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GENERAL

**Across Regions**

**Global arms trade deal takes effect**

A global arms trade treaty regulating the multibillion-dollar business has come into force - a move hailed as "a new chapter" by UN chief Ban Ki-moon. He said he hoped the treaty would help prevent the transfer of weapons to "warlords, human rights abusers, terrorists and criminal organisations." The deal also bans arms supplies if this promotes war crimes or genocide. So far 60 nations have ratified the accord, but not the US - the world's top arms exporter.

**BBC -** [**http://www.bbc.com/news/world-30594854**](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-30594854)

**China sends 700 peacekeepers to South Sudan**

China will send 700 troops to South Sudan as part of the country’s first infantry battalion to participate in a UN peacekeeping mission, state media reported. The official Xinhua News Agency said 180 of the troops will fly to South Sudan next month followed by the rest of the battalion in March. The agency said the battalion will be equipped with drones, armored infantry carriers, anti-tank missiles, mortars and other weapons for self-defense purposes.

**AP -** [**http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/dec/22/china-sends-700-peacekeepers-to-south-sudan/#ixzz3Mk2QuKur**](http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/dec/22/china-sends-700-peacekeepers-to-south-sudan/#ixzz3Mk2QuKur)

CEE/CIS

**Russia**

**Russia says will sever ties with NATO if Ukraine joins Atlantic bloc –agency**

Russia said on Wednesday it would respond adequately by severing ties with NATO if Ukraine becomes a member of the Atlantic bloc. "If this decision in the future takes on a military character (the accession to NATO), then we will respond adequately. Then there will be a complete severing of ties with NATO, which will be practically impossible to repair," Deputy Defence Minister Anatoly Antonov was quoted as saying by RIA Novosti.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141224100201-1uk1m/?source=search**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141224100201-1uk1m/?source=search)

**Turkey**

**Kurdish rebels threaten renewed violence**

A Kurdish rebel commander has warned that fighting in Turkey's southeast could resume by June if efforts to end a 30-year insurgency make no progress. Murat Karayilan's comments came days after Turkish and Kurdish officials declared a "new phase" in the peace process after widespread protests by Kurds in October threatened to derail the talks. Karayilan told Iraq-based Roj News that imprisoned Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan could be freed from prison by April if the talks make headway. However, he threatened to resume hostilities before Turkey's June elections if there is no progress.

**AP -** [**http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/kurdish-rebels-threaten-renewed-violence-turkey-27808922**](http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/kurdish-rebels-threaten-renewed-violence-turkey-27808922)

**Ukraine**

**Humanitarian disaster looms as food aid blocked**

Pro-Kyiv volunteer battalions are increasingly blocking humanitarian aid into eastern Ukraine in a move which will exacerbate a pending humanitarian crisis said Amnesty International. “As winter sets in, the already desperate situation in eastern Ukraine is being made even worse by the volunteer battalions preventing food aid and medicine from reaching those in need. It is no secret that the region is facing a humanitarian disaster with many already at risk of starvation,” said Denis Krivosheev, acting Director of Europe and Central Asia for Amnesty International.

**Amnesty -** [**http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/eastern-ukraine-humanitarian-disaster-looms-food-aid-blocked-2014-12-23**](http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/eastern-ukraine-humanitarian-disaster-looms-food-aid-blocked-2014-12-23)

**Ukraine, pro-Russian rebels resume peace talks**

Ukranian and rebel envoys prepared for intense talks on Wednesday aimed at ending a pro-Russian uprising. A successful round of preliminary negotiations in the Belarussian capital Minsk could pave the way for a second meeting on Friday at which a final agreement is signed. But sharply contrasting visions of Ukraine's place in Europe and its system of government as a whole, threaten to block a solution to the eight-month crisis. The most important immediate issue for the rebels will be to make sure that Kiev resumes the social payments it suspended in November in fear they were being used to fund the revolt.

**AFP -** [**https://uk.news.yahoo.com/russia-ukraine-set-peace-talks-kiev-step-towards-064844626.html#uQQQELI**](https://uk.news.yahoo.com/russia-ukraine-set-peace-talks-kiev-step-towards-064844626.html#uQQQELI)

EAP

**Across EAP**

**Tibetan monk self-immolates in anti-China protest - report**

A Tibetan monk has died in a self-immolation protest against Chinese rule in western China's Sichuan Province in the third such attempt in eight days, the Tibetan government-in-exile and a news report said. Kalsang Yeshi, a Tibetan monk of the Nyitso Monastery in Daofu County, set himself on fire in front of a police post near the monastery Tuesday. Kalsang's death was the third immolation in less than two weeks by Tibetans. Twenty-year-old Tibetan Tsepey Kyi burned herself to death Monday in the Aba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, while Sangye Khar a 34-year-old man self-immolated in front of a police station in northwestern China's Gansu Province Tuesday last week.

**AsiaNews-** [**http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Tibetan-monk-self-immolates.-Thousands-on-the-streets-demanding-freedom-24263.html**](http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Tibetan-monk-self-immolates.-Thousands-on-the-streets-demanding-freedom-24263.html)

**China expresses concern after protests at Myanmar mine**

China expressed concern on Wednesday about a protest against a Chinese-run copper mine in Myanmar in which a person was killed and some were wounded saying China urged its companies abroad to act responsibly and protect the environment. Myanmar police on Monday fired on protesters near the Letpadaung mine which is at the centre of a long-running land dispute, killing one person and wounding 20. The mining company, Myanmar Winbao, is a unit of the Chinese weapons manufacturer China North Industries Group Corp.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141224083128-dt3ta/?source=search**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141224083128-dt3ta/?source=search)

**China**

**Police kill 'religious extremist'**

Authorities in the southwestern province of Guangxi say police shot one person dead and detained 21 others when they confronted "religious extremists" trying to illegally cross into Vietnam. A statement Tuesday on the official website for the city of Chong Zuo does not identify the religion, but Chinese authorities usually blame religious extremism for violence involving members of the Muslim ethnic minority of Uighurs. Beijing has also warned that religious extremists want to leave China to train with militant groups.

**AP -** [**http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/chinese-police-kill-religious-extremist-27807030**](http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/chinese-police-kill-religious-extremist-27807030)

**Myanmar**

**Compromises reached on most ceasefire issues**

Senior peace negotiators say they have reached agreement on several outstanding points at the latest round of ceasefire talks in Rangoon. A representative of the ethnic group’s Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT), said at the end of the two-day talks that: “We and the government delegates have managed to reach a compromise on the majority of the remaining points for a single-text draft of a nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA).”

**DVB -** [**http://www.dvb.no/news/compromises-reached-on-most-ceasefire-issues-burma-myanmar/46873**](http://www.dvb.no/news/compromises-reached-on-most-ceasefire-issues-burma-myanmar/46873)

**Villagers remain in standoff over mine**

Villagers refusing to leave their homes for the expansion of a Chinese-backed copper mine in northwestern Myanmar remained in a tense standoff with security forces for a second straight day Tuesday, with two reported wounded. The confrontation, which left one woman dead Monday when guards and police fired at the protesting villagers. An activist, said about 1,000 police and security guards and more than 200 Chinese workers at the Letpadaung mining project have surrounded several villages where residents refused to leave.

**AP -** [**http://news.yahoo.com/myanmar-mine-protest-continues-shooting-105530887.html**](http://news.yahoo.com/myanmar-mine-protest-continues-shooting-105530887.html)

ESA

**Somalia**

**Somalia's parliament approves new prime minister**

Somalia's lawmakers on Wednesday approved the appointment of new Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, who vowed to end the infighting slowing Somalia's efforts to rebuild after decades of war. Sharmarke, who served as prime minister between 2009-2010, becomes Somalia's third premier in just over a year. The previous two fell out with the president over the make-up of their cabinets.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141224130702-wn0fx/?source=jtTheWire**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141224130702-wn0fx/?source=jtTheWire)

LAC

**Across LAC**

**Chikungunya virus infects more than 1 million in Americas**

Chikungunya has stricken more than 1 million people in the Western Hemisphere since spreading there a year ago. The Pan-American Health Organization reports 155 reported deaths as of 12 December, almost all in the Caribbean island nations of Guadeloupe and Martinique. There have been 1,900 cases reported in travelers returning to the US. Public health officials warn that Chikungunya cases could escalate in a number of South American countries, including Brazil, Peru and Paraguay, with the approach of the summer months.

**VoA -** [**http://www.voanews.com/content/chikungunya-virus-has-infected-more-than-1-million-in-americas/2570840.html**](http://www.voanews.com/content/chikungunya-virus-has-infected-more-than-1-million-in-americas/2570840.html)

**Haiti**

**UN and partners welcome consensus on appointment of interim Prime Minister**

The United Nations and its international partners today welcomed the designation of Florence Guillaume as Haiti’s interim Prime Minister. Mr. Guillaume, who was previously serving as Minister of Public Health and Population, was appointed by Haiti’s President in accordance with Article 165 of the country’s Constitution, according to a news release issued by the UN.

**UN News-** [**http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49680#.VJrHFBTAA**](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49680#.VJrHFBTAA)

**Mexico**

**Army, police to take over duties in Michoacan towns**

The Mexican army and federal police will assume control of security in several municipalities in the western state of Michoacan, replacing recently legalized rural police forces that engaged in a deadly clash last week. Earlier this year, Mexico's government took the unprecedented step of providing guns, uniforms and salaries for former vigilantes in Michoacan who had organized to fight a local drug cartel, recruiting them into a newly created "Rural Force." But last week two rival groups of ex-vigilantes engaged in a clash in the town of La Ruana that left 11 people dead.

**AP -** [**http://news.yahoo.com/mexican-army-police-over-duties-michoacan-towns-030547290.html**](http://news.yahoo.com/mexican-army-police-over-duties-michoacan-towns-030547290.html)

MENA

**Across MENA  
Jordan confirms pilot captured by ISIL**

The Jordanian military has confirmed that one of its planes has crashed over northern Syria and that its pilot has been captured by the ISIL. The jihadist group earlier said it had shot down the jet with a heat-seeking missile near the city of Raqqa. It published photographs showing the pilot, whom it identified as Flight Lieutenant Moaz Youssef al-Kasasbeh. This is the first US-led coalition aircraft to be lost on ISIL territory since air strikes began in September. Jordan is one of four Arab countries whose aircraft have been flying sorties over Syria.

**BBC -** [**http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30596474**](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30596474)

**Palestinian killed in clash with Israeli troops near Gaza border**

Israeli forces shot dead a member of Hamas's armed wing after a firefight erupted along the border with the Gaza Strip on Wednesday and an Israeli soldier was wounded, Gaza hospital officials and the Israeli army said. The military said in a statement that a routine patrol on the Israeli side of the border came under attack from snipers in the southern Gaza Strip and that forces responded with fire from the ground and the air. Hamas sources named the dead man as Tayseer Asmairi, a member of its armed wing's monitoring unit in the southern Gaza Strip. The Israeli soldier sustained a severe chest injury and was flown to hospital where he was listed in serious condition, the army said.

**NYT -** [**http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/25/world/middleeast/israel-palestinians-gaza.html?ref=world**](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/25/world/middleeast/israel-palestinians-gaza.html?ref=world)

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141224100701-7r3c2/?source=jtTheWire**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141224100701-7r3c2/?source=jtTheWire)

**Iraq**

**Suicide bomber kills 33 people south of Baghdad**

A suicide bomber killed 33 people and wounded 55 others in Madaen, about 25 km (15 miles) south of Baghdad, on Wednesday, Iraqi police and medical officials said. The bomber blew himself up near a line of Sunni pro-government fighters waiting for their salaries, the officials said, adding they expected the toll to rise. The dead were mostly pro-government fighters, but included at least three soldiers.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141224100731-eosnr/?source=search**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141224100731-eosnr/?source=search)

**Lebanon**

**Water shortages hit Syrian refugees hard**

In a region choking from dwindling water supplies, Lebanon has long been regarded as one of the few places where there is enough. But in recent years, half the people in the country have faced severe shortages. And the more than 1 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon are hit worst, making the country's most vulnerable people increasingly impoverished and sick. In informal refugee camps in the Bekaa Valley, there is no shortage of water tanks, but many are empty. Aid organizations deliver free water to many families about once every 10 days, but children say that water lasts only a few days.

**VoA -** [**http://www.voanews.com/content/water-shortages-lebanon-syrian-refugees/2571595.html**](http://www.voanews.com/content/water-shortages-lebanon-syrian-refugees/2571595.html)

**Libya**

**UN says rivals agree 'in principle' to peace talks**

The UN informed the Security Council on Tuesday that rival factions in Libya have agreed "in principle" to hold a new round of peace talks aimed at ending the escalating political crisis in early 2015. Hundreds of civilians in Libya have been killed in fighting since late August, the UN said, warning commanders of armed groups that they could face prosecution for possible war crimes, including executions and torture. The conflict has driven at least 120,000 people from their homes and caused a humanitarian crisis.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141223211134-23ts2/?source=fiOtherNews3**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141223211134-23ts2/?source=fiOtherNews3)

**State of Palestine**

**Abbas says to cut ties with Israel if UN move fails**

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas warned on Tuesday that his administration would "no longer deal" with Israel if a UNSC resolution calling for a final peace deal fails. The Palestinian draft resolution sets a 12-month deadline for wrapping up negotiations on a final peace settlement and the end of 2017 as the timeframe for completing an Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian territories.

**AFP -** [**http://news.yahoo.com/abbas-says-cut-ties-israel-un-move-fails-153630808.html**](http://news.yahoo.com/abbas-says-cut-ties-israel-un-move-fails-153630808.html)

**Sudan**

**Sudan election body says vote delayed over constitution change**

Sudan's electoral body said Tuesday it postponed elections to allow parliament to consider a constitutional amendment allowing President Omar al-Bashir to appoint state governors who were to have been elected. The National Electoral Commission pushed back polling by 11 days to April 13. It also postponed the date for candidates to apply to stand, from December 31 to January 11.

**AFP -** [**http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/160347-sudan-election-body-says-vote-delayed-over-constitution-change**](http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/160347-sudan-election-body-says-vote-delayed-over-constitution-change)

**Syria**

**Children killed in air strikes**

Syrian war planes have struck schools and mosques in several rebel-held areas, resulting in the deaths of more than a dozen children, activists say. Seven children were reported killed as jets dropped barrel bombs on a school in the town of Safohan in Idlib province on Tuesday. In the rebel-held Damascus suburb of Douma, another school was hit. At least five people were killed, including three children. And in the city of Raqqa, which is controlled by ISIL, activists said government jets conducted several attacks that killed more than a dozen people, most of them children in schools.

**Al Jazeera -** [**http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/12/children-killed-syria-air-strikes-2014122313426825611.html**](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/12/children-killed-syria-air-strikes-2014122313426825611.html)

**Moscow, Damascus discuss plans for Syria talks**

Russia's FM says a senior Russian diplomat and the Syrian ambassador have discussed prospects for talks in Moscow between the Syrian government and the opposition. The ministry said Deputy FM Mikhail Bogdanov met with Syrian Ambassador Riyad Haddad on Wednesday to discuss a political settlement of the Syrian crisis, and, in particular, Russia's proposal to host negotiations between the conflicting parties. The ministry would not say when the talks could take place.

**AP -** [**http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/moscow-damascus-discuss-plans-syria-talks-27809751**](http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/moscow-damascus-discuss-plans-syria-talks-27809751)

SA

**Across SA**

**Pakistan and Afghanistan vow anti-Taliban co-ordination**

The military chiefs of Afghanistan and Pakistan have agreed to co-ordinate military operations along their border. Afghan army chief Gen Sher Mohammad Karimi and his counterpart Gen Raheel Sharif met in Islamabad on Tuesday and announced their plans to co-operate. In the past the two countries have accused each other of allowing cross-border attacks by militants.

**BBC -** [**http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-30590244**](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-30590244)

**India**

**Death toll from northeast attacks rises to 56**

At least 56 people including children died in a series of militant attacks in Assam, Indian police said, as the rebels dramatically intensified a long-running separatist campaign in the state. Witnesses said armed militants pulled villagers from their homes and shot them at point-blank range in a series of coordinated attacks carried out across the remote and volatile northeastern state on Tuesday. Police said 12 children were among those killed in the attacks, which they blamed on the outlawed National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). A curfew has been imposed in sensitive areas and the army is on standby.

**AFP -** [**http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-2885260/Tribal-rebels-kill-34-northeast-India.html**](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-2885260/Tribal-rebels-kill-34-northeast-India.html)

**Nepal**

**'Anti-women' citizenship bill sparks fury**

Nepal's parliament is proposing to bar all single parents from passing on their citizenship to their children in a new national constitution, sparking outrage among rights activists. Activists say the move could leave a million people stateless and will disproportionately affect women, who account for the vast majority of single parents in Nepal. The draft bill says both parents must be Nepalese for their child to acquire citizenship, which is needed to get anything from a driving licence to a bank account.

It will overturn a 2006 act that says children are eligible for citizenship as long as one parent is Nepalese.

**AFP -** [**http://news.yahoo.com/anti-women-citizenship-bill-sparks-fury-nepal-065630878.html**](http://news.yahoo.com/anti-women-citizenship-bill-sparks-fury-nepal-065630878.html)

**Pakistan**

**Leaders meet to discuss new anti-Taliban strategy**

Pakistan's political and military leaders are meeting to formulate a new strategy to beat Taliban insurgents and their ideology, officials said Wednesday, a week after the massacre of 136 school children. PM Nawaz Sharif is chairing the meeting of the heads of almost all political parties and army and intelligence chiefs in the capital Islamabad. The meeting was likely to approve the deployment of a quick-response anti-terror force across Pakistan to tackle Taliban attackers, said a minister.

**DPA -** [**http://www.rferl.org/content/pakistani-leaders-meet-to-devise-new-anti-taliban-strategy/26760034.html**](http://www.rferl.org/content/pakistani-leaders-meet-to-devise-new-anti-taliban-strategy/26760034.html)

**Sri Lanka**

**Extreme weather delays Sri Lanka's post-war reconstruction**

A series of extreme weather events in the past three years has held back already slow post-war reconstruction efforts in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, officials and experts say. An 11-month drought eased only in early December, and has been followed by monsoon-linked flooding that could cause additional delays. This year's long dry spell drove down agricultural production. Water shortages also hampered the building of thousands of houses to replace those destroyed in 2008 and 2009, during the last phase of the country's 26-year war between the government and Tamil insurgents.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141224070126-3qgre/?source=jtOtherNews1**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141224070126-3qgre/?source=jtOtherNews1)

WCA

**Across WCA**

**Ebola crisis could last through 2015 as marks year since outbreak**

The Ebola crisis in West Africa that claimed its first victim exactly a year ago is likely to last until the end of 2015, according to a scientist who helped to discover the virus. Two-year-old Emile Ouamouno died in the remote village of Meliandou in southern Guinea on 28 December last year after suffering from a fever, headache and diarrhoea. His 3-year-old sister, mother and grandmother died days later. These deaths went unnoticed and the disease smouldered undetected, according to WHO. It was not until March that health officials in Guinea started to realise something worrisome was happening.

**BBC -** [**http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30595352**](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30595352)

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141224121331-ue9e2/?source=fiOtherNews2**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141224121331-ue9e2/?source=fiOtherNews2)

**CAR**

**18 killed in fresh wave of violence**

At least 18 people have been killed and dozens injured in fresh attacks in CAR, where dozens have died in a new flare-up in inter-ethnic violence, officials said Tuesday. The latest attacks took place early Sunday in and around the southwestern towns of Gamboula and Nola, near the border with Cameroon. Armed Peul herders launched attacks in the early morning, killing at least eight people in the Gamboula area and 10 in Nola, a senior official in the local Mambere-Kadei prefecture said. Fighting was still ongoing Tuesday in Gambouri between the Peul, who are mostly Muslim, and members of the predominantly Christian anti-balaka militia, the source revealed.

**AFP -** [**http://news.yahoo.com/18-killed-fresh-wave-violence-central-africa-official-155730778.html**](http://news.yahoo.com/18-killed-fresh-wave-violence-central-africa-official-155730778.html)

**Nigeria**

**Rights group asks UN to oppose executions**

A leading Nigerian human rights group is asking UN rapporteurs to act urgently to try to stop the mass executions of soldiers sentenced to death for refusing to fight Islamic militants. Fifty-four soldiers received death sentences last week, another 12 were condemned in September and 45 more soldiers, including a few officers, await their fate in an ongoing court-martial. The Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project said Wednesday the courts-martial held in secret were "a mockery of justice" and ignored issues raised by the condemned men that "suggest lack of transparency, accountability and general deficiencies" in the handling of the security budget and arms purchases.

**AP -** [**http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/rights-group-asks-oppose-nigerian-executions-27810198**](http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/rights-group-asks-oppose-nigerian-executions-27810198)

**Insurgency, fraud pose risks for credible election**

Nigeria has made an effort to clean up voter registration for elections next February, but holding a credible poll is a daunting prospect amid chaotic distribution of ballot cards and an Islamist insurgency that could disenfranchise millions. Nigeria's last presidential poll in 2011 was deemed the cleanest to date but since previous elections had been characterized by ballot box snatching, intimidation of voters by armed thugs and completely made up results, this was a modest achievement. A violent Islamist Boko Haram insurgency that has killed thousands will make voting almost impossible in swathes of the northeast, possibly disenfranchising millions.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-2885962/Insurgency-fraud-pose-risks-credible-Nigerian-election.html**](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-2885962/Insurgency-fraud-pose-risks-credible-Nigerian-election.html)

**Sierra Leone**

**First conviction in under Ebola laws**

A village chief has become the first person in Sierra Leone to be jailed under laws aimed at preventing the spread of the Ebola virus, court officials and lawyers said. Amadu Kargbo was sentenced to six months in jail by a court in the southwestern city of Moyamba for secretly burying the dead and failing to report a sick patient, court official said. He was also fined one million leones ($235) and ordered to spend 21 days in quarantine before going to jail.

**AFP -** [**http://news.yahoo.com/first-conviction-sierra-leone-under-ebola-laws-022611854.html**](http://news.yahoo.com/first-conviction-sierra-leone-under-ebola-laws-022611854.html)

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