

Extremism

Cleric raps Orban

Bid to counter 'foreign terror'

RIGA, Oct 22. (Agencies): A group of EU countries signed an agreement to counter "foreign terrorist fighters" on Thursday, making it an international crime to travel abroad — or even plan a trip — to join militant groups.

"For the first time in international law, we have an instrument that criminalises early preparations for acts of terror. It is the vital, missing piece of the jigsaw," said Thorbjorn Jagland, secretary general of the 47-member Council of Europe, which drew up the new law.



Jagland

The amended Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism makes it a criminal offence to plan or raise money for a trip abroad, if the person intends to participate in any "terrorist offence, or the

providing or receiving of training for terrorism".

Helping someone else to travel abroad to join a militant organisation also becomes a criminal offence.

Seventeen EU members including Britain, France and Germany signed the new convention on Thursday.

"All of this shows our commitment to send a positive signal to all would-be terrorists: Europe is closing in, we are not waiting for you, we are coming for you," said Jagland.

The protocol was put together in a record seven weeks due to the threat posed by foreign fighters joining the ranks of jihadists in Syria and Iraq, he told assembled officials.

"Rarely has such a treaty received such unanimous support from the beginning."

The agreement must now be ratified by national parliaments, and will automatically come into force once six states have done so.

UN experts said this week that the Islamic State group is paying supporters up to \$10,000 (8,800 euros) for each person that they recruit to fight in war-ravaged Syria and Iraq.

Shooting broke out on the outskirts of the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, on Thursday between police and a man believed to be one of the Islamist militants who escaped from a local prison this month, the Interior Ministry said. A spokesman for the ministry said police believed Altybek Itibayev, who has been convicted for murder and faces more charges, including those of terrorism, had barricaded himself inside a small building with another unidentified man.

He said no casualties had been reported.

The spiritual leader of Bosnia's Muslims protested on Wednesday against what he called the Hungarian premier's "arbitrary and damaging" remarks about Islam and Europe in the migrant crisis, saying they were uttered out of ignorance.

As hundreds of thousands of mainly Muslim migrants and refugees poured into the European Union including Hungary this year, right-wing Prime Minister Viktor Orban called them a threat to Europe's prosperity, security and "Christian values". Hungary has since sealed its southern borders with a steel fence to keep out migrants trekking north through the Balkans from Greece, and issued new laws rights groups say deny refugees their right to seek protection from war and persecution.

Bosnia's Efendi Husein Kavazovic, who leads Europe's largest community of indigenous Muslim Slavs known for their moderation and tolerance of other religions, objected to remarks by Orban in an interview with German magazine Focus earlier this week.

Focus quoted Orban as saying that Islam "has never been part of Europe but came into Europe," and that it did not spiritually reflect Europe but rather a different way of life.

"Every (kind of) ignorance is damaging, and particularly the one advocated by senior political officials who have social power and the role to publicly influence the opinion of others," Kavazovic said in a statement.

He said that educated people know that just as Islam had come to Europe, so had Christianity and Judaism.

He said Orban's comment that Western efforts to impose democracy on the Arab world had failed, and Europe's demographic problems could not be resolved through immigration but rather by focusing on the family, denied the principle of democracy and betrayed the "spirit of Christianity".

"Democracy is not an original European product," Kavazovic said. "It was invented in Greece at the time when Europe did not exist as a cultural concept and when Greek cities were part of the world that as a civilisation gravitated towards the East."

He said Orban's assertions were "arbitrary and damaging" and that he hoped not to hear similar claims by senior European officials in the future.



About 1,000 migrants are escorted by Slovenian police officers from the border crossing with Croatia, on Oct 22, near the village Rigonce to Dobova in Slovenia. More than 12,600 migrants arrived in Slovenia over a 24-hour period, police said on Oct 22, a record that surpasses even that in Hungary at the height of the crisis in September. (AFP)

Migrants

Slovenia asks EU states to send police

Migrant tide puts strain on Sweden

'It's nothing to do with racism'

Outcry over influx to English village

STOCKHOLM/LJUBLJANA, Oct 22. (RTRS): Sweden said on Thursday it expected up to 190,000 migrants this year, putting unprecedented strain on a country famous for welcoming refugees but planning to house many in tents this winter.

On the opposite pole of the angry debate on the migration crisis, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban urged European leaders to change their immigration policies and consult voters, saying they otherwise faced a threat to the democratic order.

Thousands of refugees continued to pour into Slovenia in the hope of reaching prosperous northern Europe, and the tiny country appealed for other European Union states to send police to help manage the flow.

Europe is struggling to cope with its biggest wave of migrants and refugees since World War Two. According to the International Organization for Migration, more than 670,000 people have arrived by sea this year, fleeing war zones and poverty in the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

Sweden's Migration Agency said more than 30,000 of the 140-190,000 people it expected in 2015 would be unaccompanied children.

"We have seen pictures of people who are literally walking from Greece across the Balkans to Germany and on to Sweden," agency head Anders Danielsson told reporters.

"The current refugee situation is unprecedented both in a European and Swedish perspective."

The agency said it would need an additional 70 billion Swedish crowns (\$8.1 billion) over the next two years to cope.

Reach

It added the flow of asylum seekers was seen easing next year, but the number could still reach 170,000.

More than 100,000 have already arrived in Sweden this year, topping the previous record during the Balkan wars in the early 1990s.

Nearly 10,000 came in the past week alone.

"Last night all the our places were full," Danielsson said.

The Agency estimated it would face a shortage of accommodation for 25,000-45,000 migrants by the end of the year. Tens of thousands could spend the cold Swedish winter in heated tents.

There have been attacks on asylum centres, and the anti-immigrant Sweden Democrats party is set to launch an advertising campaign in foreign media to discourage people from coming.

Polis show most Swedes still welcome refugees, but the influx has caused tensions. There have been attacks on asylum centres, and the anti-immigrant Sweden Democrats party is set to launch an advertising campaign in foreign media to discourage people from coming. Polls give the party around 20 per cent of the vote, up from 13 per cent in the last election in autumn 2014.

LONGFORD, United Kingdom, Oct 22, (AFP): An influx of Channel-crossing asylum seekers into a tiny English village has become a tension point in the migration crisis as a surge of people flee war and poverty to Britain.

The migrants, many of whom were previously living in the tent camp in Calais, are bussed into the hamlet of Longford to be temporarily housed at the Heathrow Lodge and in surrounding houses used by the hotel.

Home to a few hundred locals, the villagers see the steady arrival as just the latest encroachment.

Once surrounded by farms and orchards, the vast car parks and hotels of Heathrow Airport now border Longford and planes roar overhead, seeming close enough to scrape the chimneys of the thatched cottages.

A planned extension to Heathrow, already one of the world's busiest airports, threatens Longford with the same fate that befell the small village that gave the airport its name: total demolition.

In the meantime, dozens of asylum seekers have made Longford their temporary home.

"It used to be beautiful around here," said flight engineer Trevor Gordon, 64, seated at the bar under the low wooden beams of the White Horse pub.

"It's nothing to do with racism,"

he added. "But why are they here?" A woman, who declined to be identified but has lived in Longford for 25 years and works in the nearby airport, complained about the numbers of arrivals.

"I know they have to go somewhere but it's the volume. It's rubbish in the garden, that kind of thing," she told AFP.

Those housed by Heathrow Lodge stay for one or two days after they have gone through initial asylum screening including fingerprinting, receiving full meals and accommodation, according to Britain's Home Office.

However, those spoken to by AFP said they had been there for several days, with one man saying he had been housed in a Longford room for two weeks.

Karim, a 40-year-old from Iran, said he paid \$10,000 (8,800 euros) to people traffickers to take him out of the country.

"If I return Iran, dead," he said, drawing a finger across his throat.

The Home Office does not release data on how many migrants make it across the Channel from France on ferries or trains, although dozens have been reported arriving on a single night.

Karim was being housed with seven others, some from Syria, Sudan and Eritrea, in a Longford home that has been divided up into simple motel accommodation, with

a shared bathroom and locks on each bedroom door.

Abdul Kataloni, who gave his age as 15, looked visibly exhausted as he detailed a journey that took him from Darfur, through Libya, across the sea to Italy, before he jumped on a train at Calais.

"Very dangerous. People died," he said of the sea crossing. "I saw death," he added. "My grandmother. She couldn't go on, she was too tired."

The company in charge of housing asylum seekers in the area on behalf of Britain's Home Office is ClearSprings, one of three private companies chosen to house asylum seekers in Britain.

But locals blame the influx of migrants on the owner of the Longford hotel properties: Surinder Arora, a one-time baggage handler who worked his way up to a £356 million fortune (485 million euros, \$550 million).

Arora reportedly bought up a clutch of Longford houses, first using them as overnight accommodation for airline workers, before being used for temporarily housing recently arrived asylum seekers.

A spokesman at Arora Hotels reached by AFP was reticent when asked for comment. "This is not something we want to engage on. We have had a lot of conversations with locals," said the spokesman, who did not give his name.

UN human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini said on Thursday the Czech Republic was committing systematic human rights violations by detaining refugees for up to 90 days and stripping-searching them for money to pay for their own detention.

He said he was alarmed by Islamophobic statements by Czech President Milos Zeman, and concerned about the conditions in detention facilities. Children were also detained, which was unjustifiable, he said.

"The president has long warned of the threat of Islamic fundamentalism. He stands by his opinion and he will not change it under pressure from abroad," Zeman's spokesman said in Prague.

Croatia's Defence Minister Ante Kotromanovic called for Europe "to build, in military terms, a bulwark on the Greek-Turkish border which will ... enable the arrivals of refugees in accordance with Europe's plans", Croatian news agency Hina reported.

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Europe

Police warn of racist attacks:

German police warned on Thursday of a growing risk of racially motivated attacks on politicians by right-wing radicals angry about an influx of migrants and said crimes directed at refugee shelters were rising dramatically.

The warning came five days after the stabbing of Henriette Reker, a mayoral candidate in the western city of Cologne. She was stabbed in the neck and seriously wounded on the eve of Sunday's election, which she won. Media say she has been woken from an artificially induced coma and will make a full recovery.

Germany is struggling to cope with the arrival of an expected 800,000 to 1 million migrants this year, many from war zones in the Middle East, and politicians are openly worrying about a potential rise in right-wing radicalism.

That concern has been accompanied by a drop in support for conservative Chancellor Angela Merkel, who has opened the door to Syrian refugees, and a rise in the popularity of the anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD).

The BKA federal police said that in the third quarter alone, 285 offences against asylum-seekers' shelters had been reported, compared with 198 for the whole of last year. The crimes included arson, criminal damage and incitement. (RTRS)

Germany arrests 3 extremists:

German authorities say they've arrested three right-wing extremists and seized several kilograms of powerful firecrackers the suspects might have been planning to use in an attack to cause fear at asylum-seekers' homes.

Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere said Thursday on a visit to a home for asylum seekers from the Balkans in Bamberg that initial evidence indicates authorities "might have prevented attacks or other crimes," the dpa news agency reported.

The three were arrested Wednesday evening in a series of raids on 12 locations, Bavarian Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann said.

Authorities said items seized included several kilograms of illegal fireworks, some of which were powerful enough to blow out windows.

An anti-immigrant demonstration is planned for later this month in Bamberg, but authorities are trying to ban it, dpa reported. (AP)

Immigrants pay pensions: The five

million foreigners living in Italy pay 620,000 people's pensions, a study published on Thursday said, highlighting a potential benefit of Europe's biggest wave of immigration since World War Two.

The number of permanent foreign residents has doubled in the past decade and is climbing because Italy is on Europe's frontline of the migrant exodus from war and poverty in Africa, Asia and the Middle



Maiziere



Herrmann

East. Italy has taken in more than 136,000 seaborne migrants already this year, with almost 100,000 now living in immigration centres that the state will spend 1.16 billion euros running in 2015, according to the Interior Ministry.

The cost of providing migrants food and shelter has been a springboard for some opposition political parties, like the

Northern League, who argue that the government treats migrants better than Italians.

But the Leone Moressa Foundation's annual report on the "economy of immigration" says that immigrants contributed 125 billion euros (\$141.46 billion) to the economy last year, and that foreign workers gave more in taxes and welfare payments than the state spent on migrants. (RTRS)