

## Taliban storm Afghan MP's house in Kabul

*Eight people killed*

AFP, Kabul

Eight people were killed when Taliban suicide bombers stormed the residence of an Afghan lawmaker in the capital Kabul, officials said after the attackers were gunned down early yesterday following a nearly 10-hour siege.

Helmand MP Mir Wali survived the assault with injuries but two of his grandsons and bodyguards were among those killed in the attack, which began on Wednesday evening following a recent lull in violence in Kabul.

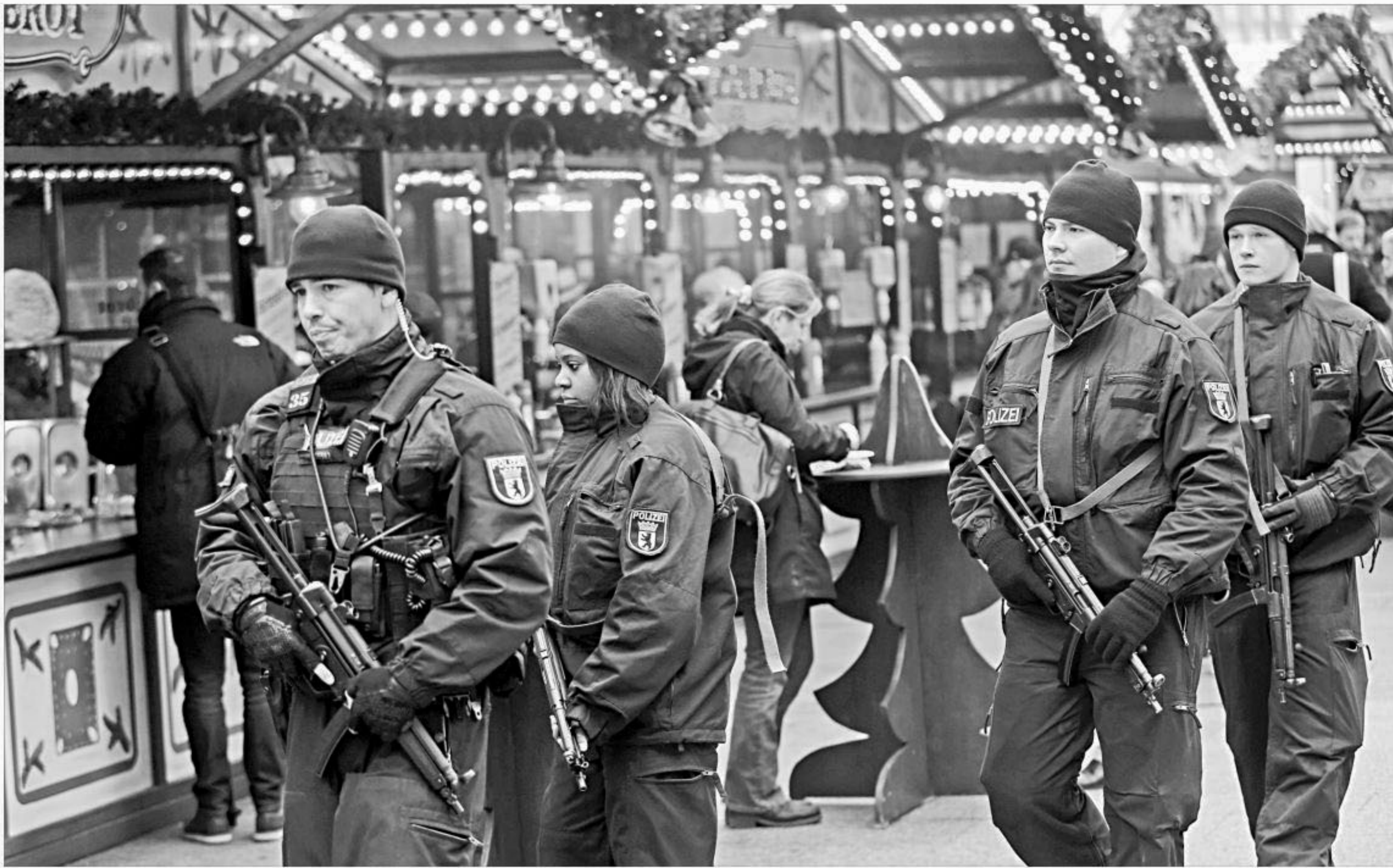
The Taliban in a statement said their suicide bombers raided the house to disrupt an "important gathering of officials" to address the deteriorating security situation in the lawmaker's southern opium-rich province.

"President Ashraf Ghani strongly condemns the attack on the residence of Helmand MP Mir Wali, which killed two members of his family, a number of his bodyguards and the son of another MP from Uruzgan, Obaidullah Barakzai," the presidential palace said in a statement.

"President Ghani termed the attack as an unforgivable crime. Attacking the residence of national personalities cannot be justified in any religion and is against Islamic values."

In all eight civilians and officials were killed, said Fraidoon Obaidi, chief of Kabul police's Criminal Investigation Department. Mir Wali was hospitalised after he jumped from his roof to escape the attack, he added. Sporadic gunfire and explosions were heard from the house early yesterday as Afghan forces cordoned off the property to launch a clearance operation.

"The coordinated attack was carried out by three suicide bombers. They were gunned down by Afghan forces," Obaidi told reporters. The brazen attack underscores the worsening security situation in Afghanistan and highlights how the Taliban are stepping up targeted attacks on high-level officials.



Police patrol among people at the re-opened Christmas market at Breitscheid square in Berlin, Germany, yesterday, following an attack by a truck which ploughed through a crowd in the market on Monday night. PHOTO: REUTERS

## Anger in Germany grows

*Officials come under fire after it emerged prime suspect, a rejected asylum seeker, was known to police*

AGENCIES

German authorities came under fire yesterday after it emerged that the prime suspect in Berlin's deadly truck attack, a rejected Tunisian asylum seeker, was known as a potentially dangerous jihadist.

Prosecutors have issued a Europe-wide wanted notice for 24-year-old Anis Amri, offering a 100,000-euro (\$104,000) reward for information leading to his arrest and warning he "could be violent and armed".

A temporary residence permit believed to belong to Amri, alleged to have links to the radical Islamist scene, was found in the cab of the 40-tonne lorry that rammed through a packed Christmas market in Berlin Monday, killing 11.

The twelfth victim, the hijacked truck's Polish driver, was found shot in the cab. The daily Sueddeutsche Zeitung said that investigators had also found Amri's fingerprints on the door of the truck.

Police in the western German city of Dortmund arrested four people who had been in contact with Amri, media reports said, but a spokesman for the

chief federal prosecutor denied that and said he would give no further details on the operation to avoid jeopardising it, reports Reuters.

In a sign of defiance, Berliners flocked to the Christmas market at the central Breitscheid square which reopened for the first time since the articulated truck cut a swathe of death and destruction through the festive crowd.

### BERLIN TERROR ATTACK

Reward notice issued for information on Tunisian Anis Amri

Four people arrested in connection with suspect

Organisers dimmed garish lights and turned down the party music but began serving mulled wine and opened the traditional market huts, as visitors left a sea of flowers and candles for the victims and signs reading "Love Not Hate".

Amid an unobtrusive police presence, stony-faced vendors embraced each other, some weeping as they

opened their stands, reports AFP.

The attack, Germany's deadliest in recent years, has been claimed by the Islamic State group. Italy yesterday confirmed that one of its nationals, a young woman called Fabrizia Di Lorenzo, also died in the attack.

The New York Times reported, citing US officials, that Amri had done online research on how to make explosive devices and had communicated with IS at least once, via Telegram Messenger. He was also on a US no-fly list.

But as the manhunt intensified, questions surfaced about how the suspect had been able to slip through the net, avoiding arrest and deportation despite being on the radar of several security agencies.

The top-selling daily Bild's frontpage headline screamed "Deportation Failure!" while local tabloid B.Z. said starkly "They knew him. They did nothing" next to a photo of the dark-haired Amri.

Meanwhile, a British truck driver has raised nearly £50,000 via crowdfunding for the family of the Polish driver found dead in the truck used in the attack on the Christmas market.

## 'All along, I've been proven to be right'

*Says Trump after Berlin, Turkey attacks*

REUTERS, Palm Beach

US President-elect Donald Trump said on Wednesday that attacks this week in Berlin and Ankara proved he was correct to propose curbing Muslim immigration to the United States.

"What's going on is terrible, terrible," Trump told reporters, when asked about the truck attack that killed 12 people at a Christmas market in Berlin and the killing of Russia's ambassador to Turkey.

Islamic State claimed responsibility for the Berlin killings though US officials say they had seen no evidence that the militant group had directed the attack.

The assassin in Turkey shouted about the war in Syria as he shot dead the envoy from Moscow, which aids Syrian President Bashar al-Assad against rebels in that country's civil war.

Trump was asked by reporters outside his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Florida, if Monday's violence would affect his consideration of a ban on Muslims entering the United States or of a registry for immigrants from Muslim countries.

"You know my plans. All along, I've been proven to be right. 100 percent correct. What's happening is disgraceful," Trump said.

On Monday, Trump issued a statement about the Berlin attack in which he said that Islamic State and other Islamist militants "continually slaughter Christians in their communities and places of worship as part of their global jihad."

## Nepal's national unity under attack

*Warns ex-king Gyanendra Shah*

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's former king has warned that national unity is under attack, making a rare public statement after protests sparked by proposed changes to new federal borders.

Gyanendra Shah, the last king of Nepal, was deposed eight years ago following a Maoist revolution and has since largely refrained from public comment on the country's fractious politics.

He broke his silence with a statement late on Wednesday in which he warned of growing divisions between the communities that inhabit the southern plains and the central hill areas of the Himalayan country over suggested changes to internal borders.

"Social harmony among Nepali people is waning and efforts are being made to break the bonds of unity between the plains, the hills and the mountains," Shah said in a statement.

Shah accused "temporary powers" who he said were "gaining strength under the influence of outside forces" of creating these divisions.

He did not say who he was referring to, but neighbouring India has made clear its displeasure over the federal borders laid out in Nepal's new constitution, which many believe will disadvantage communities living in the plains with close cultural ties to India.

Gyanendra stepped down from the throne in June 2008 after parliament voted to abolish Nepal's 240-year-old Hindu monarchy, transforming the country into a secular republic.



## Duterte faces probe over killings claim

AFP, Manila

The Philippines independent human rights watchdog said yesterday it will investigate President Rodrigo Duterte's admission he killed three criminals years ago, after the United Nations' rights chief called for a murder probe.

Duterte, who is waging an anti-drugs war that has left thousands dead, said last week that he helped police kill three suspected kidnappers early in the first of his several terms as mayor of the southern city of Davao.

UN rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said Tuesday that Duterte's killings, by his own admission, "clearly constitute murder" and Philippine judicial authorities must launch an investigation.

Commission on Human Rights chief Jose Gascon said he has formed a team of investigators to look into the matter, even as Duterte's spokesman Ernesto Abella dismissed the UN call as mere "opinion".

"Law enforcement agencies... must investigate as a matter of course any information that suggests that a crime may have been committed with the view to ensuring that perpetrators are ultimately held accountable should the evidence warrant it," Gascon said in a statement.

The commission is an independent government body that prosecutes law enforcers or other officials who commit torture, extrajudicial killings or violate Filipinos' constitutional rights.

Gascon said his agency has "reconstituted a team to further investigate (Davao death squads) to look into the new revelations and public admissions that may shed light on our previous findings."

The commission had investigated then Davao mayor Duterte over allegations he ran death squads that killed more than a thousand petty criminals there. Duterte has variously denied or confirmed the allegations. The commission did not file any criminal charges after completing its inquiry.

## NEWS IN brief

### Palestinian killed in Jerusalem clashes

AFP, Jerusalem

A Palestinian man was killed during clashes with Israeli soldiers overnight as they arrived to demolish the home of the alleged perpetrator of a deadly attack on Israel, the army said yesterday. A spokeswoman said that during a confrontation "suspects threw improvised explosive devices at soldiers, who responded by opening fire, resulting in the death" of a Palestinian.

### Seven dead in migrant boat tragedies: Italy

AFP, Rome

Seven bodies were recovered from or around stricken migrants boats in the Mediterranean on Wednesday, Italy's coastguard said. The coastguard, which coordinated rescue efforts for three rubber dinghies and a small wooden boat said a total of 300 people had been saved. The rescued people will be taken to ports in southern Italy which have registered nearly 180,000 such arrivals so far this year.

### China launches CO2 monitoring satellite

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday launched a satellite to monitor carbon dioxide levels, state media said, making the Asian giant the third country to track the potent contributor to global warming from space. The TanSat probe will allow China to keep a close eye on greenhouse gas emissions and give it a "louder voice" in future negotiations on carbon reduction, according to the official Xinhua news agency.

## FOILED CHRISTMAS PLOT FOR ATTACK

### Indonesia police beef up security

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesian police yesterday announced plans to deploy some 155,000 personnel to secure the country during Christmas and New Year holidays, a day after police foiled plans for militant attacks.

Police on Wednesday foiled plans by an IS-linked group for a Christmas-time suicide bombing after they discovered a cache of bombs in a house on the outskirts of Jakarta, killing three suspected militants in the process.

Following the raids, national police chief Tito Karnavian said security would be boosted at churches, entertainment venues and public gatherings during the Christmas and New Year celebrations across the sprawling archipelago.

"Police will beef up security after these (raids)", intensifying intelligence-gathering efforts and the monitoring of social media, national police spokesman Martinus Sitompul told AFP.

Deployment of large security personnel at year-end celebrations is an annual exercise for police in the world's most populous Muslim country. The militants who were killed Wednesday had planned to stab an officer at a police station and launch a suicide bomb attack around the Christmas holidays.

Four other suspected militants were also arrested in separate raids on Java and Sumatra on the same day.



Flames and smoke rise during a blaze that engulfed multiple houses and buildings at Itoigawa city, Niigata prefecture in Japan yesterday. The rapidly-spreading fire engulfed more than 100 buildings and sparked evacuations in the northern Japanese city, leaving two injured and forcing authorities to mobilise troops. PHOTO: AFP

## Kashmir struggles to cope with tide of trauma

AFP, Srinagar

In a consultation room in a Kashmiri hospital, Parvaiz Ahmed struggles to find the words to describe how his interrogation at the hands of India's security forces seven years ago has left him traumatised.

Speaking in a whisper and barely looking up from the table, Ahmed's face is wracked with pain as he speaks of his sleepless nights, still haunted by his months in detention in 2009.

"I worry all the time that they will come back and arrest me again," the 38-year-old tells his trauma therapist.

"We can see maybe 190 patients per day and I average around 100," says Arshad Hussain as he explains the workload at the Shri Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital.

"Sixty to 80 percent of them are trauma, depression or PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) patients," he adds.

The hospital is situated in the centre of Srinagar, the largest city in Kashmir -- an often achingly beautiful Himalayan region which is divided between India and Pakistan and claimed in full by both.

A Doctors Without Borders survey last year found more than 1.5 million living in the Kashmir Valley have symptoms of depression.

Some are relatives of those killed, such as Mohammad Shafi Bhat, who lost his voice for several years after troops shot dead his 23-year-old son Bashir Ahmad Bhat in 2014, and still finds speaking a struggle.

Shafi, 50, is barely audible as he tries to recount the events surrounding Bashir's shooting as he waters the flowers around his son's grave in Srinagar's 'Martyrs' Cemetery'.

He soon gives up and instead pulls a miniature photo portrait of his son from his wallet, his face streaming in tears.



Parvaiz Ahmed

## India rescues 70 trafficking victims

AFP, New Delhi

Police have rescued 70 victims of human trafficking, including 33 children, in a restive and impoverished region of central India, an official said yesterday.

The victims, who had been sold to factories and brick kilns, were being transported on a bus when police intercepted the vehicle following a tip-off from anti-trafficking campaigners in Bastar district of Chhattisgarh state on Wednesday.

"We have rescued 20 minor boys and 13 girls. Rest of them are adults and were sold as bonded labourers," Bastar child protection officer Vijay Shankar Sharma told AFP.

## Japan cabinet approves biggest defence budget

AFP, Tokyo

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's cabinet yesterday approved Japan's biggest annual defence budget in the face of North Korea's nuclear and missile threats and a territorial row with China.

The Cabinet approved 5.13 trillion yen (\$43.6 billion) in defence spending for the fiscal year starting in April, up 1.4 percent from the initial budget for the current fiscal year.

It marks the fifth straight annual increase and reflects the hawkish Abe's attempt to build up Japan's military, which since World War II has been constitutionally limited to self defence.

Abe, who is pushing revisions to the constitution, strongly backed new security laws that took effect this year making it possible for Japanese troops fight abroad for the first time since the end of the war.

Japan is on constant alert against neighbouring North Korea which has conducted two underground nuclear tests and more than 20 missile launches this year.

Under the new budget, the ministry aims to beef up Japan's ballistic missile defences,

allocating funds for a new interceptor missile under joint development with the United States.

Also reflected in the spending is Tokyo's determination to defend uninhabited islets in

### N KOREA NUKE THREAT



the East China Sea -- administered by Japan as the Senkakus but claimed by China as the Diaoyus. The ministry said it has allocated funds for increased monitoring operations and to maintain mastery of the air and sea to counter attacks against what it euphemistically described as "island areas" - a reference to the disputed territory.