



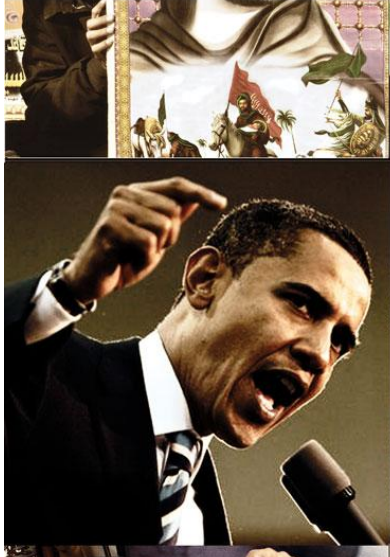
ORSAM
ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĞU BÜLTENİ

MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

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مركز الشرق الأوسط للدراسات الاستراتيجية

STRATEJİK BİLGİ YÖNETİMİ
ÖZGÜR DÜŞÜNCE ÜRETİMİ

STRATEGIC INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
AND INDEPENDENT THOUGHT PRODUCTION

**MIDDLE EAST BULLETIN
GÜNLÜK ORTADOĞU BÜLTENİ
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1. IRAQ / IRAK

- Al Sadr Front leader Sayyed Moqtada Al Sadr acknowledged that he was subject to pressure to rename Nuri Al Maliki for a second term.

Political pressures are a status quo, he said.

Al Sadr Front aims to serve its followers and protect them from oppression regardless of the Prime Minister to be. (Alsumaria Iraq Satellite TV)

- Head of Al Iraqiya List Iyad Allawi and senior officials Rafea Al Issawi and Ousama Al Nujaifi started on Tuesday night a visit to Damascus.

The visit is aimed to discuss a number of issues mainly Iraqi government formation. (Alsumaria Iraq Satellite TV)

- Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Al Moallem discussed with UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon the situation in Iraq.

Ban Ki Moon and Al Moallem conferred over the situation in the Middle East, Lebanon and Iraq, UN Chief spokesman said.

In his address before the UN General Assembly 65th meeting, Al Moallem stressed that Iraq's sovereignty and independence are Syria's main priority and concern.

The Syrian Foreign Minister affirmed that Iraq's security is bound to the country's national unity stressing the necessity for all Iraqi components to take part in shaping up Iraq's future. (Alsumaria Iraq Satellite TV)

- Iraqi President Jalal Talabani briefed Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki on his visit to the United States and his participation in the General Assembly 65th meeting.

President Talabani and Prime Minister Al Maliki discussed the political race on premiership and both stressed the necessity to accelerate the formation of the government.

Talabani met as well Vice President Adel Abdul Mehdi who underlined the importance of a national partnership government capable of meeting Iraqis' aspirations, ascertaining security and stability and providing services for the people.

President Talabani pursued its meetings as he convened with Vice President Tarek Al Hashemi who called to overcome all hindrances in this critical stage and form a national partnership government. (Alsumaria Iraqi Satellite TV)

- The National Alliance delayed its Tuesday meeting till Wednesday keen on reaching consensus over Premiership candidate.

State of Law Coalition senior official Izzat Al Shahbander explained that the meeting was put off because the Islamic Supreme Council did not attend while it is part of the alliance and choosing the candidate should be through consensus not voting, he said.

Al Shahbander told Alsumaria on the other hand that the Islamic Supreme Council abstention from attending the meeting disables voting within the national alliance for not having two competitors, he noted.

Nuri Al Maliki therefore might win uncontested, Al Shahbander added. (Alsumaria Iraqi Satellite TV)

- A French-speaking Canadian newspaper mentioned on Wednesday that Iraq was still "angry" with the opposition of the Libyan leader Muammar al-Gaddafi to holding the Arab Summit in the Iraqi capital Baghdad.

Muammar Gaddafi "Baghdad is angry from Gaddafi's call to the United Nations to open an investigation into the U.S. invasion of Iraq," the newspaper read, noting that the Libyan leader intends to submit this issue to the agenda of the forthcoming Arab summit (if held) in March 2011.

"Mondialisation" newspaper further said, "Gaddafi opposes the Arab Summit in Baghdad, and (...) the Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari believes that the Libyan request is a "threat to Iraq's security, as it incites foreign intervention, and hinders the efforts of national conciliation."

The newspaper pointed out that "Libya's position is not new. In October 2002, Gaddafi has distanced himself from the Arab League by accusing them of collusion with the United States against Iraq."

Gaddafi, according to the paper, is the only Arab president who declared mourning after the execution of the former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in 2006.

The Libyan leader recently proposed to hold the next Arab Summit in Cairo, saying that no Arab president or king would go to Iraq given the situation of the country. (AK News)

The outgoing Iraqi government confirmed on Wednesday that the agreement with Damascus over exporting oil through joint pipelines in its territory was not a political agreement.

The official spokesman of the Iraqi government, Ali al-Dabbagh, told AKnews, "the agreement the Iraqi government signed with Syria over transferring oil through the latter to the Mediterranean sea was not a political agreement like some political parties are claiming; it came in response to the need of the Iraqi side for such agreement."

"The Iraqi government has the ambition to conduct high-level coordination with all the region's states that would contribute in strengthening the export capacity of Iraqi oil."

The Iraqi Oil Ministry signed a contract with Syria to establish three export lines, implemented by BOT system: "Build - Operate - Transfer"; the lines would belong to both countries, and the last oil pipelines would be cancelled because they can no longer bear exporting oil.

The length of the Iraqi-Syrian line is 235 km, its export capacity ranges between 900 thousand and a million barrels a day. (AK News)

- The Minister of Planning of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) visited Baghdad on Wednesday to discuss the progress of the population census, said the media official at the KRG Ministry of Planning.

Adnan Haji Kaka told AKnews "the Minister visited Baghdad on Wednesday with the chairman of the census bureau in the Region, the chairman of the KRG Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology, and a representative from the United Nations Population Fund UNFPA, in order to meet with the planning officials in Baghdad."

Kaka added, "the purpose behind the meeting is to discuss the steps and the ongoing preparations for the general population census in Iraq and Kurdistan Region, and also to ensure the technical and logistic requirements necessary for its success." (AK News)

- The Gorran (Change) opposition party in the parliament of Kurdistan insists on prolonging the parliamentary boycott it began today. Parlamani Kurdistan, Kurdistan Parliament

Today as the lawmakers were due to initiate their assembly, the Gorran faction walked out of the parliament building as a protest against the ban on reporters from covering the discussion.

Earlier today Adnan Othman, a deputy from the party, led by Nawshirwan Mustafa pointed the finger at the Regional Parliament Speaker, Kamal Kirkuki for violating the journalism law and the internal regulations of the parliament.

Today's session was set up to discuss the bills for the constitution of a Regional high electoral commission, formalizing the Yazidi minority's religious feasts, compensating detainees held without legal justification, and the right to demonstrate and hold public meetings.

"We will continue our boycott and protest," Othman told the reporters in a press release shortly ago.

He went on to blame the presidency of the parliament for stripping the lawmakers of their freedom of speech and banning journalists from covering the discussion.

The Gorran deputies have submitted a petition to parliament calling for media correspondent access during parliamentary sessions.

The Gorran lawmaker further accused the parliament of discriminating between the factions.

He said "parliament is divided between the majority and minority which is a form of disrespect. To restore honor to the assembly we left the hall."

As Othman stated the presidency of parliament had voted to expel two lawmakers from the Gorran party who spoke out against the violations and another lawmaker who had left the session was blocked from voting.

"This is contempt against which we will take all necessary measures," he warned.

Othman was of the opinion that parliament prefers to hold its sessions "in the dark" and leave the public "uninformed" about events.

Gorran broke away from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) last year to run independently for the 2009 Regional parliamentary elections and secured 25 seats. (AK News)

- A leading Iraqi political analyst said on Wednesday that the al-Iraqiya List's threat to boycott the political process is intended to put pressure on the other blocs to reject Maliki's nomination for the prime minister's post. alawi + maliki + abdulmahdi, Allawi + Maleki + Abdal Mahdi

Abdul Rahim al-Moussawi said that al-Iraqiya would either participate in a government led by Maliki if he is chosen as the National Coalition (NC)'s candidate, or "miss out on the opportunity" to play an important role as a large parliamentary bloc.

"Al-Iraqiya may participate in the government even if it is headed by Nouri al-Maliki, and its threats of boycotting the political process are a kind of pressure on the political blocs to promote Abdul-Mahdi's candidature in the NC instead of Maliki's."

The National Coalition is under increasing pressure to nominate a sole candidate for the premiership from between the outgoing PM and leader of the State of Law Coalition (SLC)

The NC postponed its Tuesday evening meeting that was to be held to choose between the two candidates, a day past the scheduled deadline.

Some media sources revealed that the NC didn't agree on a single candidate because of the wide disputes within the coalition.

Differences have emerged, according to sources because it was agreed that the Sadrist Current would withdraw its support for the Iraqi National Alliance (INA) candidate Adel Abdul Mahdi for the sake SLC's Nouri al-Maliki.

This move was vehemently rejected by INA leader Ammar al-Hakim who remains opposed to Maliki's nomination for a second term in office and boycotted the Monday meeting.

The NC will hold a fourth meeting on Wednesday to choose its candidate for the prime minister's post, and if the coalition fails to do so, it will resort once again to the arbitrators' committee.

The INA and SLC, Shia-dominated groups, formed a super bloc in May known as the National Coalition (NC) to gain the parliamentary majority necessary to form the next government.

Fearing Maliki's alleged tendency to act unilaterally and offer positions of authority to his personal supporters, many INA members opposed the SLC leader, Maliki's bid for a second term in power.

The INA elected the current Iraqi Vice President Adel Abdul-Mahdi as its own nominee for the prime minister's position and the NC must now choose between the two candidates.

The NC formed a 14-member "arbitrators' committee" which includes representatives from both blocs to choose one candidate from the INA but so far it hasn't succeeded in doing so. (AK News)

- A member of the al-Iraqiya list led by the former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi said on Wednesday that the American administration has denied its support for any list or

candidate, indicating that Washington renewed its support for the Iraqi Constitution and the election results. Joe Biden

Alia Nassif said that the head of the al-Iraqiya list, Ayad Allawi, spent over an hour on the telephone to the U.S. Vice President Joseph Biden discussing the American position on the political crisis in Baghdad and allegations of Washington's support for the State of Law Coalition (SLC)'s leader, Nouri al-Maliki and his candidacy for the premiership.

"Biden told Allawi that his administration stands at the same distance from all the political blocs, in addition to that it supports the formation of a national partnership government," Nassif reported.

The SLC previously held that the U.S. Vice President Joseph Biden had told Maliki about Washington's support for his nomination for a second term in office after the U.S. administration noticed a shift in the Arab position from supporting Allawi to backing Maliki.

Nassif said: "The telephone conversation between Biden and Allawi came after the letter handed over by al-Iraqiya to the U.S. embassy in Baghdad where it asked for an explanation of the media statements about Washington's support for Maliki's nomination for the prime minister's post."

Al-Iraqiya, led by former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi came first in the March elections by securing 91 seats. The State of Law Coalition (SLC) led by the outgoing PM Nouri al-Maliki ended up second with 89 seats.

Al-Iraqiya was prevented from forming the cabinet in late March by a Federal Supreme Court ruling that it is the bloc with the highest number of seats when parliament convenes and not the party that won the highest number of seats in the election that has the right to lead the government.

Despite nearly seven months of political maneuvering and wrangling, the Iraqi political process has been locked in an impasse that centers on the allocation of the Prime Minister's office. (AK News)

- Earlier on Wednesday a member from the Gorran opposition party, led by Nawshirwan Mustafa, stated that as a protest against the violations to the journalism law, the party's deputies walked out of the Regional parliament assembly hall.

In a statement to AKnews, Adnan Othman, a lawmaker from the Gorran faction said that the media personnel were not allowed to cover the discussion in parliament which led to the Gorran legislators quitting the assembly.

"To comment on the violation we will hold a press conference in front of the parliament building after a short while," he added. Parlamani Kurdistan, Kurdistan Parliament

Today's session was set up to discuss the bills for the constitution of a Regional high electoral commission, formalizing the Yazidi minority's religious feasts, compensating detainees held without legal justification, and the right to demonstrate and hold public meetings.

Gorran broke away from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) last year to run independently for the 2009 Regional parliamentary elections and secured 25 seats. (AK News)

- A lawmaker in the State of Law Coalition (SLC) led by the outgoing Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki announced on Wednesday a tripartite meeting that will be held in the coming hours between President Talabani and the two National Coalition (NC) nominees, Maliki and Adel Abdul-Mahdi, to discuss their candidature for the post of prime minister. Adel Abdul-Mahdi and maliki

President Talabani called for the meeting because the National Coalition has once again failed to choose a sole candidate for the premiership.

"The meeting will be held during the coming hours...Talabani is working to bring their views closer and accelerate the formation of the next government" Said SLC member, Abdul Hadi al-Hassani.

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- A leader from the Al-Iraqiya bloc said on Tuesday that the leader of his bloc, Ayad Allawi, is in Syria and on the sidelines of his visit he may meet with Muqtada Sadr, the leader of the Sadr Current. iyad allawi, moqtada al-sadr, baghdad

Allawi's visit to Syria comes after a formal invitation by Bashar al-Asad, the president of the Syrian Arab Republic.

To resolve the political impasse Iraqi leaders are currently locked in over the formation of the new Iraqi government, negotiations are being held within the country and abroad.

Abdul-Satar Jumayli told AKnews that the leader of the al-Iraqiya bloc is in Syria to confer with senior officials in the country and some Iraqi notables residing there in order to discuss the latest political developments on the Iraqi arena.

Al-Iraqiya was the winner of the March parliamentary elections with 91 seats. The outgoing PM Nouri al-Maliki's state of Law Coalition (SLC) obtained the second place with 89. The Iraqi National Alliance (INA) came third with 70 seats in Parliament.

"The delegation of al-Iraqiya may meet with the leader of the Sadrists," Jumayli noted.

The Sadr Current is a prominent faction in the predominantly Shia INA.

The leader of al-Iraqiya mentioned that the coalition terms of his bloc are "recognizing al-Iraqiya's exclusive right to form the government and supporting Allawi as the only candidate for the Prime Minister's position."

Maliki from the SLC and Adel Abdul-Mahdi from the INA are the other two rivals for the premiership. It is the allocation of the PM's position which is mainly to be blamed for the political crisis that has engulfed Iraq.

Last July Allawi was also in Syria after receiving an invitation from the Syrian president and during his stay, he visited Sadr and held talks over setting up the government.

After the elections the two Shia blocs of Maliki and Hakim merged into a super bloc called the National Coalition (NC). The NC had to choose between the two PM candidates of the original blocs last Monday, but the decision was delayed as the disputes continued.

The Sadrists have on different occasions made it clear that they do not support Maliki for a second term at office and Abdul-Mahdi's nomination came as a response to Maliki's persistence on his candidacy. (AK News)

- The leader within the Iraqiya Slate, Jamal al-Batiekh, revealed that "The next two days will witness announcing the results of the negotiations conducted between the IS and the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council.

Speaking to the National Iraqi News Agency (NINA), he said "The IS and the SIIC achieved a reasonable progress and removed many obstacles that hinder their alliance."

Concerning efforts to present a mutual candidate from both blocs for the Premier Post, he stressed "Ayad Allawi and Adil Abdul Mahdi have much better chances to be next candidates for the PM post and we can collect votes to win this post."

Batiekh noted that “The visit of the IS’ head Allawi to Syria on Tuesday aims at consolidating efforts related to forming government since neighboring countries can contribute to relief the political crisis in the country.”

Earlier, Member of the IS Salam al-Zawbae has assured in a press statement that “Allawi and Abdul Mahdi will meet, without identifying the location of the meeting.”

He mentioned that “Abdul Mahdi has better chances to form upcoming government.”
(AK News)

- President of Iraq’s Kurdistan region, Massoud Barzani, left Arbil on Wednesday heading for Rome to take part in the general meeting of the Alliance of Democrats, according to a presidential statement.

“The president will deliver a speech in which he will talk about peace, democracy and political process in Iraq,” said the statement received by Aswat al-Iraq news agency.

“In his speech, President Barzani will highlight the importance of forming an Iraqi government based on consensus and the participation of all political blocs,” it added.
(Aswat Al Iraq)

- Iraq’s Deputy Prime Minister, Nouri Shawis, on Wednesday praised the role played by Japan in supporting Iraq, urging Japanese companies to invest in Iraq, according to a statement of Shawis’ office.

“Shawis received at his office in Baghdad Japanese ambassador in Baghdad and his accompanying delegation, with whom he discussed ways to bolster bilateral relations,” said the statement received by Aswat al-Iraq news agency.

“The Iraqi official praised the Japanese role in supporting Iraq and in developing bilateral relations for the good of the two people,” the statement added.

“The meeting tackled the investment opportunities in the country and the Iraqi government’s call to the Japanese companies to implement projects using their great experience,” it said.

“Talks tackled also the current political process and the ongoing negotiations to form the new government.” (Aswat Al Iraq)

- Federal Irak Hükümetinin Savunma Bakanı Abdulkadir Elubeydi, Türkiye’nin başkenti Ankara’ya gitti. Elubeydi’nin Ankara’da Türkiye Hükümeti Savunma Bakanı ile bir görüşme gerçekleştirdiği bildirildi.

Federe Irak Hükümetinin Savunma Bakanı Abdulkadir Elubeydi, Ankara’ya gitti. Elubeydi’nin Ankara’da Türkiye Hükümeti Savunma Bakanı Vecdi Gönül ile bir araya geldiği bildirildi. Irak Savunma Bakanlığı basın sözcüsü Muhamed Askeri açıklamasında, ziyaret amacının iki hükümet arasındaki ilişkiler ve sınır güvenliği konuları hakkında görüşmelerini belirtti. Askeri, görüşmede ayrıca Irak askeri ordusunun gündeme getirildiği, askerlerin güçlü ve gelişmiş bir hal alması üzerinde açıklamada buldukları bildirdi.

Muhamed Askeri açıklamasının devamında, tarafların genel olarak sınır güvenliği ve PKK konularının ağırlıklı olduğunu ve bu konular üzerine tartıştıklarını dile getirdi. (Peyamner)

Kürdistan Hükümeti Sözcüsü Kawa Mahmud, Türkiyede başlatılan Demokratik Açılımın sonuca ulaşmadığını ve ayrıca anadilde eğitimi desteklediklerini açıkladı.

Türkiyede yaşanan Kürt sorunuyla ilgili son görüşmeler konusunda ve özellikle Türkiye Başbakan’ın Anadilde Eğitim talebini kabuletmeyeceği yönünde ki açıklaması konusunda Kürdistan Hükümeti Sözcüsü ve Kültür ve Gençlik Bakanı Kawa Mahmud PNA’ ya “

Türkiyede demokrasinin gelişmesine ve özellikle Kürtlerin ulusal hakları ile temel hakları Anadilde eğitim gibi, katkı sağlamak için atılacak her edımı destekliyoruz. Ayrıca bu yönde atılacak adımlar insanı haklardır ve bunun yanı sıra uluslar arası anlaşmaların gereğidir”dedi.

Hükümet Sözcüsü “ Türkiyede hissedilir bir değişim var ve bu değişim sürecektir. Ancak Demokratik açılım hedefine ulaştı veya son buldu diye bileceğimiz bir süreç değil.Yani haklı ulusal haklar yerine getirildi diyemeyiz. Ancak bu rekabet ve zırlıklarla süren bir süreçtir”dedi.

Bakan son olarak, Türkiyede başlayan demokratik açılım sürecenin, barış, demokrasi ve adalete hizmet etmesi temennisinde bulundu. (Peyamner)

2. IRAN / İRAN

- Deputy Foreign Minister for Consular, Parliamentary and Iranian Expatriates' Affairs Hassan Qashqavi and Malaysian Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Datuk Wira Abu Seman in a meeting here on Wednesday explored ways to boost consular and judicial cooperation between the two countries.

"Given the grounds for good cooperation and ties between the two countries and the presence of more than 70,000 Iranian nationals in Malaysia, Tehran is ready to sign an agreement on consular, judicial, police and drug-related affairs in areas of judiciary and extradition of criminals and convicts through mechanisms agreed by Kuala Lumpur officials," Qashqavi said.

He further pointed to Iran's experience in campaigning drug-traffickers, and voiced Tehran's preparedness to expand cooperation between the two countries' relevant bodies.

The Malaysian official, for his part, welcomed expansion of mutual cooperation with Iran in all fields.

Abu Seman noted his talks with Iranian officials, and underlined that there reside proper grounds for the expansion of bilateral ties between the two states.

"Malaysia is ready to form a working group to study consular and judicial cooperation as well as ways of expanding relations between the relevant bodies responsible for judicial and police affairs and drug campaign, and then sign a cooperation agreement with Iran," Abu Seman stated.

Also earlier this week, the Malaysian official met with Iranian Deputy Interior Minister for Security and Law Enforcement Affairs Ali Abdullahi, and conferred on the possible ways to remove shared concerns about drug-trafficking activities in both countries.

During the meeting here in Tehran on Monday, Abdullahi pointed to the measures adopted by the two sides to fight linked activities by drug-trafficking networks in the two countries, and said, "Our friends in the Malaysian interior ministry have initiated measures and we will continue exchange of information more than before in a bid to reach our desirable results in drug-campaign." (Fars News Agency / FNA)

- Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki in a meeting with his Brazilian counterpart Ceslo Amorim called for continued consultations over the 'Tehran Declaration' signed by Iran, Brazil and Turkey on the swap of nuclear fuel for the Tehran research reactor.

During the meeting, Mottaki underlined the importance of the 'Tehran Declaration' signed by Iran, Brazil and Turkey in Tehran on May 17 and briefed Amorim on the latest development in Iran's nuclear issue.

Mottaki pointed to the agreements signed between Iran and Brazil during the past two years, and noted that these agreements would prepare the ground for institutionalizing the two countries' ties in all the various fields.

Amorim, for his part, stated that Tehran and Brasilia have positive relations, and stressed the necessity for the expansion of mutual ties in a variety of fields.

After West's opposition to Iran's proposals for nuclear fuel swap, Iranian, Brazilian and Turkish officials on May 17 signed an agreement named the 'Tehran Declaration' which presented a solution to the longstanding standoff between Iran and potential suppliers of nuclear fuel.

According to the agreement, Iran would send some 1200 kg of its 3.5% enriched uranium to Turkey in exchange for a total 120 kg of 20% enriched fuel.

But again the western countries showed a negative and surprising reaction to the Tehran Declaration and sponsored a sanctions resolution against Iran at the UN Security Council instead of taking the opportunity presented by the agreement.

Russia, France, and the US, in three separate letters, instead of giving a definite response to the Tehran Declaration, raised some questions about the deal, and the US took a draft sanctions resolution against Iran to the UN Security Council, which was later approved by the Council.

Iran in a letter responded to the questions raised by the Vienna Group on the Tehran Declaration and voiced its preparedness to hold talks.

In a later move, IAEA Director-General Yukiya Amano proposed a plan to resume talks between the two sides, and Iran's foreign minister announced Tehran's agreement with Amano's proposal.

Last week, Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Ali Akbar Salehi, in his address to the 54th Annual Regular Session of the IAEA General Conference at the

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) headquarters in Vienna, said that talks on fuel swap with the Vienna Group (Russia, France, the US and the IAEA) should be resumed without any delay. (FNA)

- An Iraqi provincial official demanded Tehran to further boost its aid and assistance in the reconstruction of the war-ravaged Iraq, and stressed that Baghdad is seeking an increase in Iran's investment activities in the country.

"We have abundant needs in different fields in Iraq and the city of Karbala and we seek Iran's cooperation and partnership to meet these needs," Nasif Jasem Mohammad Al-Khatabi, First Deputy Head of the Governorate Council of Iraq's Southern city of Karbala, said in a meeting with Iranian officials in Iran's Northwestern city of Qazvin on Wednesday.

Khatabi reiterated that his city is also in need of investments by Iranian capital holders to build power plants, construction-materials and foodstuff producing plants and factories.

Reminding that Iraq enjoys fertile soil and abundant water resources, he said Baghdad is eager to use Iran's experiences to make an optimized use of these resources.

Iran and Iraq have enjoyed growing ties ever since the overthrow of the former Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, during the 2003 US invasion of the Muslim country.

Both sides are working on a series of plans to take a wide stride in the expansion of their ties, in economic fields in particular.

Earlier, Iranian First Vice-President Mohammad Reza Rahimi voiced Tehran's preparedness to transfer technology and make investments in its western neighbor.

"We hope that our joint cooperation and bilateral economic ties increase soon," Rahimi said, addressing the Iran-Iraq Friendship society here in Tehran in August.

Also, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani in a meeting with his Iranian counterpart Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in New York last week praised Iran's role in the establishment of security and stability in his war-torn country.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has always been on the side of the Iraqi nation and sought security and integrity of our country," Talabani said in the meeting held on the sidelines of the 65th UN General Assembly session in New York. (FNA)

- Niger's Prime Minister Mahamadou Danda called on Iran to help the West African state with its upcoming referendum and elections.

The Niger premier made the request in a meeting with Tehran's Ambassador to Niamey, during which the two sides also explored ways to boost bilateral relations between the two countries.

Danda also thanked Iran's cooperation and assistance with Niger, and called for further expansion of political, economic and cultural ties between Tehran and Niamey.

On 18 Feb 2010, a coup removed President Mamadou Tandja. Djibo Salou, the coup leader and chairman of the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy, installed himself as President, suspended the Constitution, and dissolved the Cabinet, promising that elections would be held following a transitional period of unspecified duration. On 19 Feb 2010, Salou appointed Mahamadou Danda as Prime Minister.

Last week, Djibo called for the United Nations and other international organizations to observe the forthcoming series of elections to restore the country to constitutional rule after February's coup d'état.

Addressing the General Assembly on the opening day of its annual session, he stressed the transitional government's determination to "guarantee free, fair, transparent and credible elections."

"The commitments that we made the day after the events of 18 February 2010, are at an advanced stage of fulfillment and will be held within the agreed timetable, with your support," General Djibo said.

The electoral timetable provides for polls to be held between 31 October and 6 April 2011, beginning with a referendum on the new constitution and culminating with the election of a new president who will be inaugurated on 11 April. Members of the transitional government and the military and security forces will be ineligible to stand. (FNA)

- The Iranian nation and government 's awe and grandeur has bewildered and paralyzed the hegemonic powers, specially the US, and made them adopt passive policies against the country, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Wednesday.

"The US president and the hegemonic system are confused and passive against the Islamic Republic and the Iranian nation," Ahmadinejad said, addressing a ceremony here in Tehran today.

His remarks alluded to the US president's recent remarks in an interview with the Persian-language TV channel, BBC Persian, during which he resorted to sedition against the Islamic Republic and encouraged the Iranian people to stand against the government, alleging that the Islamic Republic, and not Washington, should be blamed for the 30-year-long sanctions against Iran.

Ahmadinejad described Barack Obama's comments as psychological warfare, and cautioned that psycho war is now the most important front for the enemies to confront the Islamic Republic.

They want to bring the Iranian nation to its knees through such measures, but no avail, the President said.

Iranian officials have on many occasions warned about enemies' plots and conspiracies for defeating the Iranian nation through soft and psychological wars.

Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei had earlier underlined the necessity for proper measures to repel enemy's soft war against Iran.

"Today, the main priority of the country is to confront (enemy's) soft warfare which is aimed at creating doubt, discord and pessimism among the masses of the people," Ayatollah Khamenei said in November 2009, addressing a large and fervent congregation of Basij (volunteer) forces.

The Leader has entrusted Basij with the campaign against enemies' cultural invasion and soft war on Iran. (FNA)

- A senior Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) official described Iran as the most powerful country in the Middle-East region, reiterating that enemies are fearful of Tehran's deterrent power.

"Iran is the most powerful country in the Middle-East," Supreme Leader's Deputy Representative to the IRGC Mojtaba Zonnour said Tuesday night.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran enjoys the highest capabilities in the region and this is a highly important and distinguished value," Zonnour added.

Stressing that the Islamic Republic is now experiencing its best conditions since the onset of the Islamic Revolution, he stated that such conditions have angered the enemies, but Tehran's deterrent power has dissuade them from attacking Iran.

His remarks came after the US and Israel both recently intensified threats against Iran. Speculations that Israel could bomb Iran mounted after a big Israeli air drill in 2008. In the first week of June 2008, 100 Israeli F-16 and F-15 fighters reportedly took part in an

exercise over the eastern Mediterranean and Greece, which was interpreted as a dress rehearsal for a possible attack on Iran's nuclear installations.

Iran has warned that it would target Israel and its worldwide interests in case it comes under attack by the Tel Aviv.

The United States has always stressed that military action is a main option for the White House to deter Iran's progress in the field of nuclear technology.

Iran has warned that in case of an attack by either the US or Israel, it will target 32 American bases in the Middle East and close the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

An estimated 40 percent of the world's oil supply passes through the waterway.

Meantime, a recent study by the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), a prestigious American think tank, has found that a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities "is unlikely" to delay the country's program.

Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen has also recently warned in Tel Aviv of the unexpected consequences of an Israeli attack on Iran, just as he did during the days of the (George W) Bush administration.

Foreign military commanders have also on many occasions cautioned their statesmen about IRGC's power and might and its crushing response to any attack.

The IRGC was appointed to defend the Persian Gulf security in 2008. The Iranian army has been tasked with controlling the Sea of Oman and the Caspian Sea, while the full responsibility for defending the Persian Gulf security has been entrusted to the IRGC.

In a Sep. 11, 2008 report, the Washington Institute for the Near East Policy said that in the two decades since the Iran-Iraq War, the Islamic Republic has excelled in naval capabilities and is able to wage unique asymmetric warfare against larger naval forces.

According to the report, the IRGC Navy has been transformed into a highly motivated, well-equipped, and well-financed force and is effectively in control of the world's oil lifeline, the Strait of Hormuz.

The study says that if Washington takes military action against the Islamic Republic, the scale of Iran's response would likely be proportional to the scale of the damage inflicted on Iranian assets.(FNA)

- Cumhurbaşkanı Ahmedinejad, İran milletinin büyük bir sıçrama ve tarihi bir açılımın eşiğinde bulunduğunu vurguladı.

İran'ın 12 eyaletinde İran'ın "Seçkinler Milli Vakfı" temsilciliği açılış töreninde konuşan Cumhurbaşkanı Ahmedinejad, kalkınma, adalet, izzet ve şeref gibi değerlerin yenilikçilik olmadan elde edilemeyeceğini, İran gibi dahi ve seçkin insanların yaşadığı bir diyarda yaşamaktan ötürü yüce Allah'a minnettar olduklarını kaydetti.

İran milletinin özellikle bu seçkin insanların çabaları ile hızla ilerlediğini kaydeden Ahmedinejad, İran milletinin büyük bir sıçrama ve tarihi bir açılımın eşiğinde yer aldığını vurguladı. (FNA)

- BMT Genel Sekreteri Ban Ki Moon, İran'ın bölgesel meselelerin çözümünde ifa ettiği yapıcı rolü takdir ettiklerini belirtti.

BMT Genel Sekreteri Moon, İran Dışişleri Bakanı Menuçehr Mutteki ile Newyork'ta bir araya geldi.

Görüşmede Mutteki, İran'ın Irak, Afganistan ve Lübnan başta olmak üzere bölgesel sorunların çözümünde ifa ettiği aktif rolü ve girişimleri anlattı ve ancak bölgesel çözüm yollarının bölgeye güven, barış ve istikrarı geri getirebileceğini vurguladı.

Batının Ortadoğu, Afganistan ve Irak'a yönelik politikaları hatalarla dolu olduğunu kaydeden Mutteki, İran'ın bu bağlamda önerdiği çözüm yollarını beyan etti.

Görüşmede BMT Genel Sekreteri Ban Ki Moon, İran'ın bölgesel meselelerin çözümünde ifa ettiği yapıcı rolü takdir ettiklerini belirtti. (FNA)

- İslami Şura Meclisi Başkanı Ali Laricani, eğer bazıları İran baskı ve tehditle barışçıl nükleer enerjiden yararlanma yolunu değiştireceğini düşünüyorsa, yanlış düşündüklerini vurguladı.

Çin liderlik konseyi üyesi Lee Chian Chu ile görüşen Laricani, İran'ın nükleer meselesine temas ederek, eğer bazı uluslararası güçler İran baskı ve tehditle barışçıl nükleer enerjiden yararlanma yolunu değiştireceğini düşünüyorsa, yanlış düşündüklerini ve asla böyle olmayacağını kaydetti.

Laricani, söz konusu güçlerin İran milleti ile farklı bir şekilde konuşmaları gerektiğini, İran'ın nükleer meselesinde Çin'in önemli ve etkili rol ifa edebileceğini vurguladı.

Görüşmede Çinli lider bir kez daha ülkesinin İran'ın nükleer enerjiden barışçıl amaçlar uğrunda yararlanma hakkını desteklediğini vurgulayarak Pekin yönetiminin, uluslararası yasaların dışında her türlü tek yanlı yaptırıma da kesinlikle karşı olduğunu ifade etti. (FNA)

- The United States seeks to launch a cyber war against Iran in retaliation to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's remarks at the UN, says Communications and Information Technology Minister Reza Taqipour.

"After the president's truthful remarks at the UN, the U.S. and other enemies of the Islamic system are seeking to wage a cyber war," Taqipour said Wednesday.

A computer worm dubbed Stuxnet has recently attacked the computer systems of some industrial plants in Iran.

It seems that the communications minister has made the remarks in response to the recent cyber attack.

Fortunately, the computer systems in Iran have high security and are impenetrable, “so they can not cross over our earthworks,” Taqipour explained. (Mehr News Agency / MNA)

- Shell BM'nin yaptırımlarına rağmen İran ile petrol ticaretini iyiden iyiye geliştirdi

The Guardian Shell petrol şirketinin BM Güvenlik Konseyi'nin İran'a yönelik yaptırımlarına rağmen İran ile petrol ticaretini iyice geliştirdiğini yazdı. Gazeteye göre Britanya ve Hollanda merkezli şirket, İran devlet petrol şirketine bu yaz ham petrol karşılığı 1.5 milyar dolar para aktarmış.

Britanyalı BP ve Hindistanlı Reliance Industries'in İran'daki faaliyetlerini kapattığını aktaran Guardian, Shell'in Tahran ile imzaladığı anlaşma belgelerinin kopyalarını yayımladı. Ancak Shell'in İran faaliyetlerin yüzünden suçlanamayacağını zira BM, ABD ve AB yaptırımları 'İran'dan petrol ihracatına' kısıtlama getirmediğini savundu.

ABD'nin tahminlerine göre, dünyanın en büyük dördüncü petrol ihracatçısı olan İran'ın ihracatlarının yüzde 80'ini ham petrol oluşturuyor. Tahran'a uygulanan son yaptırımlar doğrudan nükleer, balistik veya füze faaliyetleriyle bankaları, sigortacıları ve İran'ın ham petrol ticaretinde yer alan nakliyatçıları ilgilendiriyor.

Ticaret verileri Fransız ve İtalyan şirketlerinin de İran'dan yüksek indirimlerle petrol aldıklarını gösteriyor. Total ve API petrol şirketleri Mayıs ve Ağustos aylarında, bir önceki üç aya oranla alımlarını sırasıyla yüzde 12 ve 70 artırdı. (MNA)

- İran Hatemül Enbiya Hava Savunma Karargahı Bilgi ve Haberleşme Komutan Yardımcısı, İran'ın, ileri teknoloji "Passive" radar sistemini ihracat etmeye hazır olduğunu ilen etti.

Mehr haber ajansı muhabirine özel röportaj veren Tuğgeneral Hamid Erjengi, yaptırımlar İranlı gençlerin yeteneklerini geliştirdiğini ifade ederek, İran'ın pek çok ileri teknoloji radar sistemleri elde ettiğini söyledi.

Tuğgeneral Erjengi, radar bilimi İran'da yerleştiğinden ülkede Ulusal Radar sistemlerinin seri üretimi yapıldığının bilgisini verdi. (MNA)

- İslami Şura Meclisi Başkanı, Çin'in, İran'ın nükleer dosyasında daha aktif rol oynaması gerektiğini vurguladı.

Mehr haber ajansının bildirdiğine göre, İslami Şura Meclisi Başkanı Ali Laricani, Tahran'da temaslarda bulunan Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti Liderlik Konseyi üyesi Lee Çang Çuile bir araya gelerek görüş alışverişinde bulundu.

İki millet arasındaki tarihi ilişkilerine bu görüşmede işaret eden Laricani, İran ve Çin arasındaki ilişkilerin geliştirilmesinde pek çok kapasite mevcut olduğunu söyledi.

Ortak amaçları doğrultusunda iki ülke parlamentolarının etkisi çok önemli olduğunu niteyelen Ali Laricani, İran meclisi iliki ilişkilerin geliştirilmesine destek verdiğini vurguladı.

İran İslami Şura Meclisi Başkanı konuşmasının devamında İran'ın nükleer meselesine işaret ederek, İran'ın, uluslararası baskılardan dolayı barışçıl nükleer haklarından vazgeçmeyeceğinin altını çizdi.

Laricani, Çin'in, İran'ın nükleer dosyasında daha aktif rol oynaması gerektiğini vurguladı.

İran Meclis Başkanı ayrıca, Amerika'nın Irak ve Afganistan politikası yenilgiye uğradığını hatırlattı.

Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti Liderlik Konseyi üyesi Lee Çang Çu ise bu görüşmede ülkesinin İran İslam Cumhuriyetiyle ilişkilerine önem verdiğini açıklarken, İran ile işbirliklerini geliştirmeye yana olduklarını konuşmasına ekledi.

Barışçıl nükleer teknoloji İran'ın hakkı olduğunu vurgulayan Lee Çang Çu, Çin'in, BM Güvenlik Konseyi kararı haricinde İran'a yönelik her çeşit yaptırıma karşı olduğu gibi nükleer meselesi ise diyalog yoluyla çözülmesi gerektiğinin altını çizdi. (MNA)

- İran İslam Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanı Menuçehr Mutteki, Tahran'ın Güvenlik Konseyinin beş daimi üyesi ile Almanya'ya New York'ta dışişleri bakanları düzeyinde masaya oturma önerisinde bulunduğunu ancak bu talebin tüm sloganlara rağmen görmezden geldiğini belirtti.

New York'ta İRNA'ya konuşan Mutteki "bu çıkmazdan kurtulmak için karşı tarafta siyasi bir irade olmalı" dedi.

"Obama İran'ın nükleer meselesiyle ilgili tüm yetkileri Hilary Clinton'a verdi ve Clinton'un İran karşıtı tutumu dikkate alındığında müzakerelerin geleceğini nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz?" şeklindeki soruya Mutteki "bu soru Obama'ya sorulmalı.ancak BM ile ilgili konular, nükleer faaliyetler veya silahsızlanma gibi konular genellikle dışişleri bakanları tarafından takip ediliyor" yanıtını verdi.

Bu arada Clinton'a bu yetkilerin verilmesinin etkili olup olmadığı yönündeki bir soruya Mutteki şu yanıtı verdi: "Obama'nın döneminde ABD hükümetinin İran'a karşı samimi olup olmadığı konusunda tereddütlerimiz var. Obama söylediği sloganları dışında İran konusunda geçmişteki yanlışları düzeltmek için somut ne tür bir adım attı? Nükleer konusunda da iki tutum var; birisi işbirliğine diğeri de çatışmaya dayanıyor. Biz şu ana kadar 5+1Grubunun tutumunu işbirliğine dayalı görmedik. Tahran bildirisi yapıcı ve olumlu bir gelişme. Buna karşılık diğerk taraf da yapıcı bir adım atmalı ancak onlar karar almaya gidiyorlar. Bu yılki genel kurul toplantısında alınan yaptırım kararından sonra

İran'ın müzakereyi kabul etmesini istediklerini belirtiyorlar. 5+1 grubu bakanlar düzeyinde İran'ın masaya oturması gerektiği konusunda hem fikirler. Ahmedinejad başkanlığında İran heyeti NewYork'a gitti ve Ahmedinejad, New York'ta olduğu ilk iki günde 5+1 grubu ile bakanlar düzeyinde burada müzakereye hazır olduklarını ifade etti.”
(IRNA)

- Iran exported its first domestically produced gasoline to Iraq, the manager of international affairs at the National Iranian Oil Company said on Tuesday.

The Mehr News Agency quoted Ali-Asghar Arshi as saying that three or four more shipments will be exported in near future.

Iranian Oil Minister Masoud Mirkazemi announced earlier in September that the country reached self-sufficiency after increasing its gasoline production to 66.5 million liters.

He later said Iran had stopped placing orders for gasoline purchase from abroad after increasing its domestic production.

Around 40 days ago Iran stopped the export of petrochemical products following the implementation of a crash program to boost gasoline production in domestic petrochemical units.

Iranian Deputy Oil Minister Abdolhossein Bayat previously explained that gasoline production capacity in 6 petrochemical complexes has reached 19 million liters a day, and added, “Currently what is produced in petrochemical complexes is transferred to oil refineries and transformed into high octane gasoline.””

The managing director of the National Iranian Oil Products Refining and Distribution Company Ali-Reza Zeighami said on August 29 Iran is about to take-off on producing a target 191 million liters of gasoline a day. He said that the country consumes 64 million liters a day.

He added that if the gasoline rationing plan is not implemented the consumption figure will increase between 100 to 120 million liters a day.

Zeighami pointed out that the gasoline production plan will mostly be carried out by the end of the Fifth Development Plan (2015).

Tougher gasoline sanctions over Iran's nuclear program imposed in recent months have restricted fuel imports. Increasing pump prices in Iran is aimed at cooling demand as well as saving state cash.

Iran announced on Sept. 7 it had achieved a massive increase in its refining capacity and no longer needed to import 20 million liters of its 64-million-liter daily consumption.

Under the rationing scheme introduced in 2007, a motorist can buy 60 liters of subsidized fuel per month for just 1,000 rials per liter (around \$0.11). Beyond that amount they have to pay a ""semi-subsidized"" price of 4,000 rials (Tehran Times)

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE / İSRAİL – FİLİSTİN

- The views of Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman regarding the peace process with the Palestinian Authority do not represent Israel's foreign policy, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit told the Dubai-based Al-Arabiya network on Wednesday.

"It is known that Lieberman talks a lot, but not always out of an understanding of the framework in which he is in," Gheit said, adding that he did not listen to Lieberman's speech as he did not ascribe importance to his words.

Aboul Gheit's comment referred to a controversial address by the foreign minister at the United Nations General Assembly on Tuesday, in which Lieberman presented his draft for population and territory swap, as part of an eventual peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians.

Under Lieberman's controversial scheme, part of Israel's Arab population would be moved to a newly created Palestinian state, in return for evacuation of Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Gheit added that "despite the international efforts, I am not optimistic." He added that the Palestinians would not be able to remain in the peace talks after Israel's decision not to extend the moratorium.

A statement by the Prime Minister's Office stated following Lieberman's speech that "Lieberman's address was not coordinated with the prime minister," adding that "Netanyahu is the one handling the negotiations on Israel's behalf. The various issues surrounding a peace agreement will be discussed and decided only at the negotiating table, and nowhere else."

Referring to Lieberman's UN address on Wednesday, the Egyptian FM told Al Arabiya television that it was a known fact "that Lieberman talks a lot, but not always with an understanding of the framework he's in." (Hareetz)

- The Palestinians dug in ahead of a crucial meeting Thursday with Washington's Mideast envoy, saying they can't be expected to continue peace talks unless Israel reverses a decision to lift restrictions on West Bank settlement construction.

Neither side seems to want the month-old talks to collapse, but Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas are publicly at an impasse, with a Monday deadline looming.

President Barack Obama's emissary, George Mitchell, is making a secretive last-minute attempt to rescue the negotiations. He was to travel to Abbas' West Bank headquarters Thursday, after meeting with Israeli leaders on Wednesday. Mitchell said after talks with Netanyahu that he is undaunted by what he described as bumps in the road, but offered no glimpse of a possible compromise.

The European Union's top diplomat, Catherine Ashton, announced she's heading to the region "as a matter of priority" after talking to Mitchell and international Mideast envoy Tony Blair.

Starting Thursday, the EU foreign policy chief will meet with Netanyahu, Abbas and Mitchell over two days to try to prevent the collapse of negotiations. She reiterated in a statement that the European Union regrets Israel's decision not to extend a 10-month-old moratorium on West Bank housing starts that expired this week.

Netanyahu has said extending the construction curb could fracture his pro-settlement governing coalition, but has also said he wants to keep negotiating with Abbas. Obama wants a deal on the terms of a Palestinian state alongside Israel within a year.

Abbas advisers on Wednesday stopped short of posing an ultimatum, but signaled they would accept nothing less than an extension of the moratorium. Veteran Palestinian negotiator Nabil Shaath said Israel should be blamed for any breakdown of the negotiations if it insists on expanding settlements on lands claimed by the Palestinians for their state.

Abbas on Wednesday was quoted as saying, without elaborating, that he is ready to make a "historic decision" when Arab League foreign ministers meet Monday in Cairo to review the negotiations. It wasn't clear whether Abbas meant he was ready to quit the talks or whether he was simply trying to create some last-minute leverage.

On Saturday, Abbas will consult top officials from his Fatah Party and the Palestine Liberation Organization's decision-making body before sitting down with the Arab officials.

Hanna Amireh, a member of the PLO body, said there was widespread opposition to resuming talks without a settlement curb.

"The consensus is that since the entire world is in favor of a Palestinian state and against settlements, then let us throw this problem in the face of the world and see what they can do about it," Amireh said.

However, in the end the decision is up to Abbas. Fatah and the PLO have routinely backed his decisions in the past and are unlikely to rebel against him now. The Arab League is also expected to back Abbas' recommendations.

Should he stay in the talks without a moratorium, Abbas would lose more credibility among Palestinians already skeptical of Washington's ability to deliver a deal. Yet Abbas may be reluctant to walk away from talks because his international standing and future as a leader are tied to the quest for a peace deal.

Abbas' bitter Hamas rivals, who seized control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, would benefit from the talks' failure as a reflection of their position that nothing can be gained by negotiating with Israel.

In comments published Wednesday on the website of the pro-Hamas newspaper Felesteen, Hamas' Gaza strongman Mahmoud Zahar renewed his call to Abbas to quit the negotiations.

Commenting on the Palestinian uprising that followed the failed U.S.-led peace effort at Camp David in 2000, Zahar claimed the late Palestinian President Yasser Arafat instructed Hamas to carry out "a number of military operations in the heart of the Hebrew state" after he allegedly "felt the failure of his negotiating" with Israel.

At the time, Arafat had said he sought to restrain Palestinian attacks so peace talks could succeed.

Zahar and other Hamas spokesmen could not immediately be reached for comment. (Hareetz)

- The United Nations Human Rights Council Wednesday endorsed a fiercely critical report on Israel's raid on a Gaza aid flotilla in May but stopped short of pressing for an international criminal inquiry.

It also renewed the mandate of separate investigation team that has been looking into whether Israelis and Palestinians have been properly investigating alleged rights abuses during the 3-week Gaza conflict in 2008-2009.

But there was no indication in two separate resolutions tabled at the 47-nation council by the Organization of Islamic States (OIC) that Israel's critics were aiming to have it taken soon before the International Criminal Court (ICC).

That possibility was raised Tuesday by a British judge on the council-appointed team that investigated the flotilla raid on May 31, in which nine pro-Palestinian activists, mainly Turks, were killed by Israeli commandos.

Palestinian rights campaigners in Geneva for the council session told reporters that they wanted Israel taken immediately to the ICC over the Gaza fighting in December 2009 and January 2009, in which more than 1,400 Palestinians died.

But diplomats said both resolutions appeared to take heed of public and private appeals from Western countries and the Palestinian Authority to avoid any action that would create new difficulties for the renewed Middle East peace process.

Discussion next year

However, the two texts, passed easily in the council where Islamic states and their allies who include Russia and China, have a majority, did call for new discussion on both issues at its session in March and April next year.

This left open the possibility that a firm move to have Israel put before the ICC, an action that would have to be endorsed in the U.N. Security Council, could be launched then if the already troubled peace talks lead nowhere.

The United States, the main promoter of the latest round of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, voted against the two texts from the 57-nation OIC, saying nothing should be done that would spoil the prospects for peace.

The flotilla raid report, presented to the council on Tuesday, said Israel had committed "grave violations of human rights law and international humanitarian law" in the incident, in international waters off Gaza.

Israel, which maintains a blockade against Islamist Hamas-controlled Gaza, says pro-Palestinian activists on one of the ships aiming to deliver humanitarian supplies to the enclave, died when they attacked its commandoes.

The raid resolution, presented by Pakistan for the OIC and effectively calling on Israel to try troops guilty of violence, was passed in the 47-nation council with 30 votes in favour, one -- the United States -- against, and 15 abstentions.

The seven European Union members on the body abstained, joining the United States in saying that the text failed to recognize that another flotilla inquiry set up by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon took primacy. (Hareetz)

- The European Union's foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton will make an unannounced visit to Israel and the Palestinian Authority on Thursday, in what seems like another last ditch attempt to put the recently stalled direct Mideast peace talks back on track.

The EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy will be arriving in Israel directly following a consultation with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Washington scheduled for later Wednesday, and will be meeting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu this Friday.

In a statement, Clinton said she would talk to both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in order to urge them both "to find a satisfactory way for negotiations to continue and gather momentum."

The announcement of the unscheduled visit came as U.S. officials were engaged in intense efforts to find a solution to the crisis in the peace talks caused by the expiration earlier this week of Israel's ten-month freeze on settlement construction in the West Bank.

Speaking during a meeting with U.S. Special Mideast envoy George Mitchell on Wednesday in Jerusalem, Netanyahu said that he and his government are committed to reaching a peace agreement with the Palestinians.

"There are many doubts and obstacles on the road to peace," Netanyahu said. "Everyone understands this, but the only way that it is certain we won't achieve peace is if we don't try to achieve peace. I am committed to peace and my government is committed to peace."

itchell was expected to discuss with Netanyahu an American proposal in which the U.S. would make certain guarantees to Israel on core issues in final status negotiations in exchange for Israel extending the settlement freeze for several months.

At this point, Netanyahu has reservations about the U.S. proposal.

"We are committed to achieving peace – a peace that will protect Israel's security and vital interests," Netanyahu told Mitchell. "We are committed to going down this route. I hope that the good talks that we've started with Abbas will continue to reach an agreement within a year."

Netanyahu emphasized that Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman's speech at the United Nations on Tuesday in which Lieberman proposed a population exchange with the Palestinians did not represent Israeli policy.

"I lead Israeli policy and Israel's policy is to try to advance down the path to peace and security," Netanyahu said.

Mitchell said that U.S. President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Clinton asked him to convey a message to Israelis, Palestinians and their leaders that the U.S. remains committed to achieving regional Middle East peace, between all peoples of the area.

Mitchell said that he knows that the road to peace will have many potholes but that the U.S. is more determined than ever to achieving the common goal of peace and security in the Middle East.

Clinton spoke with Netanyahu twice on Tuesday about the American proposal. Under the proposal, the U.S. would give Israel guarantees on the issues of security arrangements, refugees and recognition of Israel a Jewish state. In exchange, Israel would extend the settlement freeze for several months.

According to one Israeli source familiar with the contents of the conversation, Netanyahu was not enthusiastic about the proposal and did not respond positively.

A European diplomat said that Netanyahu told the Americans that he could not agree to extending the settlement freeze in the main settlement blocs and 2,000 residential units that have already received approval.

A freeze that applied only to settlement construction outside the main blocs, however, would be unacceptable to Abbas, who has demanded the extension of the full settlement freeze as a condition to continue peace talks. (Hareetz)

- During a meeting with U.S. Middle East envoy George Mitchell in Caesarea on Wednesday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that he and his government are committed to reaching a peace agreement with the Palestinians.

"There are many doubts and obstacles on the road to peace," Netanyahu said. "Everyone understands this, but the only way that it is certain we won't achieve peace is if we don't try to achieve peace. I am committed to peace and my government is committed to peace."

Mitchell arrived in Israel on Wednesday to continue talks with Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in an effort to find a solution to the crisis in the peace talks caused by the expiration earlier this week of Israel's ten-month freeze on settlement construction in the West Bank.

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Netanyahu emphasized that Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman's speech at the United Nations on Tuesday in which Lieberman proposed a population exchange with the Palestinians did not represent Israeli policy.

"I lead Israeli policy and Israel's policy is to try to advance down the path to peace and security," Netanyahu said.

Mitchell said that U.S. President Barack Obama and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asked him to convey a message to Israelis, Palestinians and their leaders that the U.S. remains committed to achieving regional Middle East peace, between all peoples of the area.

Mitchell said that he knows that the road to peace will have many potholes but that the U.S. is more determined than ever to achieving the common goal of peace and security in the Middle East.

Clinton spoke with Netanyahu twice on Tuesday about the American proposal. Under the proposal, the U.S. would give Israel guarantees on the issues of security arrangements, refugees and recognition of Israel a Jewish state. In exchange, Israel would extend the settlement freeze for several months.

According to one Israeli source familiar with the contents of the conversation, Netanyahu was not enthusiastic about the proposal and did not respond positively.

A European diplomat said that Netanyahu told the Americans that he could not agree to extending the settlement freeze in the main settlement blocs and 2,000 residential units that have already received approval.

A freeze that applied only to settlement construction outside the main blocs, however, would be unacceptable to Abbas, who has demanded the extension of the full settlement freeze as a condition to continue peace talks. (Hareetz)

- The Palestinians dug in ahead of a crucial meeting Thursday with Washington's Mideast envoy George Mitchell and said they cannot be expected to continue peace talks unless Israel reverses a decision to lift restrictions on West Bank settlement construction.

US President Barack Obama's emissary, George Mitchell, is making a secretive last-minute attempt to rescue the negotiations. He will travel to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's West Bank headquarters on Thursday, after meeting with Israeli leaders on Wednesday. Mitchell said after talks with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu that he is undaunted by what he described as "bumps in the road," but offered no glimpse of a possible compromise.

The European Union's top diplomat, Catherine Ashton, announced she is heading to the region "as a matter of priority" after talking to Mitchell and international Mideast envoy Tony Blair. Starting Thursday, the EU foreign policy chief will meet with Netanyahu, Abbas and Mitchell over two days to try to prevent the collapse of negotiations. She reiterated in a statement that the European Union regrets Israel's decision not to extend a 10-month-old moratorium on West Bank settlement construction that expired on September 26.

On Saturday, Abbas will consult top officials from his Fatah Party and the Palestine Liberation Organization's decision-making body before sitting down with Arab League foreign ministers on Monday in Cairo to review the negotiations. Abbas on Wednesday was quoted as saying, without elaborating, that he is ready to make a "historic decision" at the Monday meeting.

Abbas advisers on Wednesday stopped short of posing an ultimatum, but signaled they would accept nothing less than an extension of the moratorium. Veteran Palestinian negotiator Nabil Shaath said Israel should be blamed for any breakdown of the negotiations if it insists on expanding settlements on lands claimed by the Palestinians for their state.

Hanna Amireh, a member of the PLO body, said there was widespread opposition to resuming talks without a settlement curb. "The consensus is that since the entire world is in favor of a Palestinian state and against settlements, then let us throw this problem in the face of the world and see what they can do about it," Amireh said.

In comments published Wednesday on the website of the pro-Hamas newspaper Felesteen, Hamas's Gaza strongman Mahmoud Zahar renewed his call to Abbas to quit the negotiations.

Commenting on the Palestinian uprising that followed the failed US-led peace effort at Camp David in 2000, Zahar claimed the late Palestinian President Yasser Arafat instructed Hamas to carry out "a number of military operations in the heart of the

Hebrew state" after he allegedly "felt the failure of his negotiating" with Israel. At the time, Arafat had said he sought to restrain Palestinian attacks so peace talks could succeed. (Jerusalem Post)

- The United Nations Human Rights Council voted on Wednesday in favor of endorsing the conclusions of the report released earlier this month concluding that Israeli forces violated international law when they raided a Gaza-bound Mavi Marmara ship killing nine activists earlier this year.

The resolution, tabled on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, was approved with 30 votes in favor, one against and 15 abstentions.

The 56-page document lists a series of alleged crimes committed by Israeli forces during and after the raid, including willful killing and torture, and claims there is "clear evidence to support prosecutions."

"A series of violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, were committed by the Israeli forces during the interception of the flotilla and during the detention of passengers in Israel prior to deportation," the experts found.

Examining the circumstances of the raid, the panel concluded that a humanitarian crisis existed in Gaza on the day of the incident in Gaza and "for this reason alone the blockade is unlawful and cannot be sustained in law."

"The conduct of the Israeli military and other personnel toward the flotilla passengers was not only disproportionate to the occasion but demonstrated levels of totally unnecessary and incredible violence. It betrayed an unacceptable level of brutality," the report said. (Jerusalem Post)

- The Palestinians dug in ahead of a crucial meeting Thursday with Washington's Mideast envoy, saying they can't be expected to continue peace talks unless Israel reverses a decision to lift restrictions on West Bank settlement construction.

President Barack Obama's emissary, George Mitchell, is making a secretive last-minute attempt to rescue the negotiations. He was to travel to Abbas' West Bank headquarters Thursday, after meeting with Israeli leaders on Wednesday. Mitchell said after talks with Netanyahu that he is undaunted by what he described as "bumps in the road," but offered no glimpse of a possible compromise.

Palestinian leader says will deliver 'very important speech' during Arab League meeting; Netanyahu tells Sarkozy, Clinton peace deal possible within a year

Abbas advisers on Wednesday stopped short of posing an ultimatum, but signaled they would accept nothing less than an extension of the moratorium. Veteran Palestinian negotiator Nabil Shaath said Israel should be blamed for any breakdown of the negotiations if it insists on expanding settlements on lands claimed by the Palestinians for their state.

Abbas ready for 'historic decision'

Abbas on Wednesday was quoted as saying, without elaborating, that he is ready to make a "historic decision" when Arab League foreign ministers meet Monday in Cairo to review the negotiations. It wasn't clear whether Abbas meant he was ready to quit the talks or whether he was simply trying to create some last-minute leverage.

On Saturday, Abbas will consult top officials from his Fatah Party and the Palestine Liberation Organization's decision-making body before sitting down with the Arab officials.

Hanna Amireh, a member of the PLO body, said there was widespread opposition to resuming talks without a settlement curb.

"The consensus is that since the entire world is in favor of a Palestinian state and against settlements, then let us throw this problem in the face of the world and see what they can do about it," Amireh said. (Yedioth Ahranot)

4. EGYPT / MISIR

- Egypt's President, Mubarak, has promised integrity in the upcoming parliamentary elections scheduled to take place in November.

The avowal took place following the announcement made by various political opposition trends to boycott the elections, accusing the government of manipulating poll results. The boycott decision comes in response to former IAEA chief, Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei's, call to steer clear from elections.

According to the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), an oversight committee led by selected judges has been appointed and the regulations and procedures for the participation of civil society organizations in monitoring the voting process, have been set.

The country's biggest, most popular and influential opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood, has announced that it may participate in the elections since the opposition groups have not reached a consensus concerning the boycott.

The group had secured 88 seats, nearly a fifth of the seats in the People's Assembly, five years ago in the last parliamentary elections and the numerous declarations by NDP officials indicate that the regime will not allow a re-run of the winnings.

The Security apparatus began their harassments early, arresting 9 members from the group in an attempt to intimidate candidates and supporters of the group. According to

the Rights groups, such arrests are politically motivated as they frequently occur around the time of elections.

Analysts describe the upcoming parliamentary elections as an indication of how next year's presidential elections will unravel. Observers ascertain that most likely the NDP, which counts the president's 47 year old son Gamal as one of its top officials, will maintain its grip over parliament in the elections. (Ikhwan Web)

- “This is a giant that needs to be awakened to save Egypt...look at what other diaspora communities are doing,” said one enthusiastic participant in a recent London conference for the Egyptian National Assembly for Change (NAC). The conference was one of a series of public events aimed at fostering ties and coordinating pro-democracy efforts between Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei and traditionally apolitical Egyptian expatriates. The latest event was a September 17-20 conference organized by the Alliance of Egyptian-Americans in Washington D.C., following other events in New York and Boston. The NAC has quickly found strong support among Egyptians in more than ten countries, including those that host some of the largest Egyptian expatriate communities such as Saudi Arabia (1 million), the United States (320,000), Jordan (230,000), Kuwait (190,000), Canada (110,000), Italy (90,000), and the United Kingdom (35,000) according to a 2010 International Organization for Migration report.

The Egyptian diaspora, estimated at between 3 and 8 million worldwide, has until now not been a factor in Egyptian domestic politics, in contrast to the active roles played by Armenian, Irish, and Cuban expatriates. Political apathy has dominated the behavior of most Egyptian expats, and indeed most other Arab expatriates, with the exception of some Palestinians. Most Egyptian expats have been more concerned about building economic fortunes and retaining the ability to go back home without fear of government reprisals. Moreover, for decades strong Arab nationalist sentiments and slogans such as

“no voice is above the voice of the battle” (i.e., the Arab-Israeli conflict) made it shameful to criticize Arab regimes from abroad.

The days when Egyptians withheld criticism of the regime, however, are over. The Mubarak regime’s blockade on Gaza, mishandling of the Egyptian-Algerian soccer crisis, and the June 2010 torture/murder of young Alexandrian Khalid Said are a few of the recent incidents that have compounded longstanding concerns about economic deprivation, social injustice, and political repression and have convinced many Egyptian expatriates that the welfare of the country and the interests of the regime are two very different matters.

ElBaradei and his NAC entered the fray earlier this year with their efforts to mobilize a diaspora still divided along political, ideological, religious, and social class lines. And in fact the recent conferences in the United States and United Kingdom marked a significant new development: Egyptians rallying for democracy and united against authoritarianism regardless of ideology, religion, or class. The London conference, for example, gathered Muslim Brothers and Coptic activists, liberals and Nasserists, wealthy businessmen and university professors, as well as waiters and maids. Many different Egyptian accents were represented including the Upper Egyptian, the Cairene, the Alexandrian, and the Sinai. The same phenomenon has occurred at the conferences held in the United States.

The agents of change are as important as the frustrating conditions driving the calls for it. While socioeconomic and political grievances voiced now in the diaspora have been around at least since the early 1990s, the emergence of a credible messenger able to articulate those grievances and courageous enough to demand political reform has made a difference. ElBaradei and diaspora Egyptians understand each other. When ElBaradei speaks about “socialist democracy,” for example, expatriate Egyptians do not conflate it with Nasser’s Arab Socialism (now associated with demagoguery, military dictatorship, and economic failure). Rather, Egyptians who have lived in the United Kingdom, Canada,

Austria, and Scandinavia understand well what ElBaradei means: a representative democracy, a social justice system, and a well-developed welfare state.

What can Egyptians living abroad do to promote political reform in Egypt? ElBaradei and the NAC realize that the potential advantage of the expats lies in their numbers, and thus have made permitting Egyptians abroad to vote in Egyptian elections via consulates and embassies (as Iraqis and Algerians already do) one of the seven demands on a petition that is now close to garnering a million signatures. The argument is that it is unacceptable to disenfranchise as many as 8 million Egyptians who contribute roughly \$8 billion to Egyptian GDP each year (according to the World Bank, Egypt is the biggest recipient of remittances in the Middle East).

The expatriate voting proposal is important not only because it has mobilized diaspora Egyptians, but because it potentially could have a significant impact on elections were it to be adopted. There would be no Central Security Forces on the streets of London, Washington, or Montreal to block the entrance of the consulates, intimidate voters, arrest activists, and harass journalists who report on violations. If independent and international monitoring was allowed--another of the NAC's seven demands--and if the results were declared immediately following a monitored vote-count in the embassies, the likelihood of wide-scale electoral fraud could be minimized.

Egyptians in the diaspora face many obstacles to playing such a role. The Mubarak regime so far is ignoring the demand for expat enfranchisement. And while Egyptians in Western countries can organize freely so far, the many in Arab countries face a darker prospect, highlighted by the April deportation from Kuwait of 21 supporters of ElBaradei. Such an extreme episode is unlikely to be repeated, but Arab governments have at their disposal many tools to discourage activities against the Mubarak regime should they chose to do so.

Added to all of that is the fact that Egyptian expatriates are far from deciding on a strategy: push seriously for enfranchisement, work on influencing policies toward Egypt

in their new home countries, raise money for the causes? And they also face real challenges in terms of overcoming their differences in order to form strong organizations. Still, it is clear that for now diaspora Egyptians are responding in a way they never have before to ElBaradei's message to them: If you don't act and participate now, then do not complain tomorrow!" (Al Masry Al Youm)

- Members of the Saudi Arabia-based International Islamic Fiqh Academy, devoted to deciding issues of Islamic jurisprudence, attacked Egyptian Coptic Bishop Bishoy for statements he made last week in which he challenged the authenticity of certain Quranic verses.

"On behalf of Muslims and Islamic scholars worldwide, the academy's secretariat expresses its great indignation and condemnation of these allegations, words and ideas, which represent a provocation to all Muslims," they declared in a statement issued on Wednesday.

"Is it not the duty of religious leaders to foster tolerance and peace rather than incite sedition and hatred within society?" they asked in the statement.

The academy further called on the United Nations to issue restrictions on freedoms of expression in the event that such freedoms "became a means to hurt others." They went on to describe the bishop's remarks as evidence of "a fear of a rising Islamic tide."

Meanwhile, a number of Egyptian protesters who had planned to stage demonstrations at Cairo's St. Mark's Church on Wednesday to demand Bishoy's dismissal postponed the planned protest until Thursday. They also decided to stage their demonstration at a less controversial venue.

"Protesters consist of Egyptian patriots of both faiths who reject these attempts to tarnish the image of Egyptians," said protest coordinator Paul Ramsey. (Al Masry Al Youm)

- The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) of President Hosni Mubarak has not yet selected its candidate for presidential elections slated for next year, Egyptian Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif said on Wednesday.

“We're still waiting for the president to decide whether or not he intends to run,” he declared.

Speaking at the Euromoney investment conference currently underway in Cairo, Nazif said that the transition of executive power in Egypt did not represent a problem.

“We already have a leader,” the PM asserted. “There's no need to look for an alternative.”

“Egypt boasts a 7000-year history, during which numerous transitions of power have taken place,” he added. “The last one, which followed the assassination of [former president Anwar] Sadat, transpired smoothly.”

“Several political parties plan to field candidates in the upcoming elections,” Nazif noted, vowing that the electoral contests would be held “in all transparency.”

“We will provide the world with an example of how to achieve political reform,” he concluded.

Last month, NDP Secretary-General Safwat al-Sherif, who is also speaker of the Shura Council, said that “consensus” had been reached within the ranks of the ruling party to nominate the 82-year-old Mubarak for a sixth term as president. (Al Masry Al Youm)

5. LEBANON / LÜBNAN

- President Michel Sleiman stressed Wednesday that Lebanon was achieving its goals despite some “worrying” media reports.

“Lebanon, about which maybe media outlets broadcast worrying images, is firmly heading toward achieving its goals despite unstable conditions in the region,” he said.

The president was addressing members of the Lebanese community in Mexico who gathered to greet him and his wife first lady Wafaa Sleiman in the Lebanese Club in Mexico City during their final day of their official visit to the country.

Sleiman stressed that the Lebanese Army was fulfilling its duty in defending Lebanese borders against Israeli aggressions and countering terrorism.

“The Lebanese Army is fulfilling its duty in defending the southern borders and confronting the Israeli enemy with courage, as it confronted its barbaric aggression and defeated it with the resistance [during the summer war of] 2006.”

“Also, your national army, assisted by the security forces, is confronting and chasing terrorists that assaulted it in 2007 when it crushed their organization,” added Sleiman, in reference to Al-Qaeda-inspired group Fatah al-Islam.

The president outlined to the audience the achievements Lebanon had made since he assumed office in 2008.

Sleiman noted that concerned authorities were discussing the suitable mechanism by which expatriates could vote, a right that was endorsed by the Parliament.

Sleiman also noted that the Parliament was studying a draft legislation allowing people of Lebanese origins to obtain the Lebanese nationality.

Sleiman and his wife also visited the Human Museum in Mexico City.

Sleiman and Lebanese Mexican businessmen agreed during talks Tuesday to enhance commercial ties between Lebanon and Mexico.

Furthermore, the president met Mexican MPs of Lebanese origin and visited the Mexican Council of Senates where he held a meeting with the head of the council Carlos Royerz during which the two tackled Lebanese-Mexican ties. (The Daily Star)

- Following its Wednesday meeting, the Future Movement issued a statement that Prime Minister Saad Hariri said during the meeting that “giving up on the blood of [his father], late former PM Rafik Hariri, is out of the question.”

Hariri reiterated his commitment to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL)—which is investigating Rafik Hariri’s 2005 assassination—adding that his support comes through patience and that the Future Movement should not be dragged into turmoil, the statement added.

Tension is high in Lebanon as some March 8 politicians are calling for the abolition of the STL.

In an interview with The Wall Street Journal newspaper published on Wednesday, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moullem said that “the Special Tribunal for Lebanon has become politicized,” adding that indicting Hezbollah members for the 2005 murder of Rafik Hariri “will [drag] Lebanon in sectarian violence.”

Moullem met with his US counterpart, Hillary Clinton, on Monday, after which the latter said Syria should not take destabilizing measures in either Lebanon or Iraq.

“Damascus was informed that certain Hezbollah members will be officially indicted by the tribunal soon,” Moullem said, adding, “We are convinced that such an indictment will be a factor that will destabilize Lebanon.”

He called for “replacing the [STL’s investigation] with a pure Lebanese probe into the Rafik Hariri murder.”

Also in the news, the March 14 General Secretariat voiced its concern over some Hezbollah officials' threats regarding the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and said that "pushing the Lebanese to accept the dominance of power over [the dominance of] truth and justice is unacceptable" because it would ruin Lebanon, according to a statement issued on Wednesday.

This comes in a possible reference to Loyalty to the Resistance bloc MP Nawwaf al-Moussawi, who said on Friday that any group in Lebanon which "abides by the STL's [pending] indictment will be dealt with on the basis that it is one of the tools of the US-Israeli aggression." The MP added that supporters of the indictment will face the same response as the US-Israeli aggressor. (Now Lebanon)

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- Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon Ghadanfar Roken Abadi said that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s visit to Lebanon aims to strengthen Lebanon’s unity as well as strengthen the consensus over the formula of the unity of the Lebanese people, army and Resistance, An-Nahar newspaper reported on Thursday.

The Iranian president is expected to visit Lebanon in mid-October. (Now Lebanon)

6. SYRIA / SURİYE

- President Bashar al-Assad on Wednesday renewed Syria's support to any agreement that takes the Iraqis out of the current crisis and leads to the formation of a national unity government which includes all Iraqi forces represented in the Parliament and is able to preserve Iraq's unity, sovereignty and independence.

President al-Assad's remarks came during his meeting with a delegation from the Iraqi List led by Iyad Allawi.

Talks dealt with the latest developments in Iraq and the ongoing efforts and negotiations among different Iraqi blocs to form an Iraqi government.

President al-Assad expressed keenness on maintaining best relations between Syria and Iraq in various areas in a way that achieves the common strategic interests of both countries and peoples.

Allawi highlighted Iraqis' high confidence in Syria as it stands at the same distance from all Iraqi forces.

He also thanked President al-Assad for his great interest and care for Iraq's unity and national accord to recover and restore its security and stability.

The meeting was attended by Vice-President Farouk al-Shara, Assistant Vice-President Mohammad Nassif and Presidential Political and Media Advisor Dr. Bouthaina Shaaban.

President al-Assad held talks with Allawi last July during which they discussed the formation of an Iraqi government on the basis of agreement among the Iraqis and maintaining Iraq's unity, sovereignty and Arab identity..

During his meeting with a delegation from the State of Law Coalition earlier this month in Damascus, the President stressed Syria's support to any agreement among the Iraqis based on Iraq's unity.

A number of Iraqi officials visited Syria during the last months including Head of the Iraqi Supreme Islamic Council Ammar al-Hakeem, Vice-President Adel Abdul-Mahdi, Leader of the Iraqi Accord Front Ayad al-Samarrai and Leader of the Sadr Trend Muqtada al-Sadr.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari informed his Syrian counterpart Walid al-Moallem during their meeting in New York a few days ago of the Iraqi government's decision to return the Iraqi Ambassador to Damascus as soon as possible. Al-Moallem, in turn, confirmed the return of the Syrian Ambassador to Baghdad.

Allawi said at a press conference following the meeting that the Iraqi officials will continue dialogue and exchange viewpoints with the Arab countries, on top, Syria, adding "the Iraqi List conducts dialogue and holds contacts with Iraq's Arab depth, and this is the reason why we came to Syria who spares no effort to support Iraq stability."

As for reports about a regional understanding on forming the Iraqi government, Allawi said "we are slowly approaching towards the formation of a new government... in the end; the decision will be an Iraqi one."

He called on the international community, the US to stand at one distance from all political Iraqi parties.

Allawi hailed Turkey's efforts to help Iraq get out of its dilemma, saying "Turkey was one of the neighboring countries which issued a clear statement prior to elections that supports the political and electoral process.

He said the Iraqi List hopes the government will be formed on a national basis.

For his part, Member of Iraqi List Delegation Saleh al-Mutlaq said that President al-Assad's meeting with leaders of the Iraqi List was dedicated to study the situation in Iraq and came in the framework of Syria and other Arab neighboring countries efforts to protect Iraq from going to a security dilemma.

He pointed out that the Iraqi List called upon the brotherly country of Syria to have a pioneering role in protecting Iraq.

Al-Mutlaq said the Syrian role comes in support of Iraq and its people as it calls for Iraq's unity and the formation of a national government which doesn't belong to the political sectarianism, expressing his confidence that Syria will continue playing this constructive role.

He pointed out that the Iraqi List insists that the next Iraqi government gain the trust and the will of the Iraqi people and could be able to pass to a new stage when Iraqi people would achieve security, peace, safety and development. (SANA)

- Dışişleri Bakanı Velid el-Muallim Suriye'nin uluslararası ilişkiler ve dış işlerinde, Suriye ve Arap çıkarlarını korumakla birlikte yeniden düzenleme önceliğinin temelini dayalı bir vizyona sahip olduğunu belirtti.

Dışişleri Bakanı Muallim BM 65. Dönem Toplantılarında Suriye adına yaptığı konuşmada dolayısıyla Suriye'nin, başkalarıyla anlaşmazlık konularında üstünde yapılanmanın olabileceği buluşma noktalarına ulaşmak için derin diyalog kapılarını açık tuttuğuna vurgu yaptı.

Kendisine karşı yıllar süren yaptırım ve ambargo süresince bunu belirten Suriye'nin, şimdi ise Ortadoğu'nun güvenlik ve istikrarında kilit bir role sahip olmasıyla yine bunu belirtmekte olduğunun altını çizen Muallim, medeni uluslararası ilişkilerin kapalılık, azletme, çarpışma ve düşmanlık üzerine değil de açılım ve diyalog üzerine kurulması gerektiğini belirtti. Bunlara ek olarak Suriye'nin, günümüz dünyasında uluslararası ilişkilerin açılım ve diyalog üzerine kurulu olmasını temenni ettiğine işaret etti.

Barış süreci konusunda ise Dışişleri Bakanı Muallim, İsrail'de barıştan söz ettiklerini fakat aynı zamanda savaş çanlarını çaldıklarını, yahudi yerleşimlerle Arapların arazilerine el koyduklarını, Kudüs'ü yahudileştirme ve müzakerelerin var olması yada olmamasından

uzak bir şekilde İsrail'in kendini emri vaki bir durum olarak kabul ettirmeye çalıştığına işaret etti.

Muallim barışın; barışı sağlama isteğinin şemsiyesi altında müzakereler ve politik manevralarla değil, onu sağlamada sergilenen pratik ve iradenin gerçekliğinde olduğunu belirterek, Suriye'nin barışı sağlama iradesine kesinlikle sahip olduğunun altını çizdi. Bununla birlikte, işgal altındaki Golan topraklarının kesinlikle pazarlık konusu olamayacağını, bir karış toprağı eksilmeden eksiksiz ve tam olarak iade alınmasına dayalı ilkeli ve sabit bir karara sahip olduğuna vurgu yaptı.

Dışişleri Bakanı, yukarıdaki koşullar temelinde Suriye'nin, Türkiye'nin oynayacağı aracı rol vasıtasıyla İsrail ile dolaylı müzakereleri yeniden başlatmaya hazır olduğunu sözlerine ekledi.

Irak Konusunda ise Muallim, Irak'ın toprak ve halk bütünlüğü, güvenlik ve istikrarı, Arap kimliğini koruması ve egemenliğine kavuşmasına Suriye'nin büyük bir özen gösterdiğini yineledi.

Muallim, ABD güçlerinin çekilmesini Irak'ın egemenliğini geri kazanması yönünde olumlu bir adım olarak nitelendirdi.

Dışişleri Bakanı doğal felaketler konusuna da değinerek, bu yıl yaşanan doğal felaketlerin daha büyük felaketlerin başlangıcını teşkil ettiğine işaret ederken, bu konuyu büyük bir duyarlılık ve sorumlulukla ele alma ve gereğinin yapılması gereğine vurgu yaptı.

Pakistan'a yaşanan sel felaketinde büyük maddi hasarların meydana geldiğine işaret eden Dışişleri Bakanı, bu ülkeye daha fazla yardımların sunulması önemine vurgu yaptı.

Nükleer silahların yayılmasını önleme anlaşmasına katılması ve nükleer tesislerinin uluslararası denetçilere açılması yönünde İsrail'in zorlanması gereğine vurgu yapan Dışişleri Bakanı, bu konuda çifte standartlı politika izlemenin yanlış olduğunu belirtti. Aynı zamanda her ülkenin barışçıl amaçlı nükleer teknolojiden faydalanma hakkına dikkat çekti.

Muallim tarih boyunca Ortadoğu'nun gerginlik ve savaşlara tanık olduğunu, coğrafi konumu nedeniyle çevresinde bulunan Asya, Avrupa ve Afrika ülkelerinden büyük derecede etkilendiğini ve bu ülkeleri etkilediğine değinirken, bu bölgenin ortasında düşen Suriye'nin tüm bu gelişmelerin politikasından etkilendiğini ve uyum sağladığını söyledi.

Dışişleri Bakanı tüm dünyanın olduğu gibi, Ortadoğu'da adil ve kapsamlı barışın sağlanması çağrısında bulunduğunu, bunun da bölgeyle birlikte tüm dünyanın güvenlik ve istikrarı için gereklilik olduğunu belirttiğine dikkat çekerken İsrail'in işgal altındaki topraklarda barışa karşı politikalarını sürdürdüğüne işaret etti.

Suriye'nin uluslararası güvenlik konseyinin 242 ve 338 sayılı kararlarıyla birlikte Arap barış Girişimi doğrultusunda adil kapsamlı barıştan yana tutumunun uzun yıllardan beri bilinen bir tutum olduğunu belirterek, bu tutumun sabit ve değişmez ilkelere dayalı olduğuna vurgu yaptı.

İsrail'in Gazze'ye yönelik uyguladığı katı ablukayı kırmak ve oradaki Filistinlilere insani yardım taşıyan Özgürlük Filosuna karşı İsrail saldırısını soruşturan uluslararası komitenin raporuna değinen Muallim, Suriye'nin rahatlığını dile getirdi.

Muallim Sudan konusunda ise Suriye'nin, bu kardeş Arap ülkesinin güvenlik ve istikrarına verdiği önem kapsamında orada gelişen olayları yakından takip ettiğini dile getirerek, Katar, Arap Birliği ve Afrika Birliğinin bu konuda harcadıkları çabaları takdirle karşıladığını kaydetti.

Dışişleri Bakanı Muallim, konuşmasında uzun yıllardan beri Küba'ya uygulanan yaptırımların kaldırılması yönünde Suriye'nin çağrısını yineledi.

Konuşmasının bitiminde Dışişleri Bakanı; “ Daha güvenli, daha adaletli, daha güzel bir dünya istiyoruz. BM rolünün aktifleştirilmesini talep ediyor, uluslararası yasalara saygı ve bağlılığın gereğini belirtiyoruz. Fakat aynı zamanda kurmak ve güçlendirmek istediğimiz dünyanın, başlangıcına bu yıl tanık olduğumuz doğal felaketlerle karşı karşıya olduğunu, ve bu felaketlerin önüne geçilmesi gerektiğini unutmamamız gerekiyor.” Sözleriyle bitirdi.

BM Genel Sekreteri ile Bölge Gündemini Gözden Geçirdi

Diğer yandan Dışişleri Bakanı Muallim, BM genel Sekreteri Ban Ki Mun ile başta barış süreci olmak üzere Ortadoğu'nun gündemini gözden geçirdi.

Muallim görüşmede, barış gereksinimlerinden yana Suriye'nin meşru tutumunu açıklarken, İsrail'in barışın sağlanması için politik iradeye sahip olmadığını kaydetti.

Ki Mun ile görüşmesinde Lübnan'daki duruma değinen Muallim, sükunetle birlikte Lübnan'ın güvenlik ve istikrarına Suriye'nin büyük bir özen gösterdiğini yineledi.

Irak'taki durumun da ele alındığı görüşmede Dışişleri Bakanı, Irak halkının tüm kesimlerini temsil edecek ulusal birlik hükümetinin kurulmasından yana Suriye tutumunu ifade etti.

BM Genel Sekreteri Ki Mun görüşmede, bölge sorunlarının çözümünde Suriye'nin oynadığı kilit rolün önemini vurguladı. (SANA)

- The Syrian Government and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) on Wednesday signed an initial document on supporting the project of establishing the Regional Planning Commission.

The project aims at providing the institutional support, building capacities and operating the Regional Planning Commission.

The budget of the project is estimated at USD 400,000, of which 300 thousands are paid by the Syrian Government, and 200 thousands are granted by the UNDP.

The project, which will be implemented over a period of 12 months, is the first of its kind which is presented to the newly established Regional Planning Commission to support it in performing its tasks.

Chairman of the State Planning Commission Dr. Amer Husni Lutfi talked about the role of the Regional Planning Commission in studying, evaluating and collecting information on

the development in all the areas to translate this data according to the development approach of the State Planning Commission to reuse them in the future development plans and programs.

Dr. Lutfi said that there is a pressing need to find strategies for the regional planning, indicating to the role of the Regional Commission in studying the expansion of the cities and land uses as it coordinates with the local bodies to collect more accurate information, studies and data to invest them in future planning.

For his part, UNDP Resident Representative Ismael Ould al-Sheikh said that the project will provide the technical aid to put the institutional and technical framework of the Regional Planning Commission.

Ould al-Sheikh indicated that preparations for a document of an integrated project are underway to support the work mechanism of the Regional Commission to perform its missions.

Chairman of the Regional Planning Commission Dr. Irfan Ali lauded the exerted efforts by the State Planning Commission in mobilizing the required capabilities in addition to the international contributions and their role in coordinating the work mechanism of the Regional Planning Commission. (SANA)

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA / ARAP YARIMADASI VE BASRA KÖRFEZİ

- Saudi Arabia has rounded up 210 suspected drug smugglers in a series of raids since mid-June in which three security officers were killed, an Interior Ministry spokesman said on Wednesday.

Security forces carried out 18 raids across the conservative Muslim country, killing two smugglers and seizing drugs with a street value of 330 million riyals (\$88 million), said the spokesman, who was quoted by the official SPA news agency.

Drugs confiscated in the three-month raids included nearly ten million stimulant pills and 6.4 tonnes of hashish.

"Drugs are aimed at undermining the country's security in addition to the problem of terrorism," Abdullah al Yousef, undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs, told state television.

The spokesman said 113 of those arrested for the smuggling or possession of drugs were Saudis while most of the rest were Pakistanis, Yemenis, Syrians and Filipinos.

The kingdom applies strict Islamic Shariaa laws, executing drug smugglers, murderers and rapists, usually by public beheading. (Asharq Al Awsat)

- The acts of terror and sabotage in Bahrain served also as a rehearsal for similar acts in other Gulf countries, Bahrain's foreign minister has said.

"We have arrested the leaders of the network, the ones in Bahrain. There were also non-Bahrainis implicated in acts of terrorism and in rehearsing them to carry them out in other Gulf countries," Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmad Al Khalifa told London-based Al Hayat daily.

Bahrain this month said that it had arrested several people on charges of plotting terror attacks to undermine the country's security and stability. Those arrested were the top and middle leaders of the network allegedly supported by religious and business figures. Two of the main suspects are in London and were charged in absentia.

Shaikh Khalid, in his interview, said that 200 people were also arrested on security-related charges.

"Some of them were Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nationals," he said, refusing to divulge more "to allow the case to take its due course without influence before a court of law."

The Gulf nationals were among those arrested on suspicion of hurling Molotov cocktails.

"We see that the Gulf nationals have been implicated in this issue. They carried out their acts of terror in Bahrain, but also had the intention of doing the same in their home countries," Shaikh Khalid said.

The suspects were trained and financed abroad, he said, but refused to implicate Iran.

Shaikh Khalid said that Bahrain did not fear reprisals from Iran in case Manama implemented the United Nations sanctions.

"I do not know whether the sanctions will hurt Iran. However, I do know that Bahrain and the GCC always applied the resolutions of the international community. The brothers in Iran are aware of our commitment to international legitimacy. We are not worried about Iran and we have not received any threats from them... We hear voices here and there, but that is it." (Gulf News)

- Yemen and McKinsey & Company discussed here on Wednesday implementation of the second priorities of creating job opportunities for Yemeni manpower in the local and Gulf markets.

The meeting held between Minister of Technical Education and Vocational Training Ibrahim Omar Hajri and the company's experts, charged with preparing a consultancy studies for the ten priorities, reviewed the company's final reports in this regard.

They also talked about the Ministry's plan to carry out training programs to rehabilitate Yemeni manpower for Gulf labor market scheduled to be launched during November.

Hajri pointed out that the training programs would be started during the coming year, 2011, as a first phase via training and rehabilitating 20 thousand employees in different fields.

For its part, the company's delegation affirmed the important role of Technical Education and Vocational Training Ministry in implementing training programs for employees. (SABA)

- Yemen and European Union (EU) discussed here on Wednesday aspects of security cooperation and coordination and ways of boosting them in all areas.

This came during a meeting gathered Interior Minister Mutahar al-Masri and Deputy Operation Commander of the EU Naval Force Somalia, Op ATALNTA, Admiral Thomas J. Ernst, with presence of Head of the EU's mission in Sana'a Michele Cervone D'urso.

The two sides reviewed areas of the existing cooperation in the area of training, rehabilitation and technical cooperation, as well as coordination in combating maritime piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Arab Sea.

In the meeting, al-Masri reviewed the successes achieved by the Yemeni security bodies in all areas especially in combating terrorism and sea piracy.

Al-Masri commended the current cooperation between the security agencies of Yemen and the EU, and the support provided by the Union for Yemen in the Police Academy and coastguard field. He hoped that this cooperation would witness further development in the coming period.

For his part, Ernst valued the efforts made by Yemen in combating maritime piracy, voicing the readiness of the EU to provide more support to Yemen in the training and technical aspects to promote the capabilities of Yemen security bodies.

He noted to the importance of communication and coordination in this aspect and with regard to combating maritime piracy. (SABA)

8. SOUTH ASIA / GÜNEY ASYA

PAKISTAN / PAKİSTAN

- At least 31 people have been killed in the Pakistani city of Karachi after clashes broke out following the killing of a local politician, local media has reported.

Iran has assured to increase its relief assistance for Pakistan to support the flood affected areas in Pakistan. All possible efforts are underway to enhance the assistance of flood hit areas because Iran is full aware of the miseries of Pakistan brothers as the people of Iran has passed through such natural calamities of earthquake in past. There will be no let up in extending financial support to Pakistan in the time of crisis both in cash and kinds.

These observations were made by Anvari, leader of Imam Khomeini Relief Committee who met with Federal Minister for Religious Affairs alongwith 8-member delegation on Wednesday. The delegation of Imam Khomeini Committee is on visit of Pakistan with the intention of proceeding to the flood hit regions and meeting with the Pakistani authorities in order to familiarize itself with the type of relief assistance required by the flood victims.

Leader of delegation informed the Minister about function of Imam Khomeini Relief Committee/Foundation adding that this Foundation is dealing with Health, Education sectors as well other social activities. He conveyed a message of Imam Khomeini for the people of Pakistan expressing full sympathies with flood victims.

The Minister lauded the efforts made by the Iran in establishing Relief Camps in flood hit areas on behalf of government of Pakistan, and said that Iran had always extended its utmost assistance in time of crisis and this time Iran has shared burden with Pakistan, he added.

Both sides agreed to continue consultative process for spreading true teachings of Islam globally. They also condemned the recent wave of terrorism in the region and hoped that with collective efforts the war on terror could be fought successfully.

The Minister suggested the delegation to visit the flood-affected areas so as they could assess the real miseries of the people of devastating areas. On demand of Minister, the delegation pledged to provide tents/blankets and other relief goods to the flood-hit areas for which the Minister thanked the delegation for this support. (Pakistan Time)

- Voicing Islamabad's concern over the deteriorating situation in the Indian-occupied Kashmir, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi Wednesday said Pakistan is ready to talk to India if New Delhi is willing to address all outstanding issues.

Pakistan is concerned because we have a lot of Kashmiris in our country. Pakistan does not want temperatures to rise. We want India to show restraint (in Kashmir), he said in reply to a question at the US Chamber of Commerce's Business Civic Leadership Center.

I'm ready to meet the Indian External Affairs Minister anywhere, anytime., the foreign minister said, underscoring that the Indo-Pakistan talks ought to be aimed at resolving all long-standing issues.

Qureshi pointed out that India's parliament and intellegensia are all saying that the current unrest in Kashmir is indigenous and that India's policy in the territory had failed.

Pakistan wants resolution of outstanding disputes through peaceful dialogue, he said. In reference to the suggestions he forwarded to the Indian counterpart on dialogue process. Qureshi said New Delhi was expected to come back with a response. I am waiting, he said. Islamabad wants normalization of relations with India in the interest of peace and security in south asia, the foreign minister added.

No Indo-Pak meeting in New York

Foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said Tuesday evening that widely anticipated meeting with his Indian counterpart S.M. Krishna did not come off because the other side expressed no interest after he proposed that their talks be made meaningful.

Wrapping up his visit to New York as the head of Pakistan's delegation to the UN General Assembly session, he told a press conference that the Indian side had actually proposed a meeting and he responded positively.

Qureshi, who was answering a reporter's question as to what went wrong, said when India sought a meeting he extended an invitation to Krishna to meet him at Roosevelt Hotel where he was staying. In fact, he said he even offered to meet Krishna at his hotel if he had any problems coming to the Roosevelt. But after his suggestion that the talks cover all outstanding issues, not a selected few, the foreign minister said he did not hear from the Indian side.

Asked whether India was responsible for the talks not taking place, he, in turn, asked the journalists to find out the reason. At the same time, he did not blame the Indian side for

changing their mind. Qureshi has previously said that he wants result-oriented talks, not a photo-op.

India wants the talks to deal initially with terrorism and progress on Mumbai attack case, he said, adding that Pakistan was ready to deal with those issue. But he asked how could the Kashmir dispute, which is on the agenda of the United Nations as well as a part of the composite dialogue with India, can be overlooked.

Kashmir issue has been raised by the people of Kashmir with their blood, Qureshi said, pointing to killing of more than 100 people by Indian security forces. He called it an indigenous political movement.

Without issues like Kashmir, Siachen and water on the table, the foreign minister said no useful purpose would be served in holding a meeting. He denied that he had set any conditions for holding talks, saying his effort was to make the talks purposeful to serve the cause for the normalization of relations between India and Pakistan. Our stand is constructive, he said. Asked whether the next round of talks under the Thimpu process would take place in New Delhi, the foreign minister said that India was aware of Pakistan's principled position for meaningful talks.

Therefore, the ball is in India's court.akistan is ready to engage India anywhere and any time, he added. Asked to comment on Krishna's criticism for raising the Kashmir issue at the UN General Assembly when Pakistan was confronted with many troubles, the foreign minister said India had its own problems and Pakistan had its own that it was trying to overcome. But Kashmir is a recognized dispute that must be resolved through negotiations, he said.

On Aafia Siddiqui issue, Qureshi said that her sentence was excessive and shocked and surprised every one. Pakistan, he added, had done everything in its power to seek her repatriation and would continue its legal, political and diplomatic efforts towards that end. Qureshi called his 10-day visit successful, especially citing the good results achieved at the high-level meeting devoted to floods in Pakistan. The foreign Minister's level

meeting saw several countries announce additional pledges for the relief and rehabilitation of the flood-people.

It was co-chaired by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Qureshi. His wide-ranging speech at the U.N. General Assembly won appreciation from many delegates. In addition, he took part in the summit meeting of the millenniumDevelopment goals and host other international conference as he went through a tight schedule. These included the Islamic Conference, Non-aligned Movement, Group of 77 and China, Commonwealth, ECO and SAARC. He met dozens of foreign ministers and other high-level delegates, besides, giving a number of interviews to media outlets during which he aired Pakistan on key issues. The minister left for Washington on Tuesday night.

Obama invited to visit Pakistan

And another report says; Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said on Tuesday that he renewed an invitation to President Barack Obama to visit Pakistan when he met him at a reception the US leader hosted last week for the heads of state/government attending the UN General Assembly.

He told reporters during his brief meeting, the President spoke fondly about Pakistan and voiced his concern over the unprecedented floods in Pakistan and sympathy for those affected. The president is set to visit India in November. (Pakistan Time)

- Security officials said Nato helicopters entered Pakistani airspace and targeted a paramilitary checkpoint.

Pakistani officials have now stopped Nato supply trucks from crossing the border at Torkham.

A Nato official confirmed there was an attack, but that it believed it was in Afghan airspace. It said the incident was under investigation.

Last week Pakistan protested after Nato forces crossed the border and killed about 50 alleged militants.

A Pakistani official told AFP news agency that Thursday's attack was "unprovoked".

"Nato helicopters entered our airspace and targeted a paramilitary checkpoint killing three soldiers and wounding three others," the official said.

In a statement, Nato said it had carried out an attack on suspected insurgents near a coalition base in the border area of Dand Patan district, in Afghanistan's Paktiya province.

However, it said that the helicopter did not cross into Pakistani airspace, and that it was working with Pakistan "to ascertain if the two events are linked". (BBC)

INDIA / HINDISTAN

- Nearly 200,000 security personnel are being deployed in northern India ahead of a court ruling on the long-running Ayodhya religious dispute.

Helicopters are keeping watch overhead and authorities have urged calm amid fears the ruling could spark unrest.

The Allahabad High Court will decide who owns land where Hindu mobs tore down a 16th Century mosque in 1992.

Hindus claim the site of the Babri Masjid is the birthplace of their God, Rama, and want to build a temple there.

The high court ruling in the Ayodhya case is due to be announced in the city of Lucknow, in Uttar Pradesh state, on Thursday at 1530 local time (1000 GMT).

Of the three judges who will give the verdict, two are Hindu and one is Muslim.

The BBC's Soutik Biswas in Delhi says whichever way the ruling goes, it will be a test for India's secular identity.

Home Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram said on Wednesday that there would be 190,000 security personnel on duty in the state for the ruling.

Group mobile phone text messages have been blocked in an attempt to prevent anyone from inciting violence, and a media watchdog has appealed to broadcasters to avoid showing inflammatory images.

"The central government has taken adequate measures and has deployed adequate forces to assist state governments in maintaining peace," Mr Chidambaram told a press conference in Delhi.

Mr Chidambaram said all state governments had been "advised to be firm and maintain public peace and order and I'm sure they will do it".

Correspondents say the authorities are anxious as the legal decision could have potentially explosive consequences.

An appeal for peace, signed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, has appeared in several Indian newspapers urging people to respect the rule of law and abide by the court order.

Correspondents say the Ayodhya ruling could not have come at a worse time for the authorities - they already have their hands full dealing with security preparations for the Delhi Commonwealth Games which begin on Sunday.

Moreover, many troops are engaged in fighting Maoist rebels across vast tracts of India and the worsening situation in Indian-administered Kashmir has added to security problems.

The court ruling was due last Friday but the Supreme Court deferred the decision, saying it wanted to give Hindus and Muslims more time to resolve the dispute amicably. On Tuesday it said the high court could proceed.

Correspondents say Thursday's ruling is unlikely to be final and it is expected that the judgement will be appealed. (BBC)

- Tens of thousands of security personnel were posted across India ahead of the Allahabad High Court verdict on Ayodhya title suits on Thursday afternoon. From Kashmir to Kerala, many states were on “extra vigil” fearing trouble in the aftermath of the judgement.

“We are monitoring the situation minute—by—minute,” an official in the Home Ministry said, “So far satisfactory. We hope the situation will remain peaceful after the judgment too.”

A three—member bench of the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court will deliver the much—awaited verdict in the Ramjanmabhoomi—Babri Masjid title suits, contested by Hindu and Muslim groups, at 3.30 p.m. Thursday.

The official said Uttar Pradesh will be the focus of security action Thursday.

Tight measures are in force in Ayodhya, the location of the dispute, and in Lucknow, where the court verdict is delivered. Unprecedented security measures are in place inside and outside the court.

Delhi is under a security blanket too, for the Commonwealth Games beginning Sunday as well as Thursday’s verdict. A large number of police and paramilitary forces have taken up position on the roads, markets and public places.

The temple towns of Varanasi and Mathura, communally—sensitive centres like Meerut, Aligarh, Moradabad, Rampur, Bareilly, Kanpur, Allahabad, Azamgarh, Gorakhpur and other places in Uttar Pradesh have been placed under tight security, police sources said.

In all, 190,000 police and security personnel will be deployed in Uttar Pradesh. Of these, 20,000 will be central forces including the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Rapid Action Force (RAF).

Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka and Kerala are some of the states for which New Delhi has instructed “extra vigil” as it believes the judgment can evoke sharp reactions there.

A special alert has been sounded for cities with a history of communal flare-up. They include Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Bhiwandi, Bhopal, Jammu, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Coimbatore and Kozhikode, officials said.

In an appeal publicised through media, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh Wednesday said: “It is necessary for all sections of the people of India to maintain equanimity and tranquillity in the aftermath of the judgment.

“There should be no attempt whatsoever made by any section of the people to provoke any other section or to indulge in any expression of emotion that would hurt the feelings of other people,” he said.

The six—decade—old title suit is regarding the site in Ayodhya which Hindu groups claim is the birthplace of Lord Ram. Radical Hindu activists razed the Babri Masjid there Dec 6, 1992, triggering widespread communal riots in which 2,000 people were killed across India.

Home Minister P. Chidambaram said Wednesday the government had “taken adequate security measures and deployed adequate security personnel to assist the state governments to maintain peace”. (The Hindu)

AFGHANISTAN / AFGANİSTAN

- A suicide car bomber blew himself up next to a police truck bringing a southern Afghan official to work early Monday, killing five children nearby, officials said.

Military operations against Taliban militants in their birthplace Kandahar in south Afghanistan have forced over 900 families to leave their houses for safer places, head of Refugees department in the province Mohammad Azim Nawabi said Wednesday.

"Since launching operations in Arghandab district about one month ago 626 families have left their homes for safer places and many of these refugees have been living with their relatives in Kandahar city," Nawabi asserted.

In an interview with Xinhua, he also said that 250 families have left Jalai district and 25 more families left Panjwai district for safer places.

However, he failed to say the exact number of those left their houses to escape the conflicts. An Afghan family often consists of average six to eight persons.

A joint Afghan-NATO-led forces operation against Taliban militants in Arghandab district was launched one month ago while similar operations covering Jalai and Panjwai districts have been continuing over the past two weeks to wipe out militants and ensure durable peace there.

Meanwhile, a refugee from Arghandab district Hajji Fazal Ahmad Khan, in talks with Xinhua said that he left his home some one month ago and since then used to run a miserable life along with his family in Kandahar city, the capital of Kandahar province.

"I have received just 80 kg wheat, 5 kg cooking oil, a pocket of salt and some other items today," Khan told Xinhua.

Another refugee Hazrat Billal also complained that his family has no tent and is living in misery.

Military operations against Taliban militants in Marja district of the neighboring Helmand province in February this year also had forced hundreds of people to leave their houses for safer places. (Afghanistan)

The NATO-led forces in Afghanistan on Wednesday confirmed the killing of a key al-Qaida commander in the war-torn country's eastern Kunar province.

"The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) confirmed a precision air strike in Kunar province Saturday which killed Abdallah Umar al-Qurayshi, an al-Qaida senior commander who coordinated the attacks of a group of Arab fighters in Kunar and Nuristan provinces," a statement released by the alliance said here.

The commander, according to the statement, routinely facilitated the travel of foreign fighters, including Arabs, into the region.

Other al-Qaida senior commanders have also been killed in the air strike, the statement said, adding that "ISAF is working to confirm the exact identities of other high-level insurgent commanders, who were meeting when the strike was conducted."

"The death of Abdallah Umar al-Qurayshi is a significant victory for the people of Afghanistan," said U.S. Army Col. Rafael Torres, ISAF Joint Command Combined Joint Operations Center director, in the statement.

Taliban militants and associated insurgents challenging Afghan and NATO-led forces in Afghanistan have yet to make comment. (Afghan Online Press)

The establishment of peace in Afghanistan is not possible unless foreign forces leave the country, Gen. Hamid Gul, the former ISI chief told BBC Persian in a recent interview published on Tuesday

General Hamid Gul, the former chief of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), made these comments in reaction to the announcement of the establishment of the High Council of Peace by the Afghan government.

Gen. Hamid Gul described the government of Afghanistan and its members as puppets and added that the establishment of the High Council of Peace meant to start peace deals with the Taliban will have no positive results.

He also said that Taliban will regain political power in Afghanistan soon.

"They have urged the foreign forces to come to Afghanistan and invade the country," Gul said pointing out to Afghan authorities.

"This is unforgivable and the Taliban will not be ready to negotiate with them. The Taliban should not be called just Taliban; they represent the national resistance of Afghans. Hekmatyar and a number of other Mujahidden are with the Taliban fighting with them side by side," he said.

He called Karzai "a traitor in the views of the Afghans" and said the High Council of Peace will end with no results.

Hamid Gul said The United States must start peace talks with the anti-government forces in order to maintain long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan.

"Barack Obama must talk with Mullah Omar. This is the only solution to the Afghan crisis. Who are the Coalition and NATO forces? They are the invaders. They must all leave

Afghanistan and this is the demand of Mullah Omar and the anti-government forces," said Gul.

Hamid Gul said Afghanistan will not turn into the core of a civil war once again since Afghan government authorities have earned enough money and properties and have looted Afghanistan and the International Community's aid that are the absolute rights of the Afghan nation.

"They have bank accounts abroad and they are about five to six hundred individuals," he said.

Hamid Gul denied the interference of Pakistan's ISI in Afghanistan's internal affairs, and also indirectly expressed satisfaction that Amrullah Saleh, the former head of the National Directorate of Security of Afghanistan, who had anti-Pakistan tendencies had been sacked. (Afghan Online Press)

- Taliban Tuesday rejected the latest peace approach of President Karzai which is said to be the first big step towards peace settlement with the Taliban

The same day 68 members of the high council of peace were announced, the Taliban rebuffed the new Afghan government outreach.

The High Council of Peace which is formed to implement the decisions made in the national consultative peace conference is said to be the first step forward to attract top armed anti-government groups' leaders to peace process in the country.

Two prominent political oppositions of the government, Burhanuddin Rabbani and Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq are also part of the council.

Hours after a key provincial official was assassinated by the Taliban in a motorcycle suicide attack, the insurgents rebuffed the new peace effort of the Afghan government, and once again preconditioned foreign forces' drawdown to any peace approaches.

Afghan government officials are often targeted by the Taliban, who have recently assassinated a number of Afghan officials across the country in particular in turbulent southern parts where Taliban are considerably active since the fall of the regime in 2001.

Meanwhile, In a statement the Taliban on Tuesday called the latest peace approach of the Afghan government a trick of the foreign forces stationed in Afghanistan and have said foreign troops want to cover their withdrawal making such sorts of efforts.

In reaction to the remarks made by the top US commander, Gen. Petraeus, on Monday about Taliban contacts with the Afghan government, the Taliban statement says how can it be possible for the "Islamic Emirate" to hold back-door peace talks with "the powerless government" while the Taliban have rejected such calls for talks in the past. (Afghan Online Press)

**This media summary is prepared by ORSAM Middle East Research Assistants Sercan Doğan and Nebahat Tanrıverdi O. It covers news and commentaries as reported by the national media sources publishing in the Middle Eastern countries. The views expressed are not those of ORSAM and their inclusion does not imply factual accuracy.*

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