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CEE/CIS

**Ukraine**

**President under pressure over Russian bailout**

Ukraine's president faced calls to resign on Wednesday over a $15-billion bailout from Russia which the opposition and protesters said had sold the country out to its former Soviet masters in Moscow. Tens of thousands of protesters gathered in Kiev on Tuesday after President Viktor Yanukovich secured financial assistance and a gas price discount at talks with President Vladimir Putin, and several hundred spent the night in the freezing cold. Many of the protesters are angry Yanukovich has spurned an offer of closer cooperation with Europe and look on Russia with suspicion after living for decades under Soviet communist rule.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/18/us-ukraine-idUSBRE9BF11U20131218**](http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/18/us-ukraine-idUSBRE9BF11U20131218)

EAPR

**Cambodia**

**Opposition gives government three-month deadline**

Cambodian opposition officials said Tuesday they will give the government three months to hold a new election, or they will lead a movement in hopes of toppling its leadership. Kem Sokha, vice president of the Cambodia National Rescue Party, said the government is harming its citizens and will face “people power” as a result. The opposition says it lost July’s election because of irregularities and fraud. It has boycotted the new government and is calling for continued demonstrations until a credible investigation is held or a new election is organized.

**VoA -** [**http://www.voanews.com/content/cambodian-opposition-gives-government-threemonth-deadline/1812433.html**](http://www.voanews.com/content/cambodian-opposition-gives-government-threemonth-deadline/1812433.html)

**Myanmar**

**Three dead in Shan state explosion**

At least three people died in an explosion in Myanmar's Shan state, police said on 17 December, in a part of the country where a tentative ceasefire exists between ethnic rebels and the army. A lawmaker for the Kong Long constituency said the blast was caused by a "time bomb attached to a mine". Tuesday's explosion comes as Myanmar hosts the Southeast Asian Games in the capital Nay Pyi Taw amid high security, over fears the nation's myriad rebel groups could target the high-profile event.

**AFP -** [**http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/three-dead-in-myanmar/925712.html**](http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/three-dead-in-myanmar/925712.html)

**Philippines**

**Philippines launches Haiyan rebuilding plan**

The Philippines has launched an $8.17bn plan to rebuild the lives of millions made homeless by Super Typhoon Haiyan and strengthen the nation's defences against future natural disasters. The Filipino government called on the international community and its private sector to take part in the four-year plan to rebuild the damage. On Wednesday, a day after the nation ended its 40-day mourning period for the estimated 8,000 who were either killed or left unaccounted for by the natural disaster, President Benigno Aquino announced the plan to rehabilitate hundreds of devastated communities.

**Al Jazeera -**

[**http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2013/12/philippines-launches-haiyan-rebuilding-plan-201312188511751442.html**](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2013/12/philippines-launches-haiyan-rebuilding-plan-201312188511751442.html)

**UNICEF: Devastation of Typhoon Haiyan still haunts children**

UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake, after a four day visit to the Philippines, said that he was deeply impressed by the spirit of the people and the communities working with the government, UN and other partners to rebuild their lives and futures. The massive typhoon disrupted the lives of nearly six million children and destroyed the homes of 1.4 million children and their families. “While I had followed the reports of progress closely from UNICEF’s New York Headquarters, no statistics can adequately capture the physical and human challenges that remain,” said Lake. “I came here not only to see the progress first-hand, but also to thank our UNICEF staff who have been here from the start and will continue to support the rebuilding effort for the long term.”

**UNICEF -** [**http://www.unicef.org/media/media\_71565.html**](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_71565.html)

ESAR

**Ethiopia**

**Ethiopia brings home 140,000 migrants from Saudi**

Ethiopia has brought home close to 140,000 citizens from Saudi Arabia, IOM said Wednesday, a month after the oil-rich kingdom started deporting undocumented migrants. Thousands are continuing to arrive daily from Saudi Arabia, where a seven-month amnesty period for migrants expired in November and where Ethiopia says three of its nationals were killed in police clashes as the migrants prepared to leave. "Ethiopia and IOM are now looking at an additional 35,000 migrants expected to arrive from the cities of Riyadh, Jeddah and new arrivals from Medina," the IOM said in a statement. The organisation said the massive influx of returnees, which began on November 13, has severely strained resources, and appealed for financial support to continue providing "humanitarian assistance" to thousands of people.

**AFP -** [**http://news.yahoo.com/ethiopia-brings-home-140-000-migrants-saudi-ilo-100108354.html**](http://news.yahoo.com/ethiopia-brings-home-140-000-migrants-saudi-ilo-100108354.html)

**Kenya**

**President Kenyatta signs 'draconian' bill**

Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta has signed into law a media bill which journalist groups have condemned as "draconian" and an attack on democracy. Last month, he rejected an earlier version of the bill as unconstitutional. Parliament then approved a new bill, which the president has signed. Despite the changes, it still sets up a quasi-government body with the power to impose fines which could cripple some media groups. After parliament approved a second version of the bill earlier this month, a joint statement by the national editors' guild, Kenya's union of journalists and the correspondents' association described it as "a dark moment for Kenya's robust media environment". The US-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) called the bill "draconian". "

**BBC -** [**http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-25418234**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-25418234)

**Somalia**

**Gunmen in Somalia kill three Syrian doctors, three Somalis**

Fighters in Somalia shot dead three Syrian doctors and their three Somali colleagues Wednesday as they travelled to a hospital outside the capital Mogadishu, an AFP reporter said. Their bullet-riddled bodies were carried into Mogadishu's Medina hospital after the attack on road leading from the capital to Afgoye, a town some 30 km northwest of the capital. Doctors at the hospital said the foreigners killed were Syrians. One Syrian doctor was also wounded in the attack, which took place as the group travelled down the road towards Afgoye, a former stronghold of the Al-Qaeda-linked Shabaab insurgents, before they were driven from the town in May 2012.

**AFP -** [**http://news.yahoo.com/gunmen-somalia-kill-three-syrian-three-somali-doctors-103644714.html**](http://news.yahoo.com/gunmen-somalia-kill-three-syrian-three-somali-doctors-103644714.html)

**South Sudan**

**US pulls non-essential embassy staff out**

The US on 17 December ordered all non-emergency embassy staff to leave South Sudan amid an eruption of fierce fighting, and urged all Americans to depart immediately. "The Department of State ordered the departure of non-emergency US government personnel from South Sudan because of ongoing political and social unrest," it said in a statement. The US mission in Juba would also suspend normal operations for the time being. As rival troops were locked in fresh battles on 17 December, the State Department said it "warns US citizens against all travel to the Republic of South Sudan and recommends that US citizens currently in South Sudan depart immediately."

**AFP -** [**http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hQ8uONyJFY9YxHSuVQJ2Es0klB-g?docId=d79f7b4e-7a2a-4de6-a4f5-274ba6c93547&hl=en**](http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hQ8uONyJFY9YxHSuVQJ2Es0klB-g?docId=d79f7b4e-7a2a-4de6-a4f5-274ba6c93547&hl=en)

**400-500 reported dead in South Sudan clashes: UN official**

Between 400 and 500 bodies have reportedly been taken to hospitals in South Sudan's capital after clashes between rival army factions, a UN official told the UN Security Council on Tuesday. UN peacekeeping chief Herve Ladsous added that another 800 people have been wounded in battles between troops loyal to President Salva Kiir and an opposition leader, according to diplomats in the closed council consultations on the new crisis in Africa. Ladsous said the information was based on reports given by Juba hospitals but the UN has not yet confirmed the toll amid new clashes on Tuesday. About 15,000 people have sought safety in UN compounds around Juba since the troubles started on Sunday, the official was quoted as saying. Juba remains "extremely tense" and it appeared the clashes were being carried out between ethnic groups, Ladsous told the 15-member council.

**AFP -** [**http://news.yahoo.com/400-500-dead-south-sudan-clashes-un-official-224204630.html**](http://news.yahoo.com/400-500-dead-south-sudan-clashes-un-official-224204630.html)

LAC

MENA

**Egypt**

**Morsi charged with 'terrorist acts'**

Egypt's deposed President Mohamed Morsi will stand trial on charges of "conspiring with foreign groups" to commit "terrorist acts." Morsi, toppled by the military in July, is already on trial for alleged involvement in the killings of opposition protesters was also accused on Wednesday of divulging "secrets of defence to foreign countries" and "funding terrorism for militant training to fulfil the goals of the International Organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood", according to a prosecutor document seen by Al Jazeera sources. Egypt's public prosecutor ordered Morsi and 34 co-accused to stand trial on charges including conspiring with foreign organisations to commit terrorist acts in Egypt and divulging military secrets to a foreign state.

**Al Jazeera -**

[**http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/12/egypt-morsi-charged-with-terrorist-acts-20131218131959978322.html**](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/12/egypt-morsi-charged-with-terrorist-acts-20131218131959978322.html)

**Iran**

**Three Iranian guards killed by roadside bomb**

Three Iranian military personnel were killed in south-east Iran early on Wednesday when the vehicle they were travelling in was struck by a roadside bomb, Iranian media said. The reported killings - near to where the borders of Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan meet - come at a time of heightened tension in the region as separatist Sunni Islamist militants step up attacks on officially Shi'ite Iran. Heavily-armed drug smugglers are also active in the region. The three men were part of an engineering division of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) working on construction projects near the city of Saravan, Tasnim news agency quoted an unnamed provincial official as saying.

**Reuters -** [**http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/12/18/uk-iran-killings-idUKBRE9BH0E020131218**](http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/12/18/uk-iran-killings-idUKBRE9BH0E020131218)

**Lebanon**

**Roof collapse kills 2 Syrian children**

Lebanese state media and a municipal official say a roof collapse in eastern Lebanon has killed two Syrian refugee children. The National News Media and Hassan Abu Hamdan say the incident occurred early on Wednesday in the town of Hazarta. Abu Hamdan says the family of the children, aged nine and three, was renting a substandard home in the town after fleeing the war in their homeland. The incident underscored the perils facing the nearly 1.4 million Syrians who have escaped the fighting to seek refuge in neighboring Lebanon. Many of the impoverished Syrians have crowded into shacks, tents and unfinished structures that offer meager shelter from the bitter cold, with no running water or electricity. Syria's war has displaced nearly 9 million people, including 2.3 million refugees.

**AP -** [**http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2013/dec/18/lebanon-roof-collapse-kills-2-syrian-children/**](http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2013/dec/18/lebanon-roof-collapse-kills-2-syrian-children/)

**Sudan**

**UN strengthens support to combating human trafficking, smuggling**

The United Nations refugee agency is working with the Government of Sudan and partners to reduce the number of kidnappings and incidents of trafficking and smuggling in, through and out of the country. “Those most vulnerable are the newly arrived asylum-seekers, mainly of Eritrean origin, who cross the border into Eastern Sudan,” according to a joint news release by UNHCR and the IOM. The strategy, which strengthens the capacity of the Government, also provides care and psychosocial support for victims, and builds awareness of risks among the families in camps and urban areas. The programme, supported by donors from Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United States, has already been involved in workshops for participants from the national refugee commission, as well as police, security, the judiciary, and civil society focusing on refugee law and protection needs.

**UN -** [**http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46763&Cr=sudan&Cr1**](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46763&Cr=sudan&Cr1)**=**

**Syria**

**Syrian planes pound Aleppo for fourth straight day**

Activists say Syrian warplanes are pounding opposition-held parts of the northern city of Aleppo for the fourth straight day in a push to drive rebels out. Aleppo-based activist Abu al-Hassan Marea and the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights say military aircraft were targeting roads and Aleppo's eastern sector with heavy machinegun fire early on Wednesday. The offensive has killed more than 100 people so far and overwhelmed Aleppo's struggling hospitals. Activists say the ongoing assault is the worst they have witnessed so far. They suggest President Bashar Assad's government is trying to crush the opposition in the contested city ahead of an international peace conference in late January in Switzerland. Aleppo has been a major front in Syria's civil war since the rebels launched an offensive there in mid-2012, and the city has since been carved into opposition- and government-held areas.

**AP -** [**http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=255169429**](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=255169429)

ROSA

**Afghanistan**

**Taliban hit NATO fuel trucks, kill 1 Afghan police**

An Afghan official says Taliban suicide bombers have attacked NATO fuel trucks near the Pakistani border. A gunbattle that followed killed one Afghan policeman and wounded three. A spokesman in Nangarhar province, Ahmad Zia Abdulzai, says the attack early Wednesday took place at the NATO outpost near the Torkahm border crossing, a key supply route for the alliance. Abdulzai says three suicide bombers first blew up a car at the gate of the parking lot of the NATO outpost. The explosion set off a fire that destroyed several of the privately-owned tankers. The attackers then stormed into the compound. Abdulzai says the attackers were killed in the ensuing gunbattle. NATO says there were no casualties among coalition troops. Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid says the insurgent group was behind the attack.

**AP -** [**http://news.yahoo.com/taliban-hit-nato-fuel-trucks-kill-1-afghan-065458253.html**](http://news.yahoo.com/taliban-hit-nato-fuel-trucks-kill-1-afghan-065458253.html)

**India**

**India approves historic anti-corruption law**

India’s parliament on Wednesday passed legislation to create a powerful anti-graft watchdog following a mass anti-corruption movement that swept the country in 2011 and spurred politicians into action. The ruling Congress and the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) joined forces in the lower house in a rare display of unity to create a corruption ombudsman in the lower decision-making house of parliament. BJP house leader Sushma Swaraj praised “the people of this country” for achieving the passage of the bill. Passage of the bill comes as general elections are due in May. Voters have become increasingly incensed by a string of corruption scandals that have engulfed the nation. A stunning poll performance by an upstart party whose mission is to clean up dirty politics gave extra momentum to passage of the Lokpal or ombudsman bill.

**AFP -** [**http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/article/1385155/india-approves-historic-anti-corruption-law**](http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/article/1385155/india-approves-historic-anti-corruption-law)

**Pakistan**

**Bomb kills three near Shiite mosque in Rawalpindi**

A bomb explosion outside a Shiite mosque in north Pakistan on 17 December killed at least three people and wounded 14 others in the latest sectarian attack to hit the nation, officials said. The blast took place in the Gracy Lines neighbourhood of the garrison city of Rawalpindi, as worshippers prayed inside the mosque, a senior police official reported. Hospital officials said at least three people were killed and 14 others were wounded.

**AFP** - [**http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gbn9Tg2yeS0-WHFNlOl4CT\_4Oeyg?docId=01cfd13e-4cea-48aa-bf45-38aed3b9449b&hl=en**](http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gbn9Tg2yeS0-WHFNlOl4CT_4Oeyg?docId=01cfd13e-4cea-48aa-bf45-38aed3b9449b&hl=en)

**Attack on polio team foiled**

Police aborted a militant attack on a polio vaccination team in Pakistan on 17 December, killing one rebel and arresting another in the city of Karachi. Two militants allegedly belonging to the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) group attempted to attack the polio team, but escorting police retaliated, in the Ahsanabad neighbourhood on the city’s northern outskirts. “Two persons named Ameer Hamza and Misbah, both from TTP, came to attack polio workers and one of them was injured when the police retaliated,” a senior police officer reported. The wounded militant, who was identified as Misbah later died in hospital, a police officer said. None of the police or the polio team was harmed but police arrested both the militants and seized their weapons. The vaccination was then called off in the area.

**AFP** - [**http://gulfnews.com/news/world/pakistan/attack-on-polio-team-foiled-in-pakistan-1.1268145**](http://gulfnews.com/news/world/pakistan/attack-on-polio-team-foiled-in-pakistan-1.1268145)

**Suicide attack kills Pakistan policemen**

Three people were killed and at least eight others injured near Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, when a suspected suicide bomber blew himself up, the latest in a wave of apparent sectarian attacks that have gripped the country. The bomber arrived on a motorcycle near a police checkpoint outside a Shia mosque in Rawalpindi late on Tuesday, police and eye witnesses said. A police inspector was among those killed in the blast. Three other policemen sustained injuries, according to the state-run Associated Press of Pakistan (APP), which also reported damages to several motorcycles and other vehicles parked at and around the blast site. The news service described the explosion as "suicide blast".

**Al Jazeera -** [**http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2013/12/suicide-attack-kills-pakistan-policemen-2013121844713401698.html**](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2013/12/suicide-attack-kills-pakistan-policemen-2013121844713401698.html)

WCAR

**CAR**

**UNHCR says 210,000 displaced in CAR violence**

UNHCR has said that approximately 210,000 people have been displaced in the capital of the Central African Republic, Bangui, in the past two weeks as a result of sectarian violence. Humanitarian organisations say that [at least 500 people have been killed](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/12/hollande-says-intervention-car-necessary-2013121019533738132.html) in Bangui in December in killing sprees on civilians by both sides. "In Bangui, our staff are reporting continued shooting and a mood of widespread fear," a [UNHCR spokesman](http://www.unhcr.org/52b037ba9.html) said on Tuesday. "We continue to hear of attacks against Christians by former Seleka [mostly Muslim disbanded militias] with looting, killing and houses being set on fire."

**Al Jazeera -** [**http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/12/un-says-210000-displaced-car-violence-2013121844733714538.html**](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/12/un-says-210000-displaced-car-violence-2013121844733714538.html)

**DR Congo**

**UN boosts attack force in east after gruesome massacre of civilians**

The United Nations mission in the DR Congo has sent attack helicopters and manned foot patrols into the country's strife-torn North Kivu province after discovering the bodies of 21 civilians brutally slaughtered, including babies, children and women, some mutilated, others raped. Troops from the UN Mission of Stabilization in the DRC (MONUSCO) made the gruesome discovery in Musuku village in the Rwenzori area of Beni sector. The killers have yet to be identified, but unconfirmed reports and villagers interrogated in the area strongly suspect that this could have been the work of the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU) and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), two of several armed groups that have terrorized North Kivu for years.

**UN News Centre -** [**http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46756&Cr=democratic&Cr1=congo**](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46756&Cr=democratic&Cr1=congo)

**Mali**

**Malian president's party wins parliamentary polls**

The party of Mali's President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and its allies have won the parliamentary elections, according to provisional results announced by the government on Tuesday. The Rally for Mali (RPM) and its junior partners have 115 of the 147 seats in the national assembly following a second round of voting on Sunday, Minister of Territorial Administration Moussa Sinko Coulibaly said on state television, with the exact breakdown still to be worked out. The Union for the Republic and Democracy (URD), the party of beaten presidential candidate Soumaila Cisse, will have between 17 and 19 members in the new parliament, allowing him to realise his ambition to be leader of the opposition. Turnout in the second round reached 37.2 percent, a drop on the 38.6 percent achieved in the first round, which itself was deemed disappointing.  
**AFP -** [**http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5i\_o1W\_Hpkn1QkaeAs-rKVYTnELbA?docId=24c7df62-bc42-4b9c-a9bc-47640d788a5b**](http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5i_o1W_Hpkn1QkaeAs-rKVYTnELbA?docId=24c7df62-bc42-4b9c-a9bc-47640d788a5b)

**Nigeria**

**Women protest against forced marriage to deities**

Women in southern Nigeria have been protesting against alleged ritual killings and "forced marriages" to traditional deities, it's reported. Such activities are believed to have cost 11 local women their lives in just two weeks, the Nigerian daily Punch reports. About 100 women rallied outside Enugu State government offices on 10 December, demanding an end to "the killing of women through fetish activities of chief priests and deities". Wearing black dresses and holding palm leaves, the protesters also demanded a ban on "forced marriages" to traditional gods as this violates several articles of the Nigerian constitution. Among the reported incidents is the chief priest of the deity Iyakpala Ugbaike allegedly forcing the daughter of a deceased man to marry him after claiming the same deity killed her father, Punch says.

**BBC -** [**http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-25406749**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-25406749)

**Pirates snatch men from tanker off Nigeria**

Pirates have attacked an oil tanker off the coast of Nigeria and kidnapped two men, a Greek coast guard official said. Ten pirates boarded the 18-crew ship, the 6,500 tonne Marshall Islands-flaggged MT ALTHE, and took its Ukrainian captain and Greek first engineer hostage late on Monday. The attack took place 35 nautical miles off the oil-producing Niger Delta coastline, a Nigerian security source said. The two hostages were taken away by speedboat to an undisclosed location. The rest of the tanker's men were robbed of personal items but were not hurt. "They kidnapped the two men but did not touch the cargo (oil) or injure anyone," an official said. The ship's manager, Piraeus-based Medtankers Management, confirmed the attack on Tuesday. "We are doing everything we can for their release," an official said, adding that so far, no demand for ransom had been received.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/12/pirates-snatch-men-from-tanker-off-nigeria-2013121715421403538.html**](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/12/pirates-snatch-men-from-tanker-off-nigeria-2013121715421403538.html)

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