

NATO Ministers to Meet on Russia, Upgrading Response Force

BRUSSELS - With NATO officials calling Russia more unpredictable now than during the Cold War, alliance defense ministers on Thursday (Today) are expected to approve further measures to enhance the organization's ability to deter and, if necessary, respond to military threats from Moscow, officials said.

Adam Thomson, Britain's permanent representative to NATO, predicted "an encouraging degree of alliance commitment" that will demonstrate "NATO is strengthening its military posture in response in particular to the challenge that Russia's behavior represents." As outlined by NATO officials, key decisions expected at the Brussels gathering of U.S. Defense



Secretary Chuck Hagel and counterparts from the other 27 NATO member countries include: - Upgrading the existing NATO Response Force to make it bigger, more capable and more quickly deployable. - Firm commitments from some of NATO's European members to act

as "framework" nations for the fastest-moving element of the Response Force, commonly known as "the spearhead" and now estimated to number around 5,000 land-based troops. - An official go-ahead for a proposal to establish small NATO liaison units in the three Baltic

republics - Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania - and Poland, Romania and Bulgaria, to improve coordination and planning, and in case needed, help smooth the way for fast deployment of the NATO Response Force. In addition to decisions on how to keep transi-

tioning, NATO said it can better face threats from Russia, as well as from the instability spawned by Islamic extremism in North Africa and the Middle East. The ministers will meet with their counterpart from the ex-Soviet republic of Georgia. A session is also planned on issues related to the effectiveness, safety and security of NATO's nuclear deterrent.

Thursday's meeting by the defense ministers is the first since President Barack Obama and other NATO heads of state and government last September ordered an overhaul of alliance capabilities and defense posture, called the Readiness Action Plan, or RAP, to take into account Russia's annexation of the Crimean Pen-

insula and purported military interference in eastern Ukraine.

"We need to show to the world and to the opposite number in Moscow that we have implemented the RAP significantly and have made significant progress," a senior NATO official said on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to make public statements.

NATO spokeswoman Oana Lungescu insisted the alliance's actions were defensive, proportionate and in keeping with the organization's international commitments. "It's only normal for a collective defense alliance such as NATO to make sure that it does everything it needs to do to protect and defend its allies," Lungescu said. "That is what we're doing." (AP)

Turkey Deports Foreigners, Puts Travel Ban to Curb Terror Group Recruitment

ANKARA - Turkey deported 1,065 foreigners and placed a travel ban on 9,915 others, as part of its efforts to curb militant recruitment into neighboring Syria and Iraq, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Wednesday.

Last month, a woman suspected of ties to the recent Paris attacks entered Syria from Turkey on Jan. 8. Hayat Boumeddiene,

wife of Amedy Coulibaly, who killed four hostages at a supermarket in Paris on Friday, arrived in Turkey from Madrid on Jan. 2 before fleeing to Syria.

Cavusoglu said there is recently increased cooperation and intelligence sharing between Turkey and other countries with respect to the entrance of foreign fighters through Turkey to Syria aiming to

join the ranks of Islamic State militants. Speaking in a televised interview, Cavusoglu said the Indian foreign minister was in Turkey lately and the two countries shared intelligence as reports showed that some Indian nationals in the region have joined the terrorist group.

Turkey has received criticism from the international community

for not taking sufficient measures along its borders with Syria to prevent foreign fighters, a remarkable number of which originated from EU countries, from getting into Syria. Ankara, in response, demanded increased intelligence sharing with European countries especially regarding suspected citizens who might join the IS. (Xinhua)

Russia to Produce New-Generation Assault Rifles



MOSCOW - Production of new-generation assault rifles will start in Russia this month, the Izvestia newspaper reported Wednesday. AK-12 and A-545 rifles, part of the Ratnik combat kit for soldiers, will be produced by the Kalashnikov and Degtyarev plants, an official with the Russian Defense Ministry was quoted as saying.

The Ratnik outfit provides soldiers with about 40 pieces of equipment for survival and combat, including a bullet-proof vest, water filter, night vision devices and the latest navigation hardware. Russian Deputy Defense

Minister Yuri Borisov said in January that the Ratnik outfit could feature the fifth-generation AK-12 rifle.

The A-545 assault rifle is the upgraded version of the A-971 rifle designed in the 1980s by Degtyarev engineers. The Ratnik gear will be put into service by the end of this year, when final tests of the new weapons would also be carried out.

In late January, Russian President Vladimir Putin demanded the Russian armed forces become more modern, more mobile and better-equipped to deal with potential threats. (Xinhua)

Jordan Executes Al-Qaida Prisoners in Wake of Pilot's Death

AMMAN - Jordan has executed Sajida al-Rishawi, the female suicide bomber asked for by the Islamic State (IS) in a previous proposal to swap prisoners, the state-run Petra news agency reported Wednesday. Another al-Qaida prisoner, Ziad al-Karbouly, was also hanged to death on the same day, accord-

ing to the report.

The news came a day after IS claimed that it has burnt a captured Jordanian pilot, Muazth al-Kassasbeh, to death in the third high-profile case of hostage-killing by the group recently.

The 26-year-old pilot was one of pilots of the U.S.-led anti-terror coalition, ... (More on P4)... (23)

France Not Planning to Deliver Lethal Weapons to Ukraine: DM

PARIS - France will not for the moment deliver weapons to Ukraine for its fight with pro-Russian separatists, Defence Minister (DM) Jean-Yves Le Drian said on Wednesday.

"We have no intention of delivering weapons at this stage to Ukraine," Le Drian said at a news conference with Canadian counterpart Robert Nicholson. The United States is reconsidering whether to provide weapons to Ukraine in its fight against Russian-backed separatists, senior administration officials said on Monday, adding that no decision had been made. Defence Minister Le Drian repeated Paris' stance that there had been



a political solution to the crisis, but that Europe would press ahead with sanctions. "Russia's position with regard to the Ukrainian separatists is not acceptable," he said. "We will continue with sanctions, but at the same time we have to avoid by all means this ongoing situation that is getting

worse and could lead to even worse tensions." French President Francois Hollande, the first head of a leading Western power to meet Putin in Russia since Moscow annexed the Crimea peninsula in March 2014, has urged all parties to respect a truce deal. A French diplomatic source

said arming Ukrainian authorities would not be coherent at a time when Western powers are asking Russia to stop providing separatists with weapons. "We don't want to add war to the war," the source said. "There has to be a return to dialogue and a ceasefire." (Reuters)

Japanese Company to Help Maintain Power Plants in Uzbekistan



TASHKENT - Japan's Mitsubishi Hitachi Power Systems, Ltd. (MHPS) has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Uzbekistan's state energy company Uzbekenergo under which the two companies will collaborate in the area of power plant operation and maintenance. In accordance with the document, MHPS will provide operation and maintenance support and related services for power plants owned by Uzbekenergo, the Japa-

nese company said. The signing ceremony was held at the 12th Uzbek-Japanese Economic Cooperation Forum in Tokyo last week. The MOU covers three areas: power plant operation and maintenance, technical training of engineers, and organization of technical seminars. MHPS will provide operation and maintenance support to the Navoi and Talimarjan power plants and a cogeneration plant in Tashkent to which ... (More on P4)... (22)

17 Soldiers Killed As Boko Haram Attacks Military Camp

YAOUNDE - Three Cameroonian soldiers and 14 Chadian soldiers died and a huge number of Boko Haram militants were killed when the group on Wednesday morning attacked military camps in Fotokol, a border town in Cameroon's Far North Region neighbouring Nigeria, military sources told Xinhua. Sources put the number of Boko Haram militants in the attack at around 7,000, adding that they were armed with 30 armored trucks, about ten ordinary vehicles and hundreds of motorcycles, as well as sophisticated weapons. In their ranks, there were Libyan, Sudanese and Malian mercenaries and fighters of non-African origin, the sources added. (Xinhua)

Iraqi Kurds Call for Foreign Ground Troops in Anti-IS Fight

IRBIL, Iraq - A senior Iraqi Kurdish official says the Kurds are "alone" in their fight against the Islamic State extremist group and need more support, including foreign ground troops. Fouad Hussein, chief of staff to Kurdish President Massoud Barzani, told

The Associated Press that coalition airstrikes have been helpful, but "to finish ISIS... you need to finish it on the ground. And on the ground, we are most of the time alone. So we need partners." When pressed, Hussein said the Kurdish regional government wants more

foreign advisers, special forces, equipment and munitions.

On Friday, a Kurdish commander and several of his men were killed in a militant ambush in the oil-rich city of Kirkuk. U.S. airstrikes began in the Kurdish region on Aug. 8. (AP)

Egypt Sentences 230 Anti-Mubarak Activists to Life

CAIRO - An Egyptian court on Wednesday sentenced to life 230 activists from the 2011 revolt against Hosni Mubarak, including leading campaigner Ahmed Douma, judicial sources said. Thirty-nine other defendants, all minors, were sentenced to 10 years in prison. All 269 defendants were found guilty of taking part in clashes with security forces near

Cairo's Tahrir Square in December 2011, the sources said. A life sentence in Egypt is for 25 years. Wednesday's ruling, which can be appealed, is the harshest court order delivered so far against non-Islamist activists amid a government crackdown overseen by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. Hundreds of Islamist

supporters of Mubarak's successor, Mohamed Morsi, have been sentenced to death after often speedy trials. Douma rose to prominence during the 2011 uprising that ousted Mubarak and was also a key protest leader against Morsi. He is already serving three years for violating a law prohibiting protests without a permit. (AFP)

Neighbor News

Uzbekistan's Election Campaign Picking up Steam

The election campaign picks up speed as presidential elections near.

TASHKENT - With less than two months to go before the main political event of the year in Uzbekistan's, presidential elections, political parties have nominated candidates.

The Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, which has the largest number of seats as a result of the parliamentary elections, held a meeting of the Political Council, during which the issue of the party's participation in the upcoming presidential elections on March 29 was discussed. The proposal to nominate Islam Karimov as head of state will be discussed at the

Party Congress on February 6. A plenary session of the Central Council of the People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan was held on the same day. The nomination of a candidate for President from the People's Democratic Party was discussed. The proposal of nominating Hatamjon Ketmonov was accepted, which is subject to approval at the party congress on February 9.

Following the decision of Liberals and Democrats on Friday, two other political parties have named their candidates. The Democratic Party of ... (More on P4)... (24)

No Short-Term Solution to Terrorism: Nisar

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan said Wednesday that terrorism cannot be resolved immediately and that tackling it may take weeks, month or even years. Addressing a session of the National Assembly, the interior minister said that inevitably there is always a reaction to a military operation, adding that security issues should not be politicized. "Their targets are soft and easy but we are trying to strengthen our mechanism to foil their nefarious designs," he said. Nisar said terrorists wanted to spread fear and panic to divide the nation. Intelligence agencies share information with provinces and forces whenever sought by provincial governments. No province is held responsible over terrorism neither is any

province criticised over the law and order situation," he said.

"Fingers should have been pointed at terrorists instead of pointing them at each other," adding that protests should have been carried out against terrorists instead of the provincial government.

"Deteriorating law and order situation should not be termed a failure of provinces," he said adding that the entire nation and the political leadership should stand united to weed out the menace of terrorism from the country once and for all. The interior minister also cited incidents from across the world, including the lone gunman's siege in the United States, the militant standoff in Germany, the recent Charlie Hebdo 'attack in the heart of France' to make his point. (Monitoring Desk)

South Korea, China Vow to Boost Ties

SEOUL - South Korean President Park Geun-hye and visiting Chinese State Councilor and Defense Minister Chang Wanquan here on Wednesday pledged to promote the relations between the two nations. Park said during their meeting that South Korea and China have been enhancing the mutual trust and friendship.

"President Xi Jinping and I made the decision during our meeting to boost the strategic communication between the two countries," said the president.

She said South Korea is willing to boost China-South Korea relations and to maintain peace and stability in the Kore-

an Peninsula by implementing the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative.

Chang said President Xi and President Park have exchanged visits in recent years, which help improve the level of the strategic communication and the mutual trust.

The Chinese defense minister said China is highly concerned about the situation in the Korean Peninsula, wishing all the concerned parties to communicate actively with each other and to resume the six-party dialogue soon.

Chang held a meeting with his South Korean counterpart Han Min-koo on Wednesday afternoon. (Xinhua)

Iran Rejects U.S. Call for Anti-Terror Cooperation: Official

TEHRAN - The Islamic republic has rejected a United States call for anti-terror cooperation, a senior Iranian Foreign Ministry official was quoted as saying by Press TV on Wednesday.

"The United States (recently) asked Iran for help in the fight against terrorism. However, we believe the U.S. lacks sincerity (in its anti-terror bid) as some of these terrorist groups are simultaneously supported by the U.S.," Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs, Hosein Amir-Abdollahian, said on Tuesday.

The presence of foreign military troops in the region over the recent years

has shown that the military approach toward regional issues not only fails to solve the problem of terrorism and instability, but may even exacerbate the problems, he said.

The presence of terrorist groups in Syria is the result of the wrong policies of the U.S. and its allies, he added.

Iran has incessantly asked non-regional powers, particularly the U.S. and its western allies, to withdraw their troops from the Middle East countries, saying that the regional states are capable of fighting terrorism and establishing security through collaboration. (Xinhua)