

WHO Calls for Access to Yemen's Besieged Taiz

SANAA - The World Health Organization is calling for access to Taiz, Yemen's third largest city which has been under siege for months amid a civil war between an internationally recognized government and Shiite rebels. The organization said in a Thursday statement that five of its trucks have been prevented from entering the city since Dec. 14. It said the trucks carried "health supplies that urgently needed to be delivered" to



overwhelmed hospitals, including trauma medicines and "500 cylinders of oxygen that are critically needed by the hospitals." Yemen has been embroiled in conflict since Shiite rebels known as Houthis took over the capital, Sanaa, in September 2014. The conflict escalated when a Saudi-led coalition began launching airstrikes against the Houthis in March. The Houthis have maintained a months-long siege of Taiz. (AP)

Polish, EU Diplomats Meet over Disputed Media, Court Laws

WARSAW - Poland's government sought to quell concerns within the European Union that its new laws on state media and on the constitutional court threatened democracy and media freedoms. The new media law, which took effect Friday, ended the terms of state radio and television heads and transferred the authority to appoint top state media executives to the treasury minister from a special committee. The conserv-



ative Law and Justice party that took power in November argues state media cow-towed to the previous government and lacked objectivity. The minister immediately appointed right-wing politician and journalist, former European Parliament member, Jacek Kurski, to head the state

TV. Kurski said he will look to put state TV at the heart of the country's national values and traditions. Poland's deputy foreign minister and the European Commission's top diplomat in the country met Friday to discuss the EU's concerns over the legislation, which is due to be replaced by mid-2016 with a sweeping law that will give the government full control of state radio, television and the PAP state news ... (More on P4)...(19)

Belgium Found Possible Paris Attacks Bomb Factory in December Raid

BRUSSELS - Belgian investigators believe explosives used in the attacks in Paris in November may have been made in an apartment in Brussels that was rented under a false name and where a fingerprint of a key fugitive was found. Police found material that could be used to make explosives, traces of explosive acetone peroxide and handmade belts during a raid on the apartment on Dec. 10, federal prosecutors said in a statement on Friday. Belgian news-

paper De Standaard, which reported the raid in its Friday edition, said the investigators believed the explosives were probably packed into suicide belts in a hotel outside Paris in the lead-up to the Nov. 13 attacks. Prosecutors investigating Belgian links to the Paris attacks said the apartment in the district of Schaarbeek had been rented under a false name that might have been used by a person already in custody in ... (More on P4)...(20)

Neighbor News

Pakistan Reaffirms Support to S. Arabia

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan reaffirmed on Thursday its support to Saudi Arabia, which is embroiled in a tense standoff with Iran, and the counter-terrorism coalition that it (Riyadh) was setting up. The reiteration of support for the Saudi government was made during a shortened visit by Saudi Foreign Minister Dr Adel Al-Jubeir to Islamabad for discussions on his country's diplomatic row with Iran and the multinational coalition against terrorism it (Saudi Arabia) had announced. "People of Pakistan held the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in high esteem and also had deep respect for the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. ... (they) will always stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of Saudi Arabia against any threat to its territorial integrity and sovereignty," PM Sharif told FM Jubeir, while assuring him of Pakistan's unconditional support. (Agencies)

China's Central Bank to Maintain Prudent Monetary Policy

BEIJING - China's central bank has said it will continue to maintain a prudent monetary policy this year to create a sound financial environment and keep liquidity at a reasonable level. A combination of flexible tools will be used to ensure the banking sector's liquidity stays at a reasonably abundant level, the People's Bank of China (PBOC) said in a statement released on Friday after a work conference. The central bank will support commercial banks expand lending to key sectors and weak areas of the economy via multiples tools, including pledged supplementary lending and medium-term lending facility, according to the statement. The PBOC will push for continued optimization of credit structure to make the financial sector support growth of the real economy. It will also continue to make interest rates more market-based and improve the exchange rate formation mechanism to ensure a generally steady rate for the yuan, the statement said. (Xinhua)

Egypt Minister Suggests Uprising Anniversary Protests Would Violate Islamic Law

CAIRO - Egypt's minister of religious endowments has warned against holding protests during the anniversary of the uprising that ended President Hosni Mubarak's rule, the state news agency said, and suggested any unrest would violate Islamic law. Mohamed Mokhtar-Gomaa said during a meeting with officials in his ministry that maintaining stability and security is a priority. He referred to a statement from Egypt's Grand Mufti, the country's high-

est religious authority, which said that any call for protests or destruction "is a full crime and illegal according to Islamic Sharia law", said MENA state news agency. The uprising, which started on Jan. 25, 2011 and lasted 18 days, had raised hopes of a new era of democracy and greater economic opportunities in a country long dominated by men from the military and business and political elites who support them. Instead it triggered tur ... (More on P4)...(21)

Special Forces Target IS in Hawija: Iraq Official

BAGHDAD - Foreign special forces have been carrying out raids on an Islamic State stronghold in northern Iraq ahead of an offensive planned later this year to retake Mosul, the largest city under the group's control, Iraq's parliamentary speaker said. Several attacks behind Islamic State lines around Hawija, 210 kilometers (130 miles) north of Baghdad, were carried out in recent weeks, Salim al-Jabouri told Reuters on Thursday. Both the U.S.



and Iraqi military have denied that U.S. forces have carried out military operations on the ground in Hawija since October, when U.S. special forces rescued 69 Iraqis in a raid that killed one U.S. commando. But Dubai-based al-Hadath TV and Iraqi media have reported at least half a dozen raids in and around Hawija since late December, led ... (More on P4)...(22)

Iran Accuses Saudi Warplanes of Attacking its Embassy in Yemen



DUBAI - Iran on Thursday said Saudi warplanes had attacked its embassy in Yemen's capital, a development that would exacerbate tensions between the major Shi'ite and Sunni powers in the region, and Riyadh said it would investigate the accusation. "Saudi Arabia is responsible for the damage to the embassy building and the injury to some of its staff," Foreign Ministry Spokesman Hossein Jaber Ansari was quoted as saying by Iranian state television news channel IRIB. Residents and witnesses in the capital Sanaa said there was no damage to the embassy building in the district of Hadda. They said an air strike had hit a public square about 700 meters (yards) away from the embassy and that some stones and shrapnel had landed in the embassy's yard. A growing diplomatic dispute between Riyadh and Tehran triggered by Saudi's execution of a prominent Shi'ite cleric has damaged the outlook for any resolution to the conflict in Yemen, where a coalition led by Saudi Arabia has been fighting the Shi'ite, Iran-allied Houthi movement. (Reuters)

Syria Rebels Warns U.N. 'Pressure' will Prolong War

BEIRUT - Syrian rebels said President Bashar al-Assad's opponents are under international pressure to make concessions that would prolong the conflict, underscoring their doubts about a new U.N.-led drive for peace talks planned to begin this month. An opposition council that met U.N. envoy Staffan de Mistura this week was under pressure "to offer concessions that will prolong the suffering of our people and the spilling of their blood", a statement signed by prominent rebel groups said. The opposition council of rebels and Assad's political opponents was set up last month to oversee negotiations, which are envisaged as part of a new effort to settle the five-year-long war that has killed 250,000 people. The rebels, including groups represented in the council, said they would ... (More on P4)...(23)

EU Welcomes Access to Syria's Madaya, Urges Halt to Attacks on Civilians

BRUSSELS - The European Union on Friday welcomed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's decision to allow humanitarian access to the town of Madaya, and called for a halt to all attacks on civilians in the conflict, ahead of peace talks later this month. The war in Syria has killed an estimated quarter of a million people in nearly five years, ravaging the country and creating a breeding ground for radical Islamists as regional allies and global players back different sides in the conflict.



The United Nations hopes to convene talks between Damascus and the Syrian opposition on Jan. 25, and the blockade of Madaya, near the border with Lebanon, has become a focal issue for Assad's opponents. "The decision of the Syrian regime to allow humanitarian access in Madaya is a first step in the right direction," Federica Mogherini, the EU's ... (More on P4)...(24)

ASEAN Condemns DPRK Nuclear Test

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN - The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) issued a statement on Friday, condemning the recent nuclear test by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The statement said DPRK's nuclear test is in violation of the relevant United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. "On 6 January 2016, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) conducted another nuclear test, which is in violation of the relevant United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions", said a statement from the ASEAN foreign ministers. In the statement, ASEAN reaffirms the importance of peace and security on the Korean Peninsula and reiterates its full support for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner. "We urge the DPRK to comply with all the relevant UNSC resolutions and call on all parties ... (More on P4)...(25)

UN Chief Praises Sri Lanka's Reform Agenda

UNITED NATIONS - UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said Thursday that he is encouraged by the Sri Lankan government's commitment to a broad reform agenda and its efforts to advance a nationwide dialogue. Ban congratulated President Maithripala Sirisena, the government and people on the first year of the country's political transition, said a statement from the UN chief's spokesperson. Sri Lanka's reform agenda "aims to realize durable peace, stability and prosperity for the Sri Lankan people," said the statement. The UN chief supports the Sri Lankan government's efforts to achieve a long-term political settlement acceptable to all, and welcomes its ... (More on P4)...(26)

Turkish Forces Kill 17 IS Militants in Attack on Iraq's Bashiqa Camp

ANKARA - Turkish soldiers killed 17 Islamic State (IS) militants in late Thursday while the IS group tried to leak into a military training camp in the Bashiqa region of Mosul province of Iraq, local Hurriyet Daily News reported on Friday. Turkish soldiers suffered casualties as they repelled the attack, which is the third assault since December against the military camp which is relatively close to IS-held Mosul, according to the report. The IS militants launched their first attack on the military camp on Dec. 16 just after Turkey deployed around additional 150 troops to the Bashiqa area in December earlier with aim of training an Iraqi Sunni militia to fight IS. In a second assault on Dec. 27, five Turkish soldiers were injured. The deployment in Iraq, however, have caused a row ... (More on P4)...(27)

India, France Start Joint Military Exercise

NEW DELHI - India and France Friday began a joint military exercise in the western state of Rajasthan. The eight-day counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency exercise includes a French contingent comprising 56 personnel of the 35th Infantry Regiment of the 7th Armoured Brigade, sources said. The French contingent, which had served in Afghanistan, is led by Major Thibaut De Lacoste Lareymondie, they said. On the Indian side, troops from the 2nd battalion of the Garhwal Rifles are participating in the exercise code-named Shakti-2016, the sources said. "The exercise is an important step ... (More on P4)...(28)

Tajikistan Makes Preparations for the 25th Anniversary of The CIS

DUSHANBE - Tajikistan makes preparations for the 25th anniversary of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). An interstate exhibition dedicated to this landmark event will take place in Moscow this year from June 9-12. The organizing committee for preparation of the country for the mentioned exhibition met in Dushanbe yesterday to discuss participation of Tajik producers and entrepreneurs in the exhibition. Speaking at the meeting, Deputy Prime Minister, Azimbrohim, noted that the exhibition would give Tajik producers and entrepreneurs an opportunity to display their achievements and find new trading partners. Established on December 1991 after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is a regional organization. (Asia-Plus)