding may have low insulin levels. Insulin was not believed to play a direct role in regulating the milk-making cells of the human breast. But scientists now know the mammary gland

becomes sensitive to insulin during lactation. Having identified the significance of insulin in the production of breast milk, scientists at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Centre and the University of California in Davis are planning a trial with a drug used for type 2 diabetes to determine whether it improves insulin action in breastfeeding mothers, thereby improving milk supply.

New tool digs up dirt on hospitals

AUSTRALIANS can now avoid the nation's dirtiest or infection-prone public hospitals, thanks to a new tool. The search engine reveals national benchmarks of two cases per 10,000 patients. Meanwhile, the Royal Women's Hospital and St Vincent's Hospital have lower infection rates. Each year about 35,000 Australians treated in public and private hospitals develop an infection following a procedure. In 2011-2012, 1728 of these infections in public hos-

pitals were golden staph. Another key health issue is hand-washing rates. The search engine reveals Royal Melbourne Hospital has hand-washing rates below the national benchmark of 70 per cent. The Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre has hand-washing rates well ahead of national benchmarks, its golden staph infection rate is likely to be due to the site's more vulnerable cancer patients it treats. Go to hcf.com.au/hospital

safetyandquality. Meanwhile, Healthscope has data on the performance of its 44 private hospitals. Healthscope hospitals treat more than 565,000 patients a year and the group provides data on 21 quality and safety benchmarks including patient falls, unplanned readmissions, A&P scores in babies and mental health and rehabilitation. See www.healthscopehospitals.com.au/index.php/myhealthscope.