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Hot tub hangout Electric Picnic Picnic takes off

The EP decor team take a well-earned break as 80,000 people arrive in Stradbally, Co Laois, for the Electric Picnic. Met Éireann predicts a wet and blustery start to day two of the festival, but the sun is expected to shine in the afternoon.

Report: page 3
Photograph: Alan Betson



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The shortlist
WEEKEND

K marks the spot Irish Open preview



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Army chief warns of rising threats

Threats to State include cyberattacks, spying and Russian 'shadow fleet'

Lieut Gen Rossa Mulcahy says defences need upgrade to repel 'initial invasion'

CONOR GALLAGHER
Security and Crime Correspondent

Ireland must focus more on national defence against external threats including espionage, covert Russian vessels and conventional military forces, the newly appointed head of the Defence Forces has said.

Lieut Gen Rossa Mulcahy, who became chief of staff in June, said one of his priorities is improving the Defence Forces' ability to defend the State and its people, as well as with over-

seeing a broad-ranging programme of military reform and expansion.

"We have to be able to deliver on national defence operations," said Lieut Gen Mulcahy. "That's the fundamental role of the Defence Forces, to defend the State. That's something we have to develop over the next couple of years."

The most pressing threats to the State are in the form of "hybrid" activity, he said, referring to hostile acts falling below the threshold of conven-

tional military aggression.

These include espionage, misinformation, cyberattacks and suspicious maritime activity, he said in an interview with The Irish Times.

"In the hybrid area, absolutely there are actors operating in our maritime domain. In our land domain, we know espionage is a threat."

The increasing presence of Russian "shadow fleet" vessels off the Irish coast is also a worry, the general said.

Deceptive practices

A shadow fleet vessel is generally defined as a ship engaged in deceptive practices to transport sanctioned oil or other cargoes.

"We monitor the shadow fleet. It is a concern for us, of course," said Lieut Gen Mulcahy. He said the Defence Forces monitors the behaviour

of these ships to determine their intentions.

Speaking at a meeting of EU Defence Ministers in Copenhagen yesterday, Tánaiste Simon Harris said the use of Irish waters by shadow fleet ships "is of deep concern".

"Let me be clear, Ireland will not allow our waters to be used for the illicit activities of Russia."

"We are particularly concerned about stateless vessels and falsely-flagged vessels and we will continue to protect our sovereignty rights and contribute to the collective security of the EU."

Lieut Gen Mulcahy said the Defence Forces must also be prepared to respond to conventional military aggression, although he conceded such an attack is "unlikely".

This includes being able to defend at sea, in the air and on land.

No small state can fight off an invasion alone, he said.

"But we have to be able to provide a defence to repel any initial invasion and then look for support from partners under the EU or under the UN banner."

"That's the same for any small country. Every sovereign country has to be able to defend itself."

Meaningful defence

He echoed remarks contained in the 2022 Commission on the Defence Forces report, which stated the military "is not equipped, postured or realistically prepared to conduct a meaningful defence of the State against a full-spectrum force for any sustained period of time".

The chief of staff outlined a range of measures being taken to improve military capability

in this area, including the acquisition of radar, sonar and a ground-based missile air-defence system.

Regarding overseas service, the general said the vote by the UN Security Council to wind down the Unifil mission in Lebanon is a "big loss", for the Defence Forces.

➔ New chief prioritises equipping Army to repel hostile forces: page 7

Fringe cuts What to see at this year's festival



TICKET

Irish woman kidnapped in Haiti released

CONOR GALLAGHER

Gena Heraty, the Irish aid worker who was kidnapped in Haiti more than three weeks ago, has been released, along with her fellow captives.

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon Harris confirmed the release yesterday and said all the victims are reported to be safe and well.

Ms Heraty, a missionary who is director of the Sainte-Hélène orphanage run by Nos Petits Frères et Soeurs (NPFS, Our

Little Brothers and Sisters) in Kenscoff, was taken with seven others, including a three-year-old child, at the start of August, about 10km outside the capital, Port-au-Prince.

The Co Mayo woman, who has lived in Haiti since 1993, oversees the running of the orphanage and is the co-ordinator of its special needs programme.

It is believed she was abducted by criminals associated with the Viv Ansanm gang which controls large parts of the country.



■ Irish aid worker Gena Heraty: kidnapped in Haiti more than three weeks ago. PHOTOGRAPH: FAMILY HANDOUT/PA

Criminals later made contact with officials to demand a ransom. It is not known if any ransom was paid.

"We are relieved beyond words. We are so deeply grateful to everyone, in Haiti and internationally, who has worked tirelessly over these terrible weeks to help secure their safe return," the Heraty family said in a statement.

They thanked Mr Harris and officials at the Department of Foreign Affairs as well as Geraldine Byrne Nason, the Irish Am-

bassador in Washington for their assistance.

The powerful Viv Ansanm group has come under increasing international pressure in recent weeks, including from the US, which announced criminal charges against its leader Jimmy Cherizier, also known as "Barbecue".

Washington has offered a reward of up to \$5 million for information leading to his arrest. In response, Cherizier has offered to negotiate with US authorities.

Weather

Wet and blustery with rain spreading northeastwards across the country. Highs of 16-21 degrees in fresh winds.

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Home News

Homelessness: The number of people homeless has surpassed 16,000 for the first time including more than 5,000 children, latest figures show. Page 2

Presidency: Former Dublin manager Jim Gavin has been strongly backed in race to be FF's Aras nominee. Page 3

World News



Gaza: Israel's military stepped up armed operations around Gaza City yesterday, ending pauses that had allowed for aid deliveries. Page 10

Business Today

Brussels: The European Commission's executive vice-president has called on the EU to be "courageous" in response to threats from Donald Trump. Page 16

MetroLink: Dublin Chamber said it was continuing to back the delivery of the 18.8km rail link. Page 17

Sports Weekend

Uefa Conference League: Shelbourne will host Crystal Palace while Rovers welcome European specialists Shakhtar Donetsk.

Para-cycling World Championships: Linda Kelly and Katie-George Dunlevy won gold and defended their tandem time trial title.

Home 2-8. World 9-11. Opinion 12-14. Letters 15. Business 16-17. Crosswords 21.

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