UNICEF OPSCEN Brief – Tuesday, 30 December 2014

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CEE/CIS

Belarus

Belarus strongman sacks PM amid economic woes

Belarussian strongman Alexander Lukashenko on Saturday sacked his prime minister as the tightly-controlled ex-Soviet state struggles with the effects of Russia's economic crisis next door. Lukashenko dismissed Mikhail Myasnikovich, who had served in his post since December 2010, and appointed his chief of staff Andrei Kobyakov as his new head of government, his administration said. Lukashenko also replaced the head of the central bank as well as several other top officials including ministers of economy and industry.

AFP - <http://www.france24.com/en/20141227-belarus-strongman-sacks-pm-amid-economic-woes/>

Serbia/Kosovo

Kosovo police arrest terrorism suspect – interior minister

Kosovo police arrested a Serb national suspected of planning a terrorist attack, the interior minister told a press conference on Friday, December 26.  The suspect, from Belgrade, was arrested on Thursday with 12.2 kilos of explosives in his car in a street in the Kosovan capital of Pristina where many Western embassies are located.

Reuters - [**http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/12/26/uk-kosovo-police-arrest-idUKKBN0K40QP20141226**](http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/12/26/uk-kosovo-police-arrest-idukkbn0k40qp20141226)

Turkey

Turkish teenager dies amid Kurdish infighting

A teenager was shot and killed in southeastern Turkey on Saturday in clashes between members of a Kurdish Islamist party and youths linked to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), security sources said. The 15-year-old's death in the town of Cizre brought the number of people killed there in fighting between Kurdish groups to three. Two others were killed on Saturday in clashes between members of the Islamist Free Cause Party (Huda-Par) and youth groups linked to PKK.

Reuters - [http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/28/us-turkey-kurds-clashes-idUSKBN0K606R20141228](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/28/us-turkey-kurds-clashes-iduskbn0k606r20141228)

Ukraine

Kiev and rebels to exchange hundreds of prisoners soon: security services

A key round of peace talks between Ukraine's government and pro-Russian rebels, due to take place in Minsk on Friday, has been called off, Belarusian officials say. No immediate reason was given by the Belarusian foreign ministry.  The talks had begun on Wednesday to try to end the conflict in eastern Ukraine which has left 4,700 dead.  A ceasefire and framework peace deal were announced in Minsk in September but neither has been properly observed.

Reuters - [http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/26/us-ukraine-crisis-prisoners-idUSKBN0K40IZ20141226](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/26/us-ukraine-crisis-prisoners-iduskbn0k40iz20141226)

EAP

Across EAP

More rain forecast for flood-hit SE Asia

People in South East Asia have been warned to prepare for more flooding, after days of heavy rain across the region that has killed dozens of people and displaced tens of thousands in Thailand, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. Weather forecasters on Sunday warned that much of Malaysia will see more storms in the next three days; Thailand and Sri Lankan authorities also warned their people to brace for more floods. According to officials, more than 200,000 people across the region have been left homeless because of the floods.

Al Jazeera - <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2014/12/more-rain-forecast-flood-hit-se-asia-201412286107902449.html>

S. Korea offers talks with N. Korea over unification

South Korea on Monday proposed talks with North Korea to discuss what it calls a range of issues needed to prepare for the unification of the divided countries. It’s unclear if Pyongyang would accept Seoul’s offer as the country has viewed any of South Korea’s unification plans an attempt to take it over. North Korea wants a unified Korea with Pyongyang in charge. Unification Minister Ryoo Kihl-jae told a televised news conference that South Korea wants talks in January to discuss exchange programs, joint projects and laws needed for a unified Korea. Ryoo said South Korea hopes the proposed talks would also discuss resuming reunions of families separated by the 1950-53 Korean War.

AP - <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/skorea-offers-talks-with-nkorea-over-unification/2014/12/28/bb174352-8f04-11e4-a66f-0ca5037a597d_story.html>

Indonesia

Indonesia says missing AirAsia plane could be at 'bottom of sea'

A missing AirAsia jet carrying 162 people could be at the bottom of the sea after it was presumed to have crashed off the Indonesian coast, an official said on Monday, as countries around Asia sent ships and planes to help in the search effort. The Indonesia AirAsia plane, an Airbus A320-200, disappeared after its pilot failed to get permission to fly higher to avoid bad weather during a flight from the Indonesian city of Surabaya to Singapore on Sunday.

Reuters - [http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/29/us-indonesia-airplane-idUSKBN0K601C20141229](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/29/us-indonesia-airplane-iduskbn0k601c20141229)

Girl aged 10 arrested 'on her way to join ISIL

A girl aged just ten has been arrested by police who think she was heading to Syria to join ISIL.  Indonesian officers detained six people today, including the youngster, on suspicion of planning to travel to the Middle East to join Islamic State. The group, who ranged in age from 10 to 48, were stopped in Indonesian capital Jakarta but are originally from Makassar in South Sulawesi.

Mirror - <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/isis-girl-aged-ten-arrested-4880443>

Strict sharia forces gays into hiding in Indonesia's Aceh

Overwhelmed by fear, members of the main gay rights group in the Indonesian town of Banda Aceh started burning piles of documents outside their headquarters in late October, worried that the sharia police would raid them at any moment. Indonesia's northernmost province of Aceh had weeks earlier passed an anti-homosexuality law that punishes anyone caught having gay sex with 100 lashes. Amnesty International criticized it, saying it would add to a climate of homophobia and fear. Outside Aceh, Indonesia is generally tolerant of gay people, particularly in urban areas like Jakarta.

Reuters - [http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/28/us-indonesia-religion-gay-idUSKBN0K600W20141228](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/28/us-indonesia-religion-gay-iduskbn0k600w20141228)

China

Hong Kong confirms first deadly case of winter bird flu

A woman is critically ill in Hong Kong with the lethal H7N9 strain of bird flu, the first confirmed case in the city this winter, Hong Kong government officials said. The city's influenza pandemic response level was elevated to "serious." The woman, 68, was admitted to a hospital on Thursday after falling ill on Dec. 19, the Hong Kong government said in a statement issued Saturday. The case has been classified as "imported" because the woman had recently been in the Longgang district of Shenzhen in mainland China, where the first human case of the deadly H7N9 strain was reported in March 2013.

NBC - <http://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/bird-flu-return-hong-kong-confirms-first-deadly-case-winter-n275701>

ESA

Acrosa ESA

Uganda says it will pull troops out of South Sudan only if Juba secured

Uganda's president said on Friday he would pull troops out of South Sudan only if regional forces secured its capital Juba from rebel attack, as fighting in the world's newest state dragged on into a second year. Yoweri Museveni, who backed South Sudan's now-ruling SPLM in its decades-long conflict with Sudan before independence in 2011, sent his troops across the border at Juba's invitation shortly after fighting began in mid-December last year.

Reuters - [http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/26/us-uganda-southsudan-ethiopia-idUSKBN0K412320141226](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/26/us-uganda-southsudan-ethiopia-iduskbn0k412320141226)

Kenya

KNUT calls a teachers’ strike from 5 January

The Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) on Saturday declared that teachers would go on strike from January 5, when schools are set to re-open. KNUT Secretary General Wilson Sossion told a press conference that the government had failed to honor previous agreements made after signing a return to work formula on July 18, 2013. He said no teacher will be on duty when schools re-open in two weeks’ time unless the government responds to its demands.

All Africa - <http://allafrica.com/stories/201412280014.html>

Somalia

Al-Shabab militant Zakariya Ahmed Ismail Hersi 'surrenders'

A top al-Shabaab militant, Zakariya Ahmed Ismail Hersi, has given himself up, Somali officials say. Mr Hersi, a leading figure in the militant group's intelligence wing, surrendered to police in the Gedo region. A Somali intelligence officer suggested Mr Hersi may have surrendered because of a dispute with al-Shabab members loyal to the former leader

BBC - <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30611758>

VOA - <http://www.voanews.com/content/key-al-shabab-commander-captured/2575641.html>

MENA

Across MENA

US-led forces launch 13 air strikes in Syria, Iraq

US-led forces on Sunday, December 28, conducted eight air strikes against ISIL militants in Syria and five air strikes on ISIL targets in Iraq, the US military said in a statement.  In Syria, air strikes centered on the town of Kobani near the Turkish border, the Combined Joint Task Force said.  The strikes in Iraq included ISIL positions near Sinjar and near Mosul, the task force said.

Reuters - [**http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/28/us-mideast-crisis-airstrikes-idUSKBN0K60BU20141228**](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/28/us-mideast-crisis-airstrikes-iduskbn0k60bu20141228)

Bahrain

Bahraini security forces attack anti-regime protestors

Bahraini security forces have attacked anti-regimes protestors in several villages as the ruling al-Khalifa regime continues its crackdown on the opposition.  The Saudi-backed Bahraini forces attacked protestors in the village of Bouri, Karzakan and Sitra on Thursday, December 25.  The demonstrators condemned the regime’s crackdown on demonstrations and slammed the arrests of activists.  They also chanted slogans in solidarity with dissents in neighboring Saudi Arabia.  Activists say there are over 30,000 political prisoners in Saudi Arabia.

Press TV - <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/12/26/391856/bahraini-regime-forces-attack-protestors/>

Bahrain Shiite opposition says leader arrested

Bahrain’s main opposition movement al-Wefeq said its leader Sheikh Ali Salman was arrested on 28 December, following a lengthy interrogation at the interior ministry.  Salam, re-elected on Friday as leader of the Shiite opposition group in the Sunni-ruled Gulf kingdom, had been summoned for questioning about “violating certain aspects of the law,” the ministry said earlier without providing further details.  His lawyer, Abduallah al-Shamlan, tweeted that Salman had been accused of “inciting hatred against the regime and calling for its overthrow by force.”  He said he had not been allowed to attend his client’s questioning by the police criminal investigation department.

AFP - <http://www.france24.com/en/20141228-bahrain-shiite-opposition-says-leader-arrested/>

Egypt

Gunmen kill 1 police officer, injure 3 in Egypt

Unknown gunmen have killed one police officer and injured three others in an attack against a patrol in the Egyptian city of Alexandria.  An unnamed Egyptian security official said the incident took place on Sunday, December 28.  Reports said the gunmen were wearing masks.  The incident came a day after a police corporal was killed and two other officers were wounded when unidentified men driving a motorcycle opened fire on them in Giza.

Press TV - [**http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/12/28/392174/gunmen-kill-police-officer-in-egypt/**](http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/12/28/392174/gunmen-kill-police-officer-in-egypt/)

Lebanon

Syria refugees in Lebanon face biting winter cold

Syrian refugees are going through bitter days in refugee camps in Lebanon as the biting winter cold sets in.  Tens of thousands of Syrians, who have taken refuge in al Saadiyeh, a village in the eastern Bekaa Valley, are reportedly inadequately equipped to cope with the cold.  “This is our first winter here.  We really didn’t expect it to be so cold,” Abu Ali, a sixty-year-old Syrian refugee said, adding, “We have no sobia (a kind of stove), nothing to heat us up.  According to the UN, over half of the 1.1 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon are living in substandard housing.

Press TV - [**http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/12/26/391942/syria-refugees-face-bitter-winter/**](http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/12/26/391942/syria-refugees-face-bitter-winter/)

Lebanon army thwarts infiltration attempt by terrorists

The Lebanese army says its forces have foiled a terrorists’ plot to infiltrate the country through the north-eastern town of Aras on the border with violence-hit Syria.  The army said in a statement on Friday, December 26, that Lebanese troops repelled an attempt by a group of gunmen to sneak into Lebanon near an army base in Wadi Hmeid, an area on the outermost edge of Arsal situated 124 km northeast of the capital Beirut.  The statement added that Lebanese government forces engaged in an exchange of fire with the infiltrators, shooting three of them.  A Syrian militant from the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Nusra Front, identified as Adham Shedad, was among the slain gunmen.

Press TV - <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/12/26/391920/lebanon-foils-border-infiltration-bid/>

Libya

Hundreds of civilians killed in Libya fighting as crisis deepens: UN

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 North African country is struggling with fighting on several fronts as brigades of former rebels who battled side by side to oust Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 now clash for political power and a share of oil revenues.

Reuters - [**http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/26/us-libya-security-un-idUSKBN0K40Q920141226**](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/26/us-libya-security-un-iduskbn0k40q920141226)

State of Palestine

Hamas bars Gaza children bereaved in war from visiting Israel

Hamas confirmed on Sunday, December 28, that it has banned a visit by Palestinian orphans from the Gaza strip to Israel because it was in the context of “normalization” with Israelis.  The Hamas Interior Ministry claimed that a Fatah affiliate group in Gaza Strip had organized the visit.  Eyad al-Bazam, spokesman for the Ministry, said that Hamas security forces prevented 37 sons of Palestinian “martyrs” from visiting “Zionist settlements inside the 1948 occupied lands.”  He said that the ban was aimed at “preserving the culture of our children and people and protecting them against the policy of normalization (with Israel).

Jerusalem Post - [**http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Hamas-bans-37-orphaned-Gazan-children-from-taking-trip-to-Israel-and-West-Bank-385947**](http://www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/hamas-bans-37-orphaned-gazan-children-from-taking-trip-to-israel-and-west-bank-385947)

Syria

Children among the dead in Syria bombing: SOHR

A car bombing killed six people including two children in a Kurdish area of Syria's northern province of Aleppo on Sunday, a monitoring group said. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the attack targeted a checkpoint in a town controlled manned by Kurdish forces in the Qitna area.Four Kurdish fighters at the checkpoint were killed, as were two children, it said. More children were among 10 people wounded.Kurdish fighters in the area are battling jihadist fighters from the Islamic State group.

Daily Star - **http://www.dailystar.**[**com**](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/news/middle-east/2014/dec-28/282468-children-among-the-dead-in-syria-bombing-monitor.ashx)**.lb/News/Middle-East/2014/Dec-28/282468-children-among-the-dead-in-syria-bombing-monitor.ashx#sthash.QxzblhAu.dpuf**

Syria says ready to discuss Russian plan to end the crisis

Syria said on Saturday it is willing to participate in "preliminary consultations" in Moscow aimed at restarting peace talks next year to end its civil war. "Syria is ready to participate in preliminary consultations in Moscow in order to meet the aspirations of Syrians to find a way out of crisis," state television said, quoting a source at the Syrian foreign ministry. Moscow, an ally of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, has pushed to restart talks that collapsed in Geneva in February.

Reuters - <http://www.trust.org/item/20141227124729-eigv1/?source=search>

Yemen

12 killed in clashes north of capital

Security officials and tribal leaders in Yemen say 12 people have been killed in clashed between tribesmen and Shiite rebels north of the capital Sanaa.  They say Shiite Houthi rebels went to the Arab district late Saturday, December 27, to search the home of a tribal chief whom the rebels suspected of being allied with the Sunni Islamist al-Islah party, with which the rebels are at war.  Clashes erupted when locals resisted the search, leaving nine rebels and three tribesmen dead.  The officials and tribal leaders say the rebels later destroyed the house, which was believed to be empty. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief reporters.

AP - <http://news.yahoo.com/yemen-12-killed-clashes-north-capital-174241316.html>

SA

Afghanistan

NATO's Afghan war: one chapter in decades of conflict

NATO on Sunday held a ceremony in Kabul marking the end of its 13-year war in Afghanistan. A follow-up mission will focus on training the national army and police in the ongoing battle against the Taliban. NATO's combat mission closes on December 31. NATO's follow-up mission, named "Resolute Support", is set to focus on training the local security forces. About 10,600 US troops and 2,500 troops from Germany, Britain, Italy and other nations will make up the force. But the mission will shrink rapidly in size through the year, with half of the US troops due to leave by 2016. Ghani is expected to explore possible peace talks with the Taliban.

Daily Mail - [http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-2889004/NATOs-Afghan-war-one-chapter-decades-conflict.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-2889004/natos-afghan-war-one-chapter-decades-conflict.html)

Afghan teenagers lured into suicide bombing by promised ascent to paradise

Suicide bomb attacks often indiscriminately kill the people in the target area, whether they are military personnel or innocent civilians, including the attackers themselves. So the Taliban is now turning to Afghans teenagers to do the killing by promising they would go to paradise after they complete their ruthless mission. Children from poor and uneducated families have been lured by the Taliban and other militant groups into conducting suicide attacks, assuring them that if they die as martyrs they would go to paradise and enjoy a happy life thereafter for sure.

Xin Hua Net - <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2014-12/28/c_133883611.htm>

Pakistan

UN, EU’s calls to halt executions rejected

The government on Saturday rejected calls by the UN and the EU to revive moratorium on execution of convicts, noting that capital punishment for terrorists did not violate international law. “Pakistan respects the international community, but the country is passing through extraordinary circumstances, which demand extraordinary measures to be taken,” a government spokesman said while referring to UN SG Ban Ki-moon’s conversation with PM Nawaz Sharif in which the UN chief called for halting executions. The spokesman said that a “peaceful Pakistan is in the best interest of the world”.

Dawn - <http://www.dawn.com/news/1153574/un-eus-calls-to-halt-executions-rejected>

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's main Muslim party defects from government as presidential election nears

Sri Lanka's main Muslim party, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), on Sunday became the latest crossover to the opposition as President Mahinda Rajapaksa battles to win a third term in power. SLMC leader Rauff Hakeem made a formal statement of his crossover to reporters and announced he had also resigned as the Justice Minister of Rajapaksa's government. "I have already sent my resignation letter to the president," he confirmed at a media gathering.

Shanghai daily - <http://www.shanghaidaily.com/article/article_xinhua.aspx?id=260830>

WCA

Across WCA

Ebola death toll rises to 7,693: WHO

The death toll from the Ebola outbreak in West Africa has risen to 7,693 out of 19,695 cases recorded, WHO said Friday, December 26.  The previous toll released December 22 stood at 7,518 fatalities out of 19,340 infected in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea.  Worldwide, the disease has killed at least 7,708 including six in Mali, one in the US and eight in Nigeria, which was declared Ebola-free in October.  Spain and Senegal, which have both been declared free of Ebola, meanwhile counted one case each, but no deaths.

AFP - [**https://en-maktoob.news.yahoo.com/ebola-death-toll-rises-7-693-164215244.html**](https://en-maktoob.news.yahoo.com/ebola-death-toll-rises-7-693-164215244.html)

EU aid shipment arrives in Ebola-hit West Africa

An EU aid shipment including vehicles and medical equipment for the three West African nations hardest hit by the Ebola epidemic has arrived in Guinea, officials said Sunday. The Dutch navy's largest ship, the Karel Doorman, arrived in Guinea on Saturday and was due to also stop in Sierra Leone and Liberia, a statement from the EU delegation said. The aid delivered to Guinea included enriched flour, some 20 all-terrain vehicles, ambulances and medical equipment such as masks.

New Vision - <http://www.newvision.co.ug/news/663235-eu-aid-shipment-arrives-in-ebola-hit-west-africa.html>

Cameroon

Suspected Boko Haram militants kill 23 civilians in northern Cameroon

About 23 civilians were killed and one village was burned down by suspected Boko Haram militants Friday night in the Far-North Region of Cameroon, a Cameroonian army source told Xinhua on Saturday. The attack took place in Mozogo, a locality neighboring the Nigerian border. Mozogo hosts over 8,000 Nigerian refugees living in a makeshift camp, where five people were killed in an attack by militants in November, the source said.

Xinhua - <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/africa/2014-12/28/c_133882552.htm>

Boko Haram militants stage attacks in northern Cameroon

Some 1,000 suspected Boko Haram fighters from Nigeria attacked five towns in northern Cameroon over the weekend and briefly occupied a military camp on Sunday, December 28, before being removed by the air force.  The heavily armed group attacked the military camp in Achigachia near the Nigerian border at around 4:00 a.m.  Following an intense battle, the army abandoned the camp, Lieutenant Colonel Didier Badjeck stated. It is the first time Cameroon has used the air force against Boko Haram.  
Reuters - <http://www.businessinsider.com/r-boko-haram-militants-stage-attacks-in-northern-cameroon-2014-12#ixzz3NE1zZKlb>

Cameroon says fights off Boko Haram attacks, kills 41 militants

Cameroon's army killed at least 41 Islamist militants as it fought off a wave of attacks along its border with Nigeria over the weekend in an escalation in the conflict, the government said. Cameroon has sent thousands of soldiers to its Far North region to fight off the militants and said it launched air attacks on the movement for the first time on Sunday.

Reuters - [http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/29/us-nigeria-violence-cameroon-idUSKBN0K70PL20141229](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/29/us-nigeria-violence-cameroon-iduskbn0k70pl20141229)

Guinea

Malaria killing thousands more than Ebola

West Africa's fight to contain Ebola has hampered the campaign against malaria, a preventable and treatable disease that is claiming many thousands more lives than the dreaded virus. In Gueckedou, near the village where Ebola first started killing people in Guinea's tropical southern forests a year ago, doctors say they have had to stop pricking fingers to do blood tests for malaria. Guinea's drop in reported malaria cases this year by as much as 40 percent is not good news, said Dr. Bernard Nahlen, deputy director of the U.S. President's Malaria Initiative. He said the decrease is likely because people are too scared to go to health facilities and are not getting treated for malaria.

Fox - <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2014/12/28/malaria-killing-thousands-more-than-ebola-in-west-africa/>

The Brief is produced by UNICEF's Emergency Operations Centre (OPSCEN) and is a daily compilation of the main humanitarian, political and security-related media stories from around the world. It aims to provide field offices and senior decision-makers with critical information related to humanitarian emergencies and staff security.

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