

Islamic Counterterrorism Alliance Meeting Focuses on Role of Media

RIYADH - Defense ministers of around 41 Arab and Islamic countries met in Saudi Arabia to discuss fighting terrorism and extremism, with a focus on the role of media, Al Arabiya local news reported Monday.

The counterterrorism alliance introduced an extended and in-depth vision on ways and mechanisms to combat terrorism which surpass the military coordination between these countries.

According to the alliance, international efforts to fight terror-



ism include combating terrorist organizations' media discourse and their attempts to lure the minds of youth. Other international efforts include developing content which fights extremist thought through media platforms such as social media, television and radio channels. The alliance states are trying to redraw and reformulate false impressions produced by extremist ideology and terrorist organizations about Arabic and Islamic countries to the world, the report said. (Xinhua)

German Government Talks Likely a Month Away, Merkel Ally Says

BERLIN - Talks on forming a new German "grand coalition" with the Social Democrats (SPD) may not begin until next year, a top official in Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservative camp said, potentially prolonging the uncertainty in Europe's largest economy. Merkel, whose fourth term was thrown into doubt a week ago when three-way coalition talks with the pro-business Free Democrats (FDP) and Greens collapsed, was handed a political lifeline by the SPD on Friday.

Under intense pressure

to preserve stability and avoid new elections, the SPD reversed its pledge to go into opposition and agreed to discuss supporting a Merkel government, raising the prospect of a continuation of the grand coalition, which has ruled for the past four years, or a minority government. But Julia Klöckner, vice-chair of Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU), said talks may not begin until the new year, over three months after the national election in which the two biggest parties suffered punishing losses. (Reuters)

BERLIN - Chancellor Angela Merkel said Monday her party was ready to hold serious talks with the Social Democrats to form a government, warning that time is pressing as Europe faces a slew of challenges. "Not only do we have diverse problems in Germany, but there are also great expectations in Europe for answers to pressing questions," Merkel told reporters after huddling with leaders of her Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in Berlin.

The German leader has

been struggling to form a coalition after elections in September left her without a majority. As the SPD refused initially to renew an alliance with Merkel's conservatives, the veteran chancellor had sought to partner up with the pro-business FDP and the ecologist Greens.

However, those talks collapsed, lurching Germany into a political crisis and raising the spectre of snap elections. Stressing the importance for Germany to have a stable government, Mer-

Merkel Vows 'Serious' Coalition Talks with SPD



kel said European partners like France were impatiently waiting for Berlin to "take a stance" on reform proposals for the bloc.

"Also given the conflicts

in the Middle East, the situation with Russia, the situation in the United States, I think it would be good if Germany is capable of taking action," she said. (AFP)

Syrian Government Welcomes Committee to Discuss Constitution



BEIRUT - The Syrian government welcomes the formation of a committee that will discuss the current constitution and is expected to be formed at a congress to be convened

by Russia in Sochi, Syrian state media said. The congress marks a Russian effort to advance a political solution towards ending Syria's six-year-long war that has killed

hundreds of thousands of people and forced millions to flee in the worst refugee crisis since World War Two.

U.N.-backed talks towards ending the conflict are due to resume in Geneva this week with the participation of the Syrian opposition to President Bashar al-Assad, who is militarily dominant in the conflict thanks to Russia and Iran. A pro-Damascus newspaper, al-Watan, reported on Monday that the government delegation had postponed its travel to Geneva, saying

Damascus was annoyed by the opposition's insistence on its demand that Assad leave power at the start of a transition. In a statement from the Syrian foreign ministry, the Syrian government said it would attend the "national dialogue congress" at the Sochi talks, whose date has yet to be confirmed. Syria welcomed "U.N. participation" in legislative elections to be held after the discussion of the constitution, state media cited a foreign ministry statement as saying. (Reuters)

Barely a Quarter of Catalans Want to Pursue Split from Spain: Poll

MADRID - Barely a quarter of Catalans want to continue with a plan to claim independence from Spain in the wake of Dec. 21 regional elections, according to a poll published in El Pais newspaper on Monday.

An illegal Catalan independence referendum on Oct. 1 plunged Spain into its worst political crisis in decades. It eased after the sacking of the secessionist Catalan authorities by the Madrid government elicited little resistance. But uncertainty could return if the pro-independ-

ence camp wins in the Dec. 21 vote.

Just 24 percent of those polled by Metroscopia said they would like to continue with the independence process after the elections, whereas 71 percent said they would prefer politicians to find an agreement based on Catalonia staying part of Spain. Pro-independence parties may fail to retain an absolute majority of seats in the Catalan parliament in next month's election, the first part of the poll published on Sunday showed. (Reuters)

FBI Leaves US Targets of Russian Hackers in the Dark

WASHINGTON - The FBI failed to notify scores of U.S. officials that Russian hackers were trying to break into their personal Gmail accounts despite having evidence for at least a year that the targets were in the Kremlin's crosshairs, The Associated Press has found.

Nearly 80 interviews with Americans targeted by Fancy Bear, a Russian government-aligned cyberespionage group, turned up only two cases in which the FBI had provided a heads-up.

Even senior policymakers discovered they were targets only when the AP told them, a situation some described as bizarre and dispiriting.

"It's utterly confounding," said Philip Reiner, a former senior director at the National Security Council, who was notified by the AP that he was targeted in 2015. "You've got to tell your people. You've got to protect your people."

The FBI declined to discuss its investigation into Fancy Bear's spying campaign, but did provide a statement that said in part: "The FBI routinely notifies individuals and organizations of potential threat information."

Three people familiar with the matter - including a current and a former government official - said the FBI has known for more than a year the details of Fancy Bear's attempts to break into Gmail inboxes. A senior FBI official, who was not authorized to publicly discuss the hacking operation because of its sensitivity, declined to comment on when it received the target list, but said the bureau was overwhelmed by the sheer number of attempted hacks. "It's a matter of triaging to the best of our ability the volume of the targets who are out there," he said. (AP)

Turkey, Iran, and Russia to Hold Meeting on Syria on Regular Basis: Erdogan

ANKARA - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan commenting on the result of the meeting on Syria in Russia's Sochi stated that such talks would be held on a regular basis.

The Turkish leader said that during the discussion three country leaders took several important decisions, which would contribute much the early settlement of the crisis and put an end to the humanitarian catastrophe in the country.

Erdogan added that he together with Vladimir Putin and Hassan Rouha-



ni would meet once in two weeks or month. Let us remind you that on November 22, Presidents of Iran, Russia, and Turkey held a meeting where they discussed the political future of Syria. They stressed the

determination of the three countries to continue working together to restore Syria, and highly appreciated the intra-Syrian talks in Astana, which are aimed at cessation of hostilities. (Agencies)

Iran FM to Head for Armenia for Key Political-Economic Talks

TEHRAN - Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif will set off for Yerevan to hold key talks with senior Armenian officials on issues of mutual interest. Heading a politico-economic delegation, Zarif will leave for Yerevan on Tuesday at the official invitation of Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Monday.

He added that the top Iranian diplomat is scheduled to hold talks with his Armenian counterpart, President Ser-

zh Sargsyan, and Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan.

The sides would exchange views about ways to improve relations in different fields, the spokesperson said.

Meanwhile, Iranian Ambassador to Yerevan Mohammad Kazem Sajjadi said Zarif would deliver a speech at an economic meeting of the two countries' tradesmen, entrepreneurs and economic activists. The participants would discuss avenues for bolstering cooperation in trade and economic sectors as well as joint ventures. (Pressstv)

EU Parliament Chief Asks Poland to Ensure Meps' Safety after Far-Right Protest

WARSAW - The president of the European Parliament said on Monday he would ask Poland's prime minister to ensure the security of Polish members of the assembly after a far-right protest staged a symbolic hanging of the politicians. On Saturday a few dozen people in the southern Polish city of Katowice hanged the portraits of politicians who backed a European Parliament resolution calling on the Polish government to condemn "the xenophobic and fascist march" held on Poland's Independence Day on Nov. 11.

"I will write to PM Beata Szydlo to ensure the security of elected members of the European Parliament to express their opinions independently, without threat, and oppose those who spread hatred by exhibiting outrageous pictures of hanged politicians," Antonio Tajani said on Twitter. Poland's socially conservative, euroskeptic government came under fire from the EU and human rights group for allowing far-right marchers - who were among some 60,000 people at the Nov. 11 rally - to brandish banners with racist slogans such as "pure blood, clear mind" or "Europe will be white or uninhabited".

Leading members of the ruling Law and Justice party (PiS) joined other politicians in denouncing the use of hate speech at the rally, but critics said their response was too slow.

The PiS government has been increasingly at loggerheads with Brussels since sweeping to power two years ago over what the EU sees as its flouting of democratic rules. (Reuters)

Neighbor News

Chinese Premier Announces Financing Support for 16+1 Cooperation

BUDAPEST - Visiting Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on Monday announced here financing support for cooperation between China and 16 Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC), also known as the 16+1 cooperation.

Li announced the establishment of China-CEEC Inter-Bank Association and the second phase of China-Central and Eastern Europe Investment Cooperation Fund in a keynote speech to the seventh China-CEEC Economic and Trade Forum held in the Hungarian capital city of Budapest.

The China Development Bank will provide an equivalent amount of 2 billion euros (2.4 billion U.S. dollars) as development-oriented financial

cooperation loans for the inter-bank association, Li said.

Meanwhile, the Chinese premier said the second phase of the investment cooperation fund that totaled 1 billion dollars will be mainly invested in Central and Eastern Europe.

The two sides need to further expand financing channels, Li said.

China supports commercial and development financial institutions to provide finance for bilateral cooperation projects, supports companies from Central and Eastern European countries to issue Panda Bonds in China, and also supports the two sides to conduct renminbi-denominated financing business for their cooperation projects, Li said. (Xinhua)

Pakistani Law Minister Resigns to End Prolonged Protest: Reports

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Law Minister Zahid Hamid resigned late Sunday after a religion-related bill caused a prolonged sit-in protest and clashes between protesters and police forces, Pakistani official PTV reported early Monday.

"In order to restore peace in the country, I have decided to step down from my position," local media quoted the outgoing minister as reporting. It's not clear whether Prime

minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi will accept or reject his resignation.

After his resignation, the government and protesters signed an agreement to put an end to the three-week long sit-in protest which has blocked major traffic junction between Islamabad and its sister city of Rawalpindi, according to local reports.

The religious groups who staged the protest are also likely to make an announcement to

end the protest, said Geo News.

The Pakistani government last month passed a religion-related bill which triggered strong opposition from religious community. The government later retracted the bill, but some religious groups further demanded the resignation of the law minister and staged the sit-in protest for almost three weeks.

The government took a clearance operation on Saturday after several rounds of negotiations with the protesters. However, the operation triggered more protests in major cities across the country.

Later the Pakistani Army was called out to help maintain order in Islamabad, and local reports quoted sources as saying that the final agreement between the government and protesters was brokered by the army. (Xinhua)

Iran, Turkey Sign Economic MoU

TEHRAN - A memorandum of understanding and cooperation agreement were signed between Iran and Turkey in a meeting of Joint Economic Commission.

The 26th summit took place at the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran in Tehran between Nov. 26-27, 2017.

Transit facilitation was one of the most important issues discussed at the meeting. The memorandum signed between the two sides is entitled "transportation and transit facilitation." This agreement will pave the way for more economic and trade relations between Iran and Turkey. (MNA)

Turkmenistan Adopts Law on Counteracting Terrorism

ASHGABAT - The law "On Counteracting Terrorism" has been adopted during a regular session of the Turkmen Parliament, the country's State News Agency reported. The document defines legal basis for counteracting terrorism, powers and duties of state bodies, public associations, officials, establishes guarantees for the legal and social protection of citizens participating in counter-

acting terrorism. Provision and protection of fundamental rights and freedoms of a person and a citizen; legality; priority of measures on preventing terrorism and protecting the rights and legitimate interests of persons exposed to terror threat, as well as inevitability of punishment for the conduct of terrorist activities have been defined as the main principles in the document. (Trend)