

# Modi Makes Surprise Visit to Pakistan

ISLAMABAD/NEW DELHI - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a surprise stopover in Pakistan on Friday to meet his counterpart, Nawaz Sharif, the first time an Indian premier has visited Pakistan in over a decade. Sharif hugged Modi after he landed at the airport in the eastern city of Lahore before the two boarded a helicopter for Sharif's nearby estate, state television showed. A spokesman at the Pakistani prime minister's office told Reuters the two leaders would discuss a range of bilateral



Modi was on his way home after a visit to Russia. He stopped off in the Afghanistan capital Kabul earlier on Friday. After months of a freeze, India and Pakistan resumed high-level contacts with a brief conversation between Sharif and Modi at climate change talks in Paris late last month, part of efforts to restart a peace dialogue plagued by militant attacks and long-standing distrust. "Looking forward to meeting PM Nawaz Sharif in Lahore today afternoon, where I will drop by on my way back to Delhi," Modi tweeted. (Reuters)

issues, including the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir, the most contentious issue dividing the nuclear-armed rivals.

## Pope Calls in Christmas Message for Unity Against Militant Atrocities

VATICAN CITY - Pope Francis urged the world in his Christmas message on Friday to unite to end atrocities by Islamist militants that he said were causing immense suffering in many countries. Security was tight at the Vatican as Francis, marking the third Christmas since his election in 2013, read his traditional Christmas Day "Urbi et Orbi" (to the city and the world) address from the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica. Tens of thousands of

people had to have their bags checked as they entered the Vatican area and then go through airport-style screening if they wanted to enter St. Peter's Square. Counter-terrorist police with machine guns discreetly patrolled the area in unmarked vans with dark windows. After calling for an end to the civil wars in Syria and Libya, the pope said: "May the attention of the international community be unanimously directed to ending the atrocities



which in those countries, as well as in Iraq, Libya, Yemen and sub-Saharan Africa, even now reap numerous victims, cause immense suffering and do not even spare the historical and cultural patrimony of entire peoples." He was clearly referring to Islamic State militants ... (More on P4)...(18)

## UN must be Cornerstone in Syria National Talks: Iran

TEHRAN - A senior Iranian official says the United Nations must play a pivotal role in the Syrian national dialog aimed at finding a settlement to nearly five-year-long crisis in the Arab country. Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir-Abdollahian held a telephone conversation with UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, on Friday to discuss the latest developments pertaining to international talks on the Syrian conflict. Amir-Abdollahian underlined that the list of terrorist groups in Syria should not divide terrorism into good and bad and should be based on the recent talks in New York on the Syrian crisis. He also urged the international community to adopt a realistic approach toward fighting terrorism and promoting a political process in the Arab country at the same time. He said the crisis in Syria will only be resolved through respecting the country's sovereignty, independence, national unity and ... (More on P4)...(19)

## Refugees Enjoy Christmas in Finnish Reception Centers

HELSINKI - Donning Santa hats, two Finns danced with Christmas cheer in a circle of jubilant asylum seekers who hail from a host of different countries. The dancers serve as instructors at a major reception center close to Helsinki which houses more than 200 foreigners waiting to be granted refugee status by the Finnish immigration authority. In a dining room roughly 80 square meters in size, asylum seekers lined up for their Christmas gifts -- a package containing socks, soap

and cold-proof knits -- from a jolly, laughing Santa Claus. They also enjoyed homemade ginger cakes, a traditional Christmas treat. Making ginger cakes has been one of the activities in the reception center. The asylum seekers, mostly young men in their 20s or 30s, have done the job with speed and willingness: rolling dough, molding various shapes and baking under guidance of the instructors. While Christmas is a common feast in Western coun... (More on P4)...(20)

## IS Sanctioned Organ Harvesting in Document taken in U.S. Raid

WASHINGTON - Islamic State has sanctioned the harvesting of human organs in a previously undisclosed ruling by the group's Islamic scholars, raising concerns that the violent extremist group may be trafficking in body parts. The ruling, contained in a January 31, 2015 document reviewed by Reuters, says taking organs from a living captive to save a Muslim's life, even if it is fatal for the captive, is permissible. (Reuters)



## Iraqi Forces to Retake Mosul from IS After Ramadi Secured: PM

BAGHDAD - Iraq's armed forces will move to retake the major northern city of Mosul from Islamic State once they capture the western city of Ramadi, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said on Friday. Capturing Mosul would deprive the militant group of its biggest population center in both Iraq and Syria, effectively abolishing the state structure of IS in Iraq, depriving it of a major source of funding and dealing a blow to its influence. The capture of Ramadi would give the army a major psychological boost in its move toward Mosul. The cities are about 420 km (260 miles) apart by road. Iraqi forces started an attack on Tuesday to dislodge Islamic ... (More on P4)...(21)

## World Powers must Stop Fighters Entering from Turkey and Jordan: Syria

BEIRUT - Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem said on Friday that international efforts to end the conflict in his country should focus on preventing insurgents coming in from neighboring Turkey and Jordan. Syrian state media, which reported the comments Moualem made after meeting Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi during a visit to Beijing, quoted him as saying he stressed the need to "implement U.N. Security Council resolutions on fighting terror". The Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad accuses Turkey of arming hardline Islamist rebels and allowing foreign jihadists into Syria and says U.S.-backed Jordan arms and trains insurgents in southern Syria - allegations vehemently denied by those countries. ... (More on P4)...(22)

## Russia, Qatar to Encourage Syrian Opposition to talk to Govt.

MOSCOW - Russia and Qatar have agreed on steps to encourage the Syrian opposition to sit down for talks with the Syrian government, the Russian foreign minister said Friday. Russia is a staunch supporter of Syrian President Bashar Assad, who Qatar and other Middle East countries accuse of war crimes. Speaking to reporters after his talks with Minister Sergey Lavrov in Moscow, Qatari Foreign Minister Khalid bin Mohammad al-Attiyah on Friday accused Assad of supporting terrorist groups. Lavrov, meanwhile, insisted that "it's up to the Syrian people" to decide



Assad's future. The Russian minister said the two countries still disagree on Assad's future but added that he and al-Attiyah have agreed to encourage the Syrian opposition to launch talks with the Syrian government. "We have reached an understanding with our Qatari counterparts about what we can do to help make sure such a delegation (of the Syrian opposition) is formed so the Syrian talks can be effective," Lavrov said. (AP)

## S. Sudan's President Creates 28 New States, Threat to Peace

JUBA - South Sudan's President Salva Kiir made a Christmas Eve decree dissolving the nation's 10 states and creating 28 new ones, a move which critics say threatens the peace deal signed in August to end the country's two-year civil war. The announcement in a late night broadcast by the state-run South Sudan Television said seven of the 10 previous governors have been reappointed along with 21 others to run the new administrative zones. Kiir's move

to create 28 states comes after 150 rebels returned to the capital Juba on Monday to implement a peace deal signed by Kiir and rebel leader Riek Machar. That deal rests on power-sharing in the original 10 states between Kiir and Machar's sides, as well as other political groups. The rebel leadership is consulting on their reaction to the president's action, Machar's spokesman James Gatdet Dak told The Associated Press Friday. The decree is ... (More on P4)...(23)

## Turkish 'Cleansing' Operation Rocks Southeastern Cities

DIYARBAKIR - Explosions and gunfire resounded around the southeastern Turkish town of Cizre on Friday after a clash overnight that the army said killed six Kurdish militants and one soldier, as a security operation there entered its 11th day. Since a two-year ceasefire between Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants and Ankara fell apart in July, the mainly Kurdish southeast has been plunged back into a three-decades-old conflict which has killed more than 40,000 people. A helicopter clattered overhead and armored vehicles sped along a hilltop road above Cizre, near the Syrian border, as security forces pressed on with a campaign across the region involving thousands of troops, backed by tanks. Reuters TV footage showed smoke billowing from buildings hit by blasts, while streets were empty and shops shuttered. The town, in Sirmak province, is the focus of what the government has described as an operation to "cleanse" the area of militants. But locals dispute that description and complain that the attacks are indiscriminate. "The recent war being conducted in the Sirmak area, especially in Cizre, is not a cleansing. They are shelling randomly," said shopkeeper Abdullah Varkin, 38, speaking as a small group of children and men looked on. "The people are miserable. The sick cannot even go to hospital. The wounded are trying to treat themselves at home and some died due to a lack of doctors and blood loss," he said. Locals also complained about a lack of food and water. (Reuters)

## Neighbor News

### Iran Slams 'Unlawful' US Bid to Seize Assets

TEHRAN - A senior Iranian official has censured US efforts to have Tehran's assets frozen in the country turned over as compensation to American victims of bombings in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia. "The US judicial apparatus, with the support of the country's administration and Congress, has been issuing and enacting rulings against the Islamic Republic of Iran for years, violating basic principles of international law with recourse to unsubstantiated and baseless allegations," Foreign Ministry Spokesman Hossein Ja-

beri Ansari said on Friday. "Some US courts are making a travesty of justice and law, having sentenced the Islamic Republic of Iran over the past few years to paying restitution to victims of terror acts carried out by known citizens of US allies." The case in the US involves over 1,300 plaintiffs, who have demanded compensation over two bombings, namely the 1983 Marine barracks bombing in Beirut, Lebanon, and the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia. (PressTV)

### China Increases Financial Support for Special Education

BEIJING - The government has raised basic financial support for primary and junior middle schools catering to disabled students to 6,000 yuan (926.40 U.S. dollars) per child every year from 4,000 yuan, according to the Ministry of Education. The move underlines China's commitment to free primary and middle school education for at least 90 percent of children with visual, hearing and learning disabilities by the end of 2016, up from the 71.9 percent in 2012. As part of a 2014 plan on special needs education, the government promised more investment, infrastructure, quality teachers and a new curricula. Meanwhile, general primary schools in east China will receive 650

yuan annually for every student they have and junior high schools will get 850 yuan. The same funds for schools in underdeveloped western regions are 50 yuan less, the ministry said in a statement Friday. Such funds are for the daily operations of schools across the nine-year compulsory education, additional subsidies are available for students from poor backgrounds. Based on these standards, which will take effect next year, more than 11 billion yuan (1.7 billion U.S. dollars) has been allocated from the central budget to ensure the smooth operation of primary and junior middle schools in urban areas for the 2016 spring semester, the ministry added. (Xinhua)

### Financial Information of Dual Nationals being Shared with US



WASHINGTON - Pakistan and the United States are sharing information on income tax and bank accounts of Pakistani citizens who have dual nationality. According to diplomatic sources, the information is exchanged under the US Foreign Accounts Tax Compliance Act (Fatca). The act offers two models, known as inter-governmental agreement 1 and 2. The first model requires a foreign financial institution to share related information with its own govern-

mental agencies, which then report it to the US Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The second version requires a participating foreign financial institution to report information directly to the IRS. Under this arrangement, an FFI needs to register directly with the IRS. Pakistan has signed the second model and under this arrangement 36 Pakistani banks and financial institutions have been registered with the IRS as participating institutions. (Agencies)

### Tajikistan Ratifies CIS Free Trade Zone Agreement

BISHKEK - Tajikistan has ratified agreement on free trade zone within the Commonwealth of Independent States and hopes for the growth of trade with the former Soviet Union countries. The share of the CIS countries in the total trade of Tajikistan makes half of the total volume of foreign trade turnover of the country. Trade turnover with the CIS countries this year has decreased by 13.6%, said Minister of Economic Development and

Trade Negmatullo Khikmatullozoda. The main trade partners of Tajikistan among the CIS countries are Russia and Kazakhstan. According to the Minister, the volume of trade with these countries in January-November decreased by 7.6% and 18%, respectively. The Minister noted that ratification of the document signed four years ago will contribute to the growth of trade turnover with the CIS countries. (AKIpress)