NEWS_{IN} brief

Syria regime barrel

Thirteen people were killed

in Syrian government raids

by helicopter on a rebel-

province, a monitor said

Observatory for Human

Rights said two children

were among the dead in the

Wednesday attack on Hula.

India court frees Irom

An Indian court yesterday

reordered the release of

paigner staging a hunger

to protest human rights

abuses in the country's

said. Sharmila has spent

her fast, intended to draw

committed by the

today or tomorrow.

strike for more than 14 years

remote northeast, her lawyer

years in judicial custody over

attention to abuses allegedly

military.The 42-year-old was

expected to be released later

Pakistan arrests 38

Pakistani marine forces have

arrested 38 Indian fishermen

for violating territorial waters

yesterday. Such arrests are

countries, as the maritime

poorly defined and many

border in the Arabian Sea is

fishing boats lack the technol

ogy needed to be certain of

The Sun to continue

British tabloid The Sun pub-

lished a photo of a winking

shooting down reports it had

tradition that has featured in

Newspaper The Times, which

like the Sun is part of billion-

the newspaper since 1970.

aire media tycoon Rupert

Murdoch's News UK group,

page three feature had been

shelved and the news was

welcomed by government

ministers.

reported on Tuesday that the

topless model yesterday,

ended the controversial

their precise location.

page three

AFP, London

in the Arabian Sea, police said

frequently carried out by both

Indian fishermen

AFP, Karachi

Irom Sharmila, a cam-

yesterday. The Syrian

Sharmila

AFP, Guwahati

held area of central Homs

using barrel bombs dropped

bombs kill 13

AFP, Beirut

Egypt court

frees sons of

judicial official said. Their lawyer Farid al-Deeb told AFP Alaa and Gamal Mubarak were free to leave prison after the court order because they had served the maximum pretrial detention period.

Earlier this month, an appeals court ordered their retrial, along with their father, overturning a lower court conviction that saw the two given four-year jail sentences. Deeb said the elder

Mubarak, who is in a military hospital, would also be a free man, but state media reported that there had been no orders yet for his release. In November, a court also dropped murder charges against the former president

killed during the uprising that unseated him in 2011. Along with Mubarak, seven security commanders were acquitted of involve-

Alaa and Gamal still face

over the deaths of some of

the roughly 800 protesters

a separate trial for stock AFP market manipulation.

ment in those deaths.



Members of the Ahrar movement, a coalition of various Islamist groups, take part in a demonstration yesterday at Talaat Harb Square in the Egyptian capital Cairo, following the release of ousted president Hosni Mubarak's two sons pending their retrial on corruption charges. The Ahrar movement is against the Muslim Brotherhood, military and remnants of former Mubarak's regime.

Coalition meets after attacks UN reports significant

Iraq asks for more weapons; clock ticking for Japanese hostages

AFP, London

Top officials from the US-led coalition against the Islamic State group met in London yesterday for the first talks since the Paris attacks with the threat posed by homegrown jihadists high on the agenda.

US Secretary of State John Kerry and British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond co-hosted discussions involving 21 of some 60 countries that are working together to tackle the militant ISIS group in Syria and Iraq.

Kerry said taming ISIS was "the challenge of our time".

The US official also said that members of the coalition would now meet on a monthly basis, but not necessarily at a ministerial level.

A US state department official said jihadists leaving home to fight with ISIS would be a "real focus" of the meeting and that an expert working group would be formed on sharing information to stop militants travelling.

The Paris attacks rekindled fears about the dangers posed by welltrained homegrown jihadists returning from foreign battlefields.

European police agency Europol estimates up to 5,000 EU citizens have gone to join the ranks of militants in Syria and Iraq.

Looming over the meeting is also

FIGHT AGAINST ISIS

the deadline set by members of the IS group for Tokyo to pay a \$200 million ransom for the release of two Japanese hostages. Tokyo believes the deadline

will expire at 2:50 pm today. The Japanese government said it was working to secure the release of freelance journalist Kenji Goto and self-employed contractor Haruna Yukawa, but with hours to go, admitted it had still not spoken to the

Islamic State group. "We have not been able to confirm

their safety," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a press conference.

Jihadist footage posted online Tuesday showed a knife-wielding militant looming over two kneeling Japanese men, apparently in a desert in Syria or Iraq.

In a chilling echo of the group's videotaped beheadings of five western hostages last year, the man, who speaks English with a British accent, says the two captives' fate hangs in the balance over a \$200 million ransom.

Meanwhile, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi called on the international coalition to provide his country's forces with more weapons to fight the militants.

"Iraq needs weapons and the international community has the ability to provide Iraq with the weapons it needs," he told reporters after a meeting of 21 coalition members in London.

Abadi said the plummeting oil price had been "disastrous" for Iraq, which is on the frontline of the fight against IS militants who seized parts of his country and Syria last year.

drop in cases of disease hit countries which have a creaky health infra-

PHOTO:

AFP, Geneva

The deadly Ebola epidemic is slowing significantly in the three west African countries at its epicentre, the World Health Organization said Wednesday, adding that those countries were now adequately equipped to stem the tide.

The UN health agency said in its latest update that a total of 8,626 people had died as of EBOLA CRISIS January 18, almost all of them in west Africa, since

the epidemic broke out in December 2013. There were 21,689 confirmed cases. But decrypting the figures revealed rare

good news in the worst ever outbreak of the disease which sparked a health scare the world over.

"Case incidence continues to fall in accounting for 30 of last week's cases. Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone," the WHO said. Liberia, for instance, which had a peak over 300 new cases per week in August and September, only notched up eight last week.

The UN agency also said the three hardest-

structure and were struggling to deal with the epidemic were now adequately equipped largely thanks to international help.

They now have "sufficient capacity to isolate and treat patients," it said.

The three countries have borne the brunt of the epidemic, representing 99 percent of

the total deaths from the

haemorrhagic virus. Hailing the dramatic fall in the transmission

rate, the update said there

were only 20 confirmed cases in Guinea last week against 45 the week before. The figure for Sierra Leone was 117 last

week against 184 a week ago, it said, but added that the west of the country remained a problem area with the capital Freetown

Mali, which along with Senegal and Nigeria had a minor Ebola scare, was able Monday to declare itself Ebola-free after 42 days without any new cases.

Senegal and Nigeria had previously already done so.

Divers find bodies belted in seats near fuselage

AFP, Pangkalan Bun

Indonesian divers yesterday recovered six bodies, some still belted into their seats, near the main section of an AirAsia plane that crashed into the Java Sea last month, but

Flight QZ8501 went down on December 28 in stormy weather with 162 people on board as it flew from the Indonesian city of Surabaya to Singapore. A total of 59 bodies

failed again to reach the fuselage.

"We have found six bodies, four of whom were females and two males, all adults," SB

Supriyadi, a rescue agency official coordi- stalling and plunging into the sea. nating the search, told AFP.

far from the jet's main section.

have so far been recovered.

He said they were found among debris, with some still strapped into their seats, not

The main body of the Airbus A320-200

was spotted on the seabed by a military vessel last week following an arduous search in shallow Indonesian waters, but strong underwater currents and rough seas have prevented divers from reaching it.

Search and rescue teams again failed to reach the fuselage yesterday,

> Supriyadi said. The jet's black boxes -- the cockpit voice recorder and flight data recorder -- were recovered last week, and investigators are analysing them.

> Indonesian Transport Minister Ignasius Jonan said this week that the plane climbed abnormally fast before

Just moments before the plane disappeared off the radar, the pilot had asked to climb to avoid a major storm but was not

heavy air traffic.

immediately granted permission due to



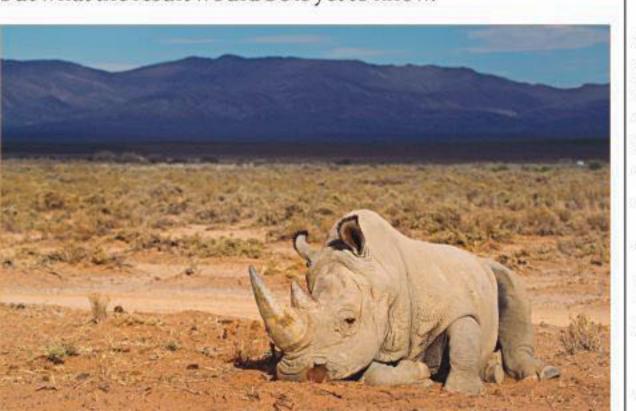
Ukrainian forces servicemen check passengers of a car at a checkpoint in the eastern Ukrainian city of Kurakhove, near Donetsk, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

A record 1,215 rhinos were poached in South Africa in 2014, a 21 percent increase from the previous year, environmental

authorities said yesterday. "During 2014, the number of 1,215 rhinos were killed, this is a rise in the number of poached rhino from 1,004 in 2013," said Minister of Environmental Affairs Edna Molewa.

Over two thirds of the animals were killed in the famed Kruger National Park. Molewa said Some of the animals were moved to neighbouring countries to save the animals but what the result would be is yet to know.



Worst yr for rhinos | Fighting escalates amid peace calls

Blame game as shelling on bus, attacks kill 41; Kiev troops abandon key airport

AFP, Donetsk

At least 41 people were killed in Ukraine's east yesterday, one of the deadliest days in the separatist war, with a bloody bus shelling in Donetsk as government forces abandoned their defence of the city's strategic airport.

In a graphic illustration of the degenerating nine-month conflict, pro-Russian rebels also paraded some 20 captured Ukrainian soldiers through Donetsk and forced them to kneel before enraged locals who threw snowballs and glass at them, some of it from the shattered bus.

The trolleybus shelling in the rebel bastion city was the day's bloodiest incident, with 13 civilians killed and Kiev alleging that ultimate blame for

the tragedy rested with Russia. The violence came only hours after peace talks in Berlin called for a

ceasefire and as the toll from the hub -- once one of eastern Europe's conflict surpassed 5,000 dead, with a million people also forced from their homes.

Another 10,000 have been isolated buildings on its outskirts. wounded by rocket and mortar strikes raining down daily on the industrial the bloodiest incidents involving region's residential dis-

tricts, Michael Bociurkiw of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe told Ukrainian radio.

With intensifying clashes rocking Donetsk airport in recent days, Ukraine's military said

early Thursday that its troops had abandoned most of the site.

symbolic prize of the conflict, with battling for control.

continued around the ruins of the air

the insurgents of committing "a Defence officials said fighting

The airport had become the the army and rebels continuously

and its foreign sponsors." charges against Moscow, accusing

crime" whose ultimate responsibility rested with "'the party of war' in Kiev Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk made similar

horrible act against humanity."

most modern and busiest -- but they

admitted that government forces

controlled little more than a few

The trolleybus shelling was among

civilians in recent

months in a conflict that

has devastated the ex-

Soviet republic's indus-

trial heartland and

brought Ukraine's econ-

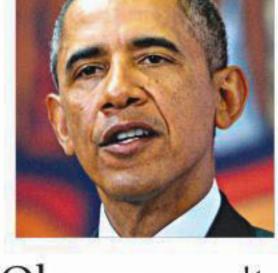
omy to its knees. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called the attack "a monstrous

The strike occurred just south of Donetsk's city centre far from the front line, with concerns having been raised over shelling that has at times moved closer in from the airport northwest of the city, putting civilians in increasing danger. The violence came hours after the

foreign ministers of Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France ended a crisis meeting in Berlin with a joint call to cease hostilities, but no breakthrough agreement to stop the bloodshed. The talks had been held against

the unpromising backdrop of fresh clashes and after Ukraine's president accused Moscow of fuelling the war with fresh troops and tanks. US Secretary of State John Kerry

accused the rebels of attempting "a blatant land grab", while Washington's UN envoy Samantha Power said Russia was pursuing an "occupation plan" in the east.



Obama won't meet Israel PM during US tour

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama will not meet Benjamin Netanyahu when the Israeli prime minister makes a controversial visit to the United States in early March, the White House said yesterday.

National Security Council spokeswoman Bernadette Meehan said it was a "matter of longstanding practice and principle" that the president not meet candidates or incumbent leaders while they on the campaign trail.

The Israeli leader is up for re-election on March 17, two weeks after his slated visit to Washington.

"The president will not be meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu because of the proximity to the Israeli election," said Meehan.

Netanyahu has been invited to address a joint session of Congress, to speak about the threat from Iran -- which is accused of building a nuclear weapon, a charge Tehran denies. The topic causes heart-

burn for the White House, which along with European allies, is engaged in the final phase of talks with Iran to end a decennial nuclear standoff.