

World News Roundup

Britain

US, UK to test cyber-security: The United States and Britain will test later this month how its regulators would respond if their financial sectors suffered a major cyber-attack or broader IT problems, a British official said on Monday.

The test, for which no date has yet been set, will focus on how regulators for the world's two biggest financial centres in New York and London communicate in an emergency, a spokesman for British government cyber-security body CERT-UK said.

"It is testing how we would react to 'x' scenario, how would our colleagues in the US react to the same, (and) how would we then coordinate communications with each other, to the sector and within the sector," he said.

"There will be no testing of cash machines coming down, banks coming down or anything like that," he added, contradicting an earlier media report.

US President Barack Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron agreed last January to hold the joint exercise this year and coordinate their responses to an online attack on their financial sectors.

Businesses on both sides of the Atlantic have shown vulnerability to hacking. Just last month, hacking attacks threatened to compromise the data of 4 million customers of British telecoms company TalkTalk and 15 million clients of T-Mobile US Inc.

The CERT-UK spokesman said no final decision had been made on the exact scenarios for the exercise or the banks that would take part. The US Treasury, Britain's finance ministry, the Bank of England (BoE) and US regulators would take part and intelligence agencies are also likely to play a role, he said. (RTRS)

Flight restrictions imposed: Flight restrictions over the country home of Prince William and his wife Kate came into effect Sunday, with the authorities citing security considerations.

Anmer Hall in Norfolk, eastern England, is where the royal couple spend most of their time with their children Prince George, two, and six month old Princess Charlotte.

From Sunday, most aircraft will be banned from flying over the ten-bedroom mansion at an altitude of under 2,000 feet (600 metre).

There are a few exceptions to the rule including the helicopter of Queen Elizabeth II, who has a house at nearby Sandringham, and air ambulances such as those flown by Prince William in his job.

In August, William and Kate wrote to the media warning that paparazzi attempts to photograph Prince George were becoming increasingly "alarming".

"In view of the security for the members of the royal family staying at or visiting Anmer Hall and at the request of the security services, the secretary of state (for transport) considers that flying should be restricted in the vicinity," the official order enforcing the move said. (AFP)

UK flights cancelled: Thick fog across much of Britain caused travel disruption on Monday with 10 percent of flights cancelled from London Heathrow, Europe's busiest airport.

The Met Office said the fog could reduce visibility to less than 100 metres (328 feet) but forecast it would lift by the afternoon.

A driver died and a five-year-old girl was injured Sunday when a car apparently hit a tree in thick fog in Uttroter, central England.

Heathrow said around 45 flights had been cancelled, while London City, Manchester, Leeds Bradford, Glasgow, Belfast and Cardiff airports all reported delays.

"We've got extra passenger ambassadors in the terminals to provide assistance for those travelling today," said a Heathrow spokeswoman.

"Once again we would like to apologise for the disruption."

Heathrow officials met airlines and air navigation firm NATS to draw up a new schedule, and to decide which flights to cancel, said an airport spokeswoman.

In foggy conditions, airports have to switch to radar and "low visibility procedures" to ensure aircraft can taxi, take-off and land safely.

This increases spacing between aircraft by up to 50 percent as they have to taxi far enough away from the runway so that their instruments do not interfere with other planes. (AFP)

Ancient tree changing gender: A British tree thought to be up to 5,000 years old has started to change sex, a "rare and unusual" phenomenon not fully understood by scientists, a botanist said Monday.

The Fortingall Yew, in Perthshire, central Scotland has for hundreds of years been recorded as male, but has recently begun sprouting berries, suggesting that at least part of the tree is changing gender.

"It's a rare occurrence ... rare and unusual and not fully understood," said Max Coleman of Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, who spotted the berries.

"It's thought that there's a shift in the balance of hormone-like compounds that will cause this sex-change. One of the things that might be triggering it is environmental stress."

However, the tree appears healthy, Coleman said, adding that it would now be closely observed for further changes.

The gnarled tree is situated in an old church yard, and is difficult to age because its heartwood — the wood in the centre of the tree — has long rotted away.

Scientists have been able to estimate by comparing its current size with measure-



Cameron



St Paul's Cathedral is seen through thick fog smothering London on Nov 2. Thick fog over much of England and Wales has caused travel disruption with dozens of flights being cancelled at Heathrow Airport and others. (Inset): A boat travels along the River Thames through the fog past the Houses of Parliament in central London on Monday. (AFP)

Migrants

4 refugees down, 6 missing off Greece

October EU refugee flow equalled '14

Sweden expects record migrant arrivals

Asylum seekers now face arson attacks

GENEVA, Nov 2. (Agencies): The number of migrants and refugees entering Europe by sea last month was roughly the same as that for the whole of 2014, United Nations refugee agency UNHCR said on Monday.

The monthly record of 218,394 also outstripped September's 172,843, UNHCR spokesman Adrian Edwards said.

"That makes it the highest total for any month to date and roughly the same as the entire total for 2014," he said. The UNHCR puts 2014 arrivals by sea at about 219,000.

At the peak, 10,006 arrived in Greece's shores on a single day, Oct 20. The vast majority of refugees and migrants to Europe have travelled via Turkey to Greece, a switch from the previously more popular African route via Libya to Italy.

The largest group by nationality are Syrians, accounting for 53 percent of arrivals, as a result of the civil war that has driven hundreds of thousands from their homes. Afghans come second, making up 18 percent of the total.

The flow of refugees into Europe, however, is still dwarfed by the numbers in Syria's neighbours. Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan have Syrian refugee numbers exceeding 2 million, 1 million and 600,000 respectively.

Displaced

Globally, 60 million people are refugees or displaced within their own country, not counting economic migrants.

UNHCR said in October that it was planning for up to 700,000 refugees in Europe this year and a similar or greater number in 2016.

But that plan has already been eclipsed, with 744,000 arriving so far. Some 3,440 are estimated to have died or gone missing in the attempt to escape to Europe.

"Certainly in 2016, we have to expect this level of arrivals to continue, and that's because the facts that are causing people to move aren't going away," said Edwards. "It is the new reality that we all have to deal with."

Migration experts had expected the number of people making the hazardous journey by sea to dwindle as winter approached, but the boats have continued to arrive.

"We hope that there will be some reductions in the number of people crossing this year, simply to help with the manageability of the situation, but unfortunately, the underlying causes that are making people move across the Mediterranean to Europe are still there," Edwards said.

MUNKEDAL, Sweden, Nov 2, (RTRS): Throughout Europe's migrant crisis, Sweden has laid out the welcome mat for tens of thousands of asylum seekers. But in towns like Munkedal and other small communities, someone has replaced it with death threats and arson.

For all Sweden's self-proclaimed role as a "humanitarian superpower", many of the new arrivals dotted around the country are living in fear after a wave of unsolved attacks on asylum centres.

One such is Mustafa, a computer student from Gaza who arrived just over a week ago at the reception centre in Munkedal, which lies amid the forests and farmland of southwestern Sweden.

"For one day I felt safe," said Mustafa. "The day after my arrival, the house burned down."

When the centre housing 14 asylum seekers in a forest clearing went up in flames, the occupants had to escape through a window and shelter in a nearby building. Now they patrol the area in nearly sub-zero temperatures each night, using only the dim lights of mobile phones to peer into the forest for any intruder bent on

destroying their temporary home.

The Munkedal blaze was just one of more than a dozen at centres across Sweden in the past month — some confirmed as arson attacks and others suspected as such — that the police are struggling to solve as the country expects to take in up to a record 190,000 asylum seekers this year.

While no one has died in the fires, a sword-wielding masked man killed two people and wounded two others last month in a racist killing spree at a largely immigrant school in Trollhattan, a short drive from Munkedal.

With fewer than 10 million people, Sweden has received proportionately more asylum seekers than any other European Union country, as huge numbers of people escaping war and poverty head north across the continent.

Opinion polls show most Swedes support this, and volunteers welcome refugees with mobile clinics when they arrive off trains at the end of their long journeys.

However, the open door policy is under strain, playing into the hands of the anti-immigration Sweden

Democrats, the country's third biggest party which holds the balance of power in parliament.

There is no evidence of any link between the Sweden Democrats and the attacks, which the party's leader Jimmie Akesson has condemned.

Nevertheless, Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom has accused them of helping to create a climate of violence with rhetoric over the dangers of immigration and their decision to publish the addresses of planned asylum centres.

Sweden's Migration Agency is now keeping secret the locations of new centres, where asylum seekers live while their applications are processed, fearing new attacks.

However, it faces a shortage of private guards to protect the properties. "It's a big problem," said Mikael Ribbenvik, acting Director General at the Migration Agency. "Our contracted suppliers cannot always meet the demand."

With no one arrested, the security services have stepped in to help overstretched police protect the asylum centres. Helicopters equipped with infrared cameras will fly at night, guiding police patrols to any suspects.

Europe's darker past, has begun to seem like a reasonable option to Slovenia and Austria. Police and the military now stand alongside guards on Europe's borders.

Speed is of the essence in tackling the crisis. Increasingly cold weather is a new enemy, as the EU and member states race to set up shelters along thousands of kilometers (miles) of the "migrant route" out of Greece north-west to Austria. The vast amounts of money that the EU often throws at its challenges are being grudgingly mustered — but cash and policy changes have so far proved woefully inadequate.

Yet neither the tragic recent deaths in the Aegean; nor the scenes of shivering migrants trudging through Balkan mud; nor the mounting chaos and squalor in asylum centers in even wealthy Germany should come as any surprise. Since the drowning of more than 350 migrants off Italy two years ago pushed leaders to vow a comprehensive response, there has mainly been foot-dragging and bickering.



A boy looks on as refugees and migrants arrive on the Greek island of Lesbos after crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey on Nov 2. More than 218,000 migrants and refugees crossed the Mediterranean to Europe in October — a monthly record and more than during the whole of 2014, the United Nations said Monday. (AFP)

Europe

Govt faces 70 'jihadi' cases: The Swiss government says the terrorism threat has increased this year, and police and intelligence services are now handling about 70 cases involving "jihadi-motivated terrorism."

The Federal Council, the country's seven-member executive, says it's considering stronger measures against extremism such as stopping suspected jihadis from leaving the country. The federal department of justice and police is to look into the effectiveness and consequences of such measures.

A new report on terrorism-tracking compiled by the Swiss federal police and intelligence service shown to the council last week and made public Monday points to the Europe-wide phenomenon of jihad-motivated trips to Syria, with women and children increasingly joining men to travel.

The council said the federal prosecutor has opened criminal proceedings into about 20 of the 70-odd cases and will begin handing out indictments this fall. Switzerland has documented far fewer cases than larger European countries like Britain or France. (AP)

Politician's 'anti-Semitic posting': Officials of Austria's right-wing Freedom Party will meet over whether to expel one of their legislators after she backed anti-Semitic sentiments in a Facebook posting.

Susanne Winter insists she is not anti-Semitic. But the Freedom Party has called for a meeting Monday in response to last week's post in which she backed a Facebook statement by one of her supporters that said "Jews the world over are the problem."

Winter responded "nice that you take the words out of my mouth," adding a smiling and winking emoticon. She later deleted both postings and replaced it with one saying "anti-Semitic sentiments were, are, and always will be abhorrent for me."

Other political parties are demanding that Winter resign. Freedom Party officials say they expect to decide on her fate by mid-week. (AP)

Ex-SS guard fit for trial: A German court says a 93-year-old former SS sergeant charged with 170,000 counts of accessory to murder on allegations he served as an Auschwitz death camp guard has been declared fit for trial. Germany's Chancellor is Angela Merkel.

The Detmold state court said Monday a doctor determined that Reinhold H., whose last name wasn't given for privacy reasons, is fit to stand trial so long as sessions are limited to two hours per day.

Defense attorneys and prosecutors now have two weeks to submit responses to the expert opinion. The court will then decide whether to open a trial.

H. is accused of being an accessory to murders at Auschwitz from January 1943 to June 1944. The suspect says he was assigned to a part of the camp not involved in the mass murders. (AP)



Winter



Merkel

WWII bomb found at airport: A World War II bomb was destroyed in a controlled explosion Monday at the main international airport in the western German city of Duesseldorf, briefly halting air traffic.

Flights at the hub, Germany's third busiest in terms of passengers, were interrupted for an hour in the morning while the 125-kilogramme (275-pound) bomb was neutralised, the airport said in a statement.

Two departing flights and five arrivals were axed from the schedule and 34 other flights had to be brought forward or delayed on safety grounds, an airport spokesman said.

The bomb had been discovered overnight near the main runway during construction work. Before it was exploded, the bomb was placed in an eight-metre (26-foot) deep hole to limit any collateral damage. (AFP)