

# Samples Confirm Islamic State used Mustard Gas in Iraq: Diplomat

AMSTERDAM - Islamic State militants attacked Kurdish forces in Iraq with mustard gas last year, the first known use of chemical weapons in Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein, a diplomat said, based on tests by the global chemical weapons watchdog. A source at the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) confirmed that laboratory tests had come back positive for the sulfur mustard, after around 35 Kurdish troops were sickened on the battlefield last August. The OPCW will not identify who used the chemical agent. But the diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity because the findings have not yet been released, said the result confirmed that chemical weapons had been



used by Islamic State fighters. The samples were taken after the soldiers became ill during fighting against Islamic State militants southwest of Erbil, capital of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region. The OPCW already concluded in October that mustard gas was used last year in neighboring Syria. Islamic State has declared a "caliphate" in territory it controls in both Iraq and Syria and does not recognize the frontier. Experts believe that the sulfur mustard either originated from an undeclared Syrian chemical stockpile, or that militants have gained the basic know how to develop and conduct a crude chemical attack with rockets or mortars. (Reuters)

## Turkey Vows 'Harsh Reaction' if Kurds Try to Take Syrian Town

KIEV/ISTANBUL - Turkey will not allow the northern Syrian town of Azaz to fall into the hands of a Kurdish militia and its fighters will face the "harsh reaction" if they approach it again, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said on Monday. A major offensive supported by Russian bombing and Iranian-backed Shi'ite militias has brought the Syrian army to within 25 km (15 miles) of the Turkish border. The Kurdish YPG militia has exploited the

situation, seizing ground from Syrian rebels to extend its presence along the Turkish border. Turkey is infuriated by the expansion of Kurdish influence in northern Syria, fearing it will encourage separatist ambitions among its own Kurds. The YPG, which Ankara considers to be a terrorist group, controls nearly all of Syria's frontier with Turkey. Speaking to reporters on his plane en route to Ukraine, Davutoglu said YPG fighters would have taken control of rebel-



held Azaz and the town of Tal Rifaat further south had it not been for Turkish artillery firing at them over the weekend. "YPG elements were

forced away from around Azaz. If they approach again they will see the harshest reaction. We will not allow Azaz to fall," Davutoglu said. (Reuters)

## Farmers' Anti-Reform Protests Severely Harm Greek Economy: Gov't Warns

ATHENS - The escalating protest action of farmers across Greece, who oppose the planned pension and taxation systems reforms, are severely harming the health of the already ailing national economy, the Left-led government warned on Monday as an invitation to start talks in search of a fair compromise was still pending. A month after the launch of the blockades across key national highway junctions and border crossings for several hours each day, the impact is significant on

the economy, Deputy Foreign Minister Dimitris Mardas told local Mega TV channel. Although there are still no official estimates on the damages, the minister drew parallels with the 1997 similar mobilizations that lasted 58 days. "The cost to the economy at the time reached 13 billion drachmas and the value of agricultural exports declined by 100 million euros that year," Mardas noted, underlining that it took Greek exporters ... (More on P4)...(29)

## Opinion Poll Sees Spanish PP Lose Support as Corruption Crisis Bites

MADRID - An opinion poll published in the conservative Spanish newspaper ABC on Monday shows that the Peoples' Party (PP) of Mariano Rajoy has lost support since the Dec. 20 general election. The February poll carried out by the GAD3 group for the newspaper shows support for the PP dropping from 28.7 percent they received in the Dec. 20 general election, to 27.9 percent should the election be repeated now. This fall in support comes in the wake of the revelations of further corruption

scandals involving Rajoy's party in the regions of Valencia and Madrid, where the PP offices were raided by Civil Guards last week as part of an investigation into the illegal financing of the party. Sunday saw veteran politician Esperanza Aguirre, a former president of the Madrid Autonomous Community and minister for education, resign as the president of the Madrid branch of the party on Sunday afternoon, explaining that she "should have kept closer vigilance" on the ... (More on P4)...(30)

## Cameron Brings EU Arguments to France's Hollande

PARIS - Prime Minister David Cameron will meet French President Francois Hollande on Monday to discuss Britain's EU renegotiation ahead of a crunch summit this week, Downing Street said. The European Union is trying to broker a series of reforms to Britain's relationship with the bloc ahead of a looming "in-out" referendum that could be held as early as June this year. The talks will take place in Paris at 1800 GMT. British officials hope a deal can be nailed down at an EU summit in Brussels on Thursday and Fri-

day. In London, Cameron's spokeswoman said: "We have made progress (on renegotiation) but there's details to be pinned down. "Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed," she added. A deal could pave the way for a referendum on whether Britain should leave the 28-member EU or stay in. But some of Cameron's demands are proving problematic to his European partners. Analysts say France - which with Germany is considered the EU's engine - is likely to want to see changes in what is being proposed



over economic governance. Cameron had wanted the European Union to recognize a series of principles including that countries outside the eurozone like Britain should not face discrimination or disad-

vantage. The British prime minister also spoke to European Union chief Donald Tusk on Monday. Tusk was first in the queue in Paris - he met Hollande in the French capital before Cameron arrived. (AFP)

## Presidential Runoff in Central African Republic Peaceful

BANGUI - Voters in Central African Republic headed to the ballot on Sunday to elect their future president for the next five years during a presidential runoff poll that was generally termed as peaceful. The voters were choosing between two former prime ministers, Anicet-Georges Dologuele who won the first round polls on Dec. 30, 2015 with about 24 percent, and Faustin-Archange Touadera who came second with slightly over 19 percent. Dologuele, 58, is an economist who served as prime minister during the regime of ex-president Ange-Felix Patasse (1999-



2001) and also served as president of the Development Bank for Central African States. His rival, Touadera, also aged 58, was a former vice-chancellor of Bangui University who served as

## No Cold War with Russia as Syria Truce Agreed: EU

BRUSSELS - The European Union's top diplomat said on Monday there was no Cold War "climate" between Moscow and the West as they agreed to a pause in the fighting in Syria, although Russia's prime minister warned of growing tension between his country and the West. At an annual security conference in Munich on Friday, world powers agreed to a "cessation of hostilities" that would let humanitarian aid be delivered in Syria. But a day later Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev told the gathering that Moscow and the West had "fallen into a new Cold War". "I have not seen the climate of Cold War in these last days," the EU foreign policy head Federica Mogherini said before hosting EU foreign ministers in Brussels, when she was asked to comment on the Russian warning. Mogherini said all the parties to the Syria agreement must stick to their commitments, a call echoed by Bert Koenders, the foreign minister of the Netherlands, which now hold the EU's rotating presidency. (Reuters)

## Bosnia Applies for EU Membership, Hoping to Make up Ground

SARAJEVO - Bosnia handed in its application for EU membership Monday, hoping to catch up with its neighbors on the EU path but confronting the reality that many in the country have grown tired of waiting for jobs and prosperity and are already voting with their feet. President Dragan Covic submitted the application to the Dutch Foreign Affairs Minister, Bert Koenders, in Brussels. The Netherlands currently holds the EU presidency. "There is no way back for Bosnia-Herzegovina, we must catch up with our neighbors," Covic said. He said the country will speed up the required reforms in the expectation that the EU will grant the country candidate status in 2017. Bosnia first knocked on the EU door ... (More on P4)...(32)

## Student Leader's Arrest Leads to Protest at India University

NEW DELHI - Massive protests paralyzed one of India's top universities Monday after the president of the student union was arrested on charges of sedition. Kanhaiya Kumar was arrested Friday over a demonstration days earlier at Jawaharlal Nehru University to mark the anniversary of the 2013 execution of Afzal Guru, a Kashmiri man convicted of an attack on India's Parliament. A student faction linked to the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party filed a police complaint, and Kumar was arrested amid allegations that anti-India slogans were used at the demonstration. On Monday, several student groups called for a ... (More on P4)...(35)

## Missiles Hit School and Hospital in Syrian Border Town, 14 Dead: Residents

AMMAN - At least 14 civilians were killed when missiles hit a children's hospital, a school and other locations in the rebel-held Syrian town of Azaz near the Turkish border on Monday, a medic and two residents said. They said at least five missiles hit the hospital in the town

center and a nearby school, where refugees fleeing a major Syrian army offensive were sheltering. A resident said another refugee shelter south of the town was also hit by bombs dropped by jets believed to be Russian. Tens of thousands of people ... (More on P4)...(33)

## Ukraine Bans Russian Cargo Trucks in Tit-For-Tat move

KIEV - Ukraine has banned Russian trucks from crossing its territory in response to a similar move by Moscow, Prime Minister Arseniy Yatseniuk said on Monday. Diplomatic and trade ties between Russia and Ukraine have broken down over Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and a pro-Russian separatist conflict, a dispute that has now hit road freight. "Ukraine

has temporarily suspended ... transit permits for cargo vehicles with Russian registrations until it receives an explanation and resolution of this dispute," Yatseniuk said in a statement. On Sunday, the Russian transport ministry barred Ukrainian trucks because Ukrainian activists had been blocking some Russian trucks from entering Ukraine. ... (More on P4)...(34)

## Nieghbor News

### China Urges US, N. Korea to Hold Direct Talks

BEIJING - China's foreign ministry on Monday urged the United States and North Korea to sit down with each other face-to-face and resolve their problems, as tension continues to climb on the Korean peninsula after North Korea's latest rocket test. While China was angered by the launch, it has also expressed concern at plans by Washington and Seoul to deploy an advanced U.S. missile defense system, saying it would impact upon China's own security.

"The focus of the nuclear issue on the peninsula is between the United

States and North Korea," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei told a daily news briefing. "We urge the United States and North Korea to sit down and have communications and negotiations, to explore ways to resolve each other's reasonable concerns and finally reach the goal we all want reached."

North Korea launched a long-range rocket on Feb. 7 carrying what it called a satellite, drawing renewed international condemnation just weeks after it carried out a nuclear bomb test. (Reuters)

### Tehran Says S-300 Missile System Being Shipped to Iran

TEHRAN - Russia is shipping S-300 air defense missile systems to Iran, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Hossein Jaber Ansari said here on Monday.

"The agreement for the delivery of S-300 systems has been finalized over the past months and they are being shipped to Iran," Ansari told a weekly press conference. Iran and Russia have diversified their cooperation, and both countries have "remarkable" political and defense cooperation, he said.

Moscow and Teheran signed an 800-million-U.S. dollar contract in 2007 to supply Iran with five S-300 systems. In September 2010, then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev cancelled

the contract in line with a resolution of the United Nations Security Council, which banned the supply of conventional weapons to Iran.

Iran, in response, submitted a 4-billion-dollar claim against Russia to an international arbitration court in Geneva.

In early April last year, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree to lift the ban on sales of S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems after Iran and six world powers, including Russia, reached a framework accord on parameters of Iran's controversial nuclear program.

Iran withdrew the lawsuit against Russia after the latter agreed to supply the S-300 missile systems. (Xinhua)

### Pakistan Joins 'Thunder of the North' Military Exercise in Saudi Arabia

RIYADH - Armed forces from around 20 countries including Pakistan and Malaysia are gathering in northern Saudi Arabia Sunday for "the largest, most important military manoeuvres" ever staged in the region, the official news agency SPA reported. The "Thunder of the North" exercise involving ground,

air, and naval forces sends a "clear message" that Riyadh and its allies "stand united in confronting all challenges and preserving peace and stability in the region", SPA said. Saudi Arabia is currently leading a military campaign against Houthi rebels in its southern neighbour Yemen. (Agencies)

### ADB to Help Tajikistan Create Favorable Environment for Foreign Investors

DUSHANBE - According to the press center of Tajikistan's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Tajikistan Resident Mission (TJRM) has suggested that Tajikistan's CCI should outline the main directions of partnership for creation of favorable environment for development of private sector in the country. "The ADB is closely collaborating with the Government of Tajikistan on carrying out economic reforms, laying a special emphasis on crating favorable environment for potential foreign investors," Mr. C.C. Yu, ADB's Country Director for Tajikistan, was quoted as saying during a meeting with CCI Head Sharif Said.

The two reportedly discussed issues related to cooperation in attracting investment in Tajikistan's economy, supporting economic reforms, private entrepreneurship and training of business personnel. ADB's current partnership strategy with Tajikistan focuses on improved connectivity, energy security, and private sector development. In 2015, ADB approved two projects worth a total \$92 million for Tajikistan, including \$60 million budget support for the first phase of the investment climate reforms program and \$32 million to modernize technical and vocational education and training system in the country. ... (More on P4)...(36)