

Boko Haram Killed Nearly 1,200 People Since 2013: Cameroon

YAOUNDÉ - Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamists have killed nearly 1,200 people in neighbouring Cameroon's far north since 2013, the communications minister in Yaounde said Friday. Issa Tchiroma Bakary told reporters that the group had staged 315 raids in the border region during this period and carried out 32 suicide bombings. "In total, 1,098 civilians, 67 of our soldiers and three police officials have been killed in these barbaric attacks by the Boko Haram terrorist group," Bakary said. Since July last year, Cameroon's far north has been hit by a series of at-



tacks blamed on Boko Haram, which has pledged allegiance to the Islamic

State group. This year, the number of attacks in the region has increased to a near

daily basis with simultaneous incursions in some areas. "In the face of such unjustified and gratuitous harassment our defence and security forces have inflicted heavy losses on the enemy," he said, adding that the group had been so weakened that it was now taking recourse to bomb attacks, often staged by women or girls. Since late November, the Cameroon army has carried out operations in several border areas aimed at weakening Nigerian jihadists active in the region. Boko Haram in the past year stepped up cross-border attacks in Niger, Chad and Cameroon while continuing shooting and suicide assaults on markets, mosques and other mostly civilian targets within Nigeria itself. (AFP)

Turkey Detains 12 Academics over Call for Peace with Kurdish Militants

ISTANBUL - Turkish police on Friday detained 12 academics who signed a declaration calling for a cease-fire between the Kurdish militants and Turkish security forces, state-run Anadolu Agency reported. It said the academicians were charged with "insulting the state" and "engaging in terrorist propaganda" by signing the declaration, according to the report. The scholars are reportedly lecturers from Kocaeli University in Turkey's Marmara region, and the police were look-

ing for another nine. More than 1,400 academicians from universities across the country including some with foreign nationalities, who called themselves "Group of Academics for Peace," signed a peace declaration titled "We won't be a part to this crime" days ago. The declaration criticized the government policy as being "based on violence" and called for an end to the ongoing fighting in Turkey's southeastern region between Turkish security forces ... (More on P4)... (21)

US, Kremlin Officials Meet at Russian Border for Ukraine Talks

MOSCOW - Top US and Russian officials met Friday in Russia's westernmost outpost to discuss the Ukraine crisis amid attempts to bolster a fragile truce in the east of the ex-Soviet country, a source told AFP. US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and top Kremlin aide Vladislav Surkov met near the city of Kaliningrad in Russia's exclave bordering European Union members Lithuania and Poland, a source familiar with the situation told AFP. "The meeting



is closed to the media. The topic is Ukraine," the source said. The meeting took place in Russia because Surkov

has been targeted by Western sanctions over the Kremlin's role in the Ukraine crisis and is unable to travel to the EU, the source said. It came after Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Barack Obama ... (More on P4)... (22)

Iraqi Force Enters Southern Oil City to Disarm Tribal Fighters

BASRA - Iraq has sent an armored army division and a police strike force into the southern oil city of Basra to disarm residents amid intensified feuding among rival Shi'ite Muslim tribes, local officials and security sources said on Friday. Forces had been deployed earlier to restore calm to rural areas running north of the city towards West Qurna and Majnoon oilfields on Wednesday, but a local official reassured foreign companies their assets

were secure. "The oil companies and oil sites and the roads leading to them are completely safe. There are no concerns in this regard," said Sabah al-Bazouni, head of Basra's provincial council. The tribal fighting and military response are a sign of the growing problems that could face foreign oil companies, even though they operate far from areas of conflict with Islamic State. The disputes have forced Baghdad to divert critical security resources from



the frontlines with those militants in the north and west to the south, where oil fields account for more than 85 percent of production by the ma-

major OPEC member. "This security operation targets areas north of Basra that have an abundance of tribal clashes and will ... (More on P4)... (23)

Australia Keeps its Top Ranking in Nuclear Security

CANBERRA - Australia has been ranked number one overall in nuclear security by the Nuclear Threat Initiative in its 2016 Nuclear Security Index, released Thursday. This is the third consecutive time Australia has topped the list. "Australia's high ranking demonstrates our commitment to international nuclear security treaties and standards," the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade said in a statement on Friday. The Nuclear Threat Initiative is a non-government organi-

sation based in the United States, that works to reduce global threats from nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. According to the index, Australia has been ranked first on measures against theft of nuclear materials and second for protection against sabotage, including cyber-attacks. The 2016 index, third of its kind, finds that progress on reducing the threat of catastrophic nuclear terrorism has slowed and major gaps remain in the global nuclear security system. (Xinhua)

Russia Says Accusations of Putin's Role in Doping 'Baffling'

MOSCOW - The head of the Russian Olympic Committee says it is "baffling" to say that President Vladimir Putin may have been consulted on doping by Russian athletes. A World Anti-Doping Agency commission's report published Thursday said former IAAF president Lamine Diack told a lawyer he would consult Putin, "with whom he had struck up a friendship," to discuss doping cases against nine Russians ahead of the 2013 world championships in Moscow. The report says the processing of the cases was deliberately delayed, though none of the nine competed at the 2013 worlds and all were eventually banned after further delays. ROC president Alexander Zhukov, who is also a senior Russian politician, says the mention of Putin in the report is "unsupported" by evidence and raises doubt over the commission's other findings. (AP)

Severe Malnutrition Confirmed in Syria: U.N.

BEIRUT/GENEVA - The U.N. children's fund UNICEF on Friday confirmed cases of severe malnutrition among children in the besieged Syrian town of Madaya, where local relief workers reported 32 deaths of starvation in the past month. A mobile clinic and medical team of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent was on its way to Madaya after the government approved an urgent request, and a vaccination campaign is planned next week, the World Health Organization (WHO) said. Two convoys of aid supplies were delivered this week to



of 42,000 affected by the months-long blockade. The U.N. said a convoy was planned to Madaya, which is besieged by pro-government forces, and two rebel-besieged villages of Foua and Kefraya in Idlib next week and that regular access

was needed. "UNICEF ... can confirm that cases of severe malnutrition were found among children," it said in a statement, after the United Nations and Red Cross had entered the town on Monday and Thursday ... (More on P4)... (24)

Starving Syrian Teen Died 'in Front of our Eyes: UN Agency

BEIRUT - The U.N. children's agency said Friday that it witnessed the death of a teenager who died of starvation "in front of our eyes," as well as several cases of severe malnutrition among children trapped in a besieged Syrian town near Damascus. Hanaa Singer, UNICEF's representative in Syria, said in a statement that the 16-year-old, identified as Ali, died of malnutrition on Thursday in a clinic in the town of Madaya. Trucks from the U.N. and other humanitarian organizations entered Madaya on Thursday for the second time in a week after reports of starvation deaths. The town has been under siege for months by government forces. Two other communities, the villages of Foua and Kefraya in northern Syria, besieged by Syrian rebels were also included in the aid operation. The death of the teenager as international aid workers were inside Madaya reinforced the scale of the humanitarian catastrophe in the town and other besieged areas. The U.N. Security Council is scheduled to hold an emergency meeting Friday at the request of Western countries trying to press Syria's warring parties to lift sieges on towns where hundreds of thousands have been cut off from aid and many are starving. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who called the deliberate starvation of civilians a "war crime," also stepped up the pressure, calling Thursday for both the Syrian government and rebels to end the sieges before the commencement of peace talks scheduled for Jan. 25 in Geneva. (AP)

ASEAN Condemns Terrorist Attack in Jakarta

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN - ASEAN countries issued a statement on Friday, strongly condemning the terrorist attack in Indonesia's capital Jakarta on Thursday, which caused the loss of innocent lives, injuries, and damage to properties. In the ASEAN foreign ministers' statement on the terrorist attack in Ja-

karta, ASEAN extends its deepest sympathies and condolences to the Indonesian government and people, especially to the families of the victims of this attack. ASEAN member states commend the Indonesian security forces' swift and courageous actions in responding to the attack ... (More on P4)... (25)

Palestinian Killed in Clashes with Israeli Forces in Eastern Gaza Strip

GAZA - A Palestinian young man was killed and 10 others injured on Friday in clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli forces in eastern the Gaza Strip. The clashes broke out east of al-Bureij refugee camp when Palestinian protesters hurled stones at Israeli soldiers stationed on the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip, ac-

ording to witnesses. The Israeli soldiers responded by firing tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition to disperse the protesters, killing one of them and injuring 10 others, the witnesses said. The dead was identified as Mohamed Abu Zayed, 18, according to Ashraf al-Qedra, spokesman ... (More on P4)... (26)

Neighbor News

Iran Interested in FTZ with EEU



TEHRAN - Iran's Ambassador to Russia Mehdi Sanaei said on Thursday that Tehran is interested in creating a free trade zone with the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). "Iran is interested in the introduction of a free trade regime with the EEU and considers that the establishment of closer ties with the Union may become the basis for the development of economic cooperation of Iran with the Union's member countries," Sanaei told the Gaidar Forum in Moscow as reported by Sputnik news agency.

The EEU chairman said last December that the union considered Iran a key potential partner and voiced interest in creation of a free trade zone with the country. Also, Russia's First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov announced again last December that talks on the creation of a free trade zone with Iran could be completed in the near future. Sanaei added that Iran was particularly interested in economic projects of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states, the EEU and the Chinese Silk Road. (PressTV)

Age Limit for Hajj Increased: Tajikistan

DUSHANBE - Fresh from President Emomali Rahmon's visit to Mecca, the government in Tajikistan has dreamt up a new way to further curtail the rights of devout Muslims. Asia-Plus website reported on January 15 that citizens under the age of 40 will no longer be allowed to perform the hajj. An official on the religious affairs committee, Husein Shokirov, told Asia-Plus that the restrictions would give older Tajiks more of a chance to undertake the pilgrimage. One ongoing devel-

opment motivating the move, Shokirov said, are the stricter quotas being put in place by the authorities of Saudi Arabia. The number of people from Tajikistan allowed to do the hajj in 2015 was 6,300. Critics of the new age limit of 40, which has been raised from the limit of 35 that was instituted in April, will object that the authorities are attempting crudely to stamp out religiosity among the younger generations. The intent is apparently to prevent instances of radicalization. (Agencies)

China Sincere, Responsible in Pushing Ties with Arab World

BEIJING - A new policy document pledging greater cooperation with the Arab states demonstrates China's sincerity and responsibility in deepening relations in this part of the world, where conflict and development issues remain a problem. The guideline, China's first on the Arab states, details the principles of the cooperation and reiterates Chinese commitment to peace and stability in the Middle East. It was issued on Wednesday, a week prior to President Xi Jinping's visit to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iran. This year marks the 60th anniversary of the start of diplomatic ties between China

and Arab states. The document highlights a "1+2+3" cooperation pattern that takes energy partnerships as the core, infrastructure construction and trade and investment facilitation as two wings, and high and new technologies in nuclear energy, satellites and new energy as three breakthroughs. The document fits the pragmatic development needs of both sides and the current situation in the region. Despite rich oil reserves in the Middle East, a number of Arab countries are striving to tackle poverty, unemployment and weak industrialization and infrastructure. (Xinhua)

Sharif to Head Steering Committee to oversee CPEC Implementation

ISLAMABAD - Participants of a consultative meeting on Friday, chaired by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif at his office, decided to form a steering committee headed by the prime minister to oversee implementation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. The meeting, which was attended by representatives from all political parties and provinces, was held to allay concerns and reservations

over the construction of the economic corridor. PM Nawaz also directed fast track implementation of the western route of the corridor, as all political parties agreed to support the project, said a statement from the PM Office. All four chief ministers will be included in the committee, which would meet every three months to review progress on the project's implementation. (Agencies)