



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procees of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

Enerji Güvenliđi

Economy News

Ekonomi Haberleri

Peace Process

Barış Süreci

Ethnic and Secterian Groups

Etnik ve Mezhepsel Gruplar

Non State Actors

Devlet-dış Aktörler

Relations with the West

Batı'yla İlişkiler



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

26 NOVEMBER 2012

NO: 1487

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. IRAQ..... | 3 |
| • High-ranking UN Delegation Meets KRG Peshmarga Minister..... | 3 |
| • Musawi warns ending relations between CG, KRG..... | 3 |
| • Abdul Bari Zebari: resolving crisis between Erbil and Baghdad appears on the horizon..... | 4 |
| • Ahrar MP: We do not put withdrawal of confidence on the table at this time..... | 5 |
| • Ala Talabani: provincial officials would not abide the request to get approval from the Center on regional officials travel..... | 5 |
| • A Parliamentary and media delegation to visit Gaza today..... | 6 |
| • Zebari, Arab League's delegation discuss preparations of international conference in Baghdad..... | 7 |
| • Barazani stresses the importance of Syrian Kurds' unity..... | 7 |
| • Samarra Operations Command foils an attempt to target Husseinia processions..... | 8 |
| • 10 Rockets intended against Hussaini processions seized east of Dijail..... | 8 |
| 2. IRAN..... | 9 |
| • Israel will now think twice before attacking Iran: Hamas official..... | 9 |
| • Iran complains to UN about US airspace, sea border violations..... | 10 |
| • Muslim countries duty-bound to help Gaza: Iran..... | 11 |
| • Majlis to review Eutelsat SA ban on Iranian channels..... | 12 |
| • Iran supporter of Arab, Muslim countries: Nasrallah..... | 13 |
| • Iran to surpass Qatar in South Pars gas production..... | 14 |
| • Germany holds Iran civilization expo..... | 15 |
| 3. SYRIA..... | 16 |
| • Support for anti-Assad fighters unacceptable: Russia's Medvedev..... | 16 |
| • Gunfire from Syria hits occupied Golan Heights as fighting lingers..... | 18 |
| • Syria rebels take loyalist Palestinian training camp: NGO..... | 20 |
| • Syrian children 'killed by cluster bombs'..... | 22 |
| • War planes drop bombs on border town of Atma..... | 24 |
| 4. ISRAEL-PALESTINE..... | 24 |
| • Piles of rubble: Gazans rebuild following Israel ceasefire..... | 24 |
| • Abbas heads to New York ahead of U.N. bid, gets Hamas support..... | 27 |
| • Gaza cease-fire raises hopes for reconstruction..... | 29 |
| • Hamas chief announces support for UN bid..... | 33 |
| • Israel's Barak says quitting politics..... | 34 |
| • Palestinian Dies of Wounds in Gaza..... | 35 |
| • Gaza cleric calls violation of Israel truce sinful..... | 36 |
| • Abbas heads to NY ahead of UN statehood bid..... | 36 |
| 5. AFRICA and EGYPT..... | 39 |
| • Egypt's Morsi to meet judges over new powers..... | 39 |
| • Egypt protesters tear-gassed as world concern grows..... | 42 |
| • Islamist teenager killed, dozens injured in Egypt anti-govt clashes..... | 44 |



| | |
|---|-----------|
| • Morocco says breaks al Qaeda cell sending youth to Mali | 46 |
| • Egypt's top Islamist expects assassination of liberal figures | 48 |
| • Mursi says his decrees are 'temporary,' calls for dialogue with opponents | 49 |
| • Egypt journalists call for strike to demand guarantees of press freedom | 51 |
| • Interior minister: Mohamed Mahmoud protesters shot by their comrades | 52 |
| • Tahrir Square calm on third day of anti-Morsy sit-in | 53 |
| 6. JORDAN and LEBANON..... | 54 |
| • Lebanese army: 5 Syrians arrested with explosives | 54 |
| • Lebanese leader blames Iran for Hezbollah UAV | 55 |
| • Hezbollah says it would hit Tel Aviv in future war | 57 |
| • Jumblatt says a return to dialogue only means to end crisis | 59 |
| • School for Syrian refugees opens in Jordan camp..... | 62 |
| • Lebanese, Armenian presidents discuss regional developments | 62 |
| 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA..... | 64 |
| • Saudi religious center to open in Vienna | 64 |
| • UN team to visit Bahrain over crackdown..... | 65 |
| 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN | 66 |
| • US aims to keep 10,000 troops in Afghanistan: report | 66 |
| • Two killed, 18 injured in east Afghanistan bomb blast | 67 |
| • Seven Shia Muslims killed, 90 injured in Pakistan Ashura bombing | 68 |

1. IRAQ

- **High-ranking UN Delegation Meets KRG Peshmarga Minister**

Today, Sunday, a high-ranking UN delegation visited Secretary General of the KRG Ministry of Peshmarga Jabar Yawar to discuss the latest developments in the disputed areas.

The UN delegation, comprising Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq (DSRSG) for Political Affairs, Gyorgy Busztin and Erbil UNAMI Head Sokol Kondi, met with the Secretary General of the KRG Ministry of Peshmarga Jabar Yawar and discussed the latest military developments and political situation in Kirkuk and Diyala especially after the formation of Dijla Operation along with addressing also the ways of settling the issues.

Commending the role of the UN and its position, Yawar also expressed his Ministry's concerns calling for coordination between his ministry and the Iraqi Defense Ministry for resolving the issues of the disputed areas.

He proposed that KRG Peshmarga Ministry prefers that the UN to have its role in joint negotiations and in coordination between his ministry and the Iraqi Defense Ministry.

On his part, the UNAMI delegation urged the commitment of the two sides to the 2010 agreement signed in the presence of the US forces between KRG Peshmarga Ministry through Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani and the Iraqi Defense Ministry through [Iraqi Premier] Noori Maliki to defuse the standoff and to protect security in the disputed areas.

(Unofficial translation from Kurdish by Erbil UNAMI PIO)

- **Musawi warns ending relations between CG, KRG**

Baghdad, 25 Nov. 2012 - The State of Law Coalition's MP Samira al-Musawi warned from ending the relations between the Central Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government in case armed clashes erupt between the forces of both sides.

Mp Musawi stated to All Iraq News Agency Sunday “We do not imagine eruption of clashes between the ISF and the Kurdish forces but if this case happens it will be the end of the relations between the Central Government and that of Kurdistan.”

“The media reports over the intentions of KRG to form Himreen Operations Command to be equivalent to Dijla OC is illegal since it is among the authorities of the Central Government according to the Constitution,” she concluded.

All Iraq News

- **Abdul Bari Zebari: resolving crisis between Erbil and Baghdad appears on the horizon**

BAGHDAD -A leader of the Kurdistan Alliance, Abdul Bari Zebari confirmed that "The solution for the latest crisis between the central government and the Kurdistan region has appeared in the horizon despite the fragility of mutual trust between the political blocs in general."

He told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / today 26, Nov "The political and democratic process in the country does not bear any escalation; especially that the country needs more stability to start construction and reconstruction."

Zebari added: "Everyone is trying to solve the current crisis and the agreement on the technical and military meeting, which will be held today, is an important part that" expressing his hope that " tangible results will emerge from those meetings."

It is scheduled that a technician and military meeting to be held today between a delegation from the federal government and another from the provincial government in order to reach a solution to the crisis that erupted between them on the background of the formation of Tigris forces.

NINA

- **Ahrar MP: We do not put withdrawal of confidence on the table at this time**

BAGHDAD - MP, of the Ahrar bloc, Abdul Hussein Resan al-Husseini confirmed that the issue of withdrawal of confidence from Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is not on the table at the moment.

A statement of his office today 26, Nov quoting him as saying that "Ahrar bloc does not think in the subject of withdraw confidence from the Prime Minister, which was raised in the past months," describing the subject of withdrawal of confidence from the Prime Minister to "equation loser" if other blocs try to renew put on the political scene to resolve the crisis existing in the country at the moment"

Husseini had said earlier that the political blocs stand helpless to resolve the current political crisis.

Husseini added that the country is in front of only one option for reform, and Iraqi people should realize the reality of the political process, and start a revolution of change in the coming elections.

He said the change should include the balances of the political map on the grounds, because changing people only, does not mean anything.

MP, of the state of law coalition, Khalid al-Asadi ruled out the ability of some of the political blocs to withdraw confidence from al-Maliki, and form a political majority government.

NINA

- **Ala Talabani: provincial officials would not abide the request to get approval from the Center on regional officials travel**

BAGHDAD- MP, of the Kurdistan Alliance, Ala Talabani demanding Prime Minister for regional officials to inform the central government before travelling outside the country as: "push for a crisis and deepen the differences between the center and the region."

She said in a statement to the / NINA / that "The travel of the Kurdistan officials out of the country is not a violation of the constitution or illegal, so they would not abide by the request of Prime Minister because it is illegal and not in accordance with the the Constitution."

She added "Even if there was a dispute between the province and the center, it should not reach to prevent regional officials from travelling outside Iraq" .. Noting: "The government of Kurdistan was existed before the federal government."

She explained that "The provincial government has been founded since 1992 and has established relations with neighbouring and regional countries. And after the fall of the former regime the region continued in this matter, and visits of the regional officials to countries around the world were aimed to deepen the democratic experiment in Iraq, but what is happening today is pushing to deepen differences and this is not in the interest of the political process. "

NINA

- **A Parliamentary and media delegation to visit Gaza today**

Cairo - A parliamentary and media delegation headed by the President of the House of Representatives Osama al-Nujaifi is to arrive to Arish Airport on Monday 26, Nov.

MP, Riad al-Zaidi said in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / The delegation will include a number of Iraqi MPs, in addition to the Iraqi Journalists Syndicate president Mo'aid al-Lami and a number of journalists and staff in the House of Representatives, noting that the delegation will enter Gaza by cars from Arish airport to via the Rafah crossing .

He explained that the delegation will visit the Government of the Gaza Strip, in addition to visiting hospitals and providing medical and material humanitarian aid estimated one million and six hundred thousand dollars as a support from the Iraqi people for the steadfastness of the people of Gaza against the Israeli aggression.

NINA

- **Zebari, Arab League's delegation discuss preparations of international conference in Baghdad**

Baghdad – Foreign Minister, Hoshiyar Zebari, discussed with a delegation representing the Arab League's Secretariat, headed by the League's Assistant Secretary General, Mohammed Sabeeh, the ongoing preparations to hold the International Conference on Palestinian Prisoners and Detainees, due to be held in Iraq in the current year.

A statement issued on Sunday, Nov. 25, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said, "the Arab League's delegation consisted of Palestinian Undersecretary of Prisoners, Kuwait's Representative to the Arab League, Jamal al-Ghonaim, and the Arab League's Representative to Iraq, Naji Shalgam.

The statement pointed out that in the meeting, Zebari affirmed Iraq's readiness to provide all needed facilities to make the Conference successful and to come up with results that serve Palestinian detainees.

NINA

- **Barazani stresses the importance of Syrian Kurds' unity**

Erbil (NINA) – President of Kurdistan Region, Massoud Barazani, stressed, "The importance of the unity among Syrian Kurds to realize the national rights of the Kurds in Syria."

Meeting on Sunday, Nov. 25, with a delegation of Syrian Kurds, Barazani expressed, "Support to the Kurdish people in Syria to realize their legitimate national rights."

He called on the Syrian Kurds to preserve their unity against whatever infringes their national unity.

For their part, in the meeting, the Kurdish delegation shed light on the status of Syrian Kurds, stressing the importance to implement the articles of Erbil Agreement, concluded last July.

NINA

- **Samarra Operations Command foils an attempt to target Husseinia processions**

Tikrit- Samarra Operations Command foiled, on Sunday 25, Nov an attempt to target Husseinia processions in Dujail district south of Tikrit.

A security source told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / that "the force of the Third Regiment of the seventh Brigade of Samarra Operations Command foiled an attempt to target Husseinia processions in the Dujail district by five Katyusha rockets were ready to be fired toward the processions."

The source added that "the force transferred and successfully defused the rockets."

NINA

- **10 Rockets intended against Hussaini processions seized east of Dijail**

Baghdad (NINA) – The Ministry of Interior announced that police in Salaheddin province seized 10 rockets set to attack Hussaini processions, east of Dijail district, south of Tikrit.

A statement issued on Sunday, Nov. 25, by quoted the Ministry of Interior's Spokesman, Colonel Sa'ad Ma'an Ibrahim, saying that the ten rockets seized in a security operation carried out by Salaheddin province police, they were intended against Hussaini processions east of Dijail district.

He added that the operation was successful and based on intelligence information.

NINA

2. IRAN

- **Israel will now think twice before attacking Iran: Hamas official**

Senior Hamas official Mahmoud al-Zahar says the Israeli regime will now "think twice" before launching an attack on Iran following its failure in the Gaza war.

"The Jews will think twice before" attacking Iran, al-Zahar said on Saturday.

The resistance movements in the tiny blockaded enclave managed, for the first time in two decades, to target Tel Aviv with rockets and missiles they had produced using, according to the Commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Iranian technology.

According to US Center for Military Studies, Fajr-5, newly developed by resistance fighters in the Gaza Strip using Iranian know-how, has a range of up to 75 kilometers, weighs 915 kilograms and has a 90-kilogram warhead. It was one of the rockets that penetrated Israel's Iron Dome missile interceptor and landed in Tel Aviv.

Iran has made great advances in the missile technology over the past years. According to the Commander of the Aerospace Division of IRGC Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh, Iran's Sejil (Baked Clay) and Shahab missiles are among the missiles capable of targeting objects within a range of 2,000 kilometers.

During Great Prophet 6 military drills in June 2011, the Iranian commander said although Iran is equipped with the technology to produce longer range missiles, it does not intend to do so as Israeli targets are within the reach of its missiles. A distance of 1,200 km, according to Hajizadeh, separates Iran from Israel.

Israel has at times threatened to attack Iran's nuclear facilities based on the unsubstantiated allegation that Iran's nuclear energy program has been diverted towards the production an atomic bomb, a claim Iran has rejected.

Iran's Defense Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi said in October that Iran's arsenal of ballistic missiles is powerful enough to repel any threats. Last November, he said Israel would not have a minimal chance of survival if it ventured to attack Iran.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/25/274428/israel-will-think-twice-for-iran-attack/>

- **Iran complains to UN about US airspace, sea border violations**

Iran has warned against the repeated violations of its airspace by US drones and the illegal moves of US Navy warships in the Persian Gulf and Sea of Oman.

Iran's Ambassador to UN Mohammad Khazaei submitted two identical letters to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the UN Security Council on Friday, saying the US Navy has carried out "illegal and provocative acts."

Khazaei stated that a US drone had entered Iran's airspace on November 1 despite repeated radio warnings. He also cited seven US flights over the coastal areas of Bushehr, located in southern Iran, in October.

The letters urged the UN chief to warn the US "against the continuation of acts in violation of international law and of the adverse consequences of any provocative and dangerous acts for which the United States government would be held responsible."

Earlier this month, Iran's military repelled an unidentified aircraft that had entered the country's airspace "above the territorial waters of the Islamic Republic in the Persian Gulf."

The Pentagon claimed two Iranian warplanes had fired at a US drone as it conducted a routine, but classified, surveillance mission over the Persian Gulf about 16 nautical miles off the Iranian coast.

However, Brigadier General Amirali Hajizadeh, commander of the Aerospace Division of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), revealed the drone had been driven away by Iranian

forces as it attempted to gather oil and economic intelligence around Kharg Island in southern Iran.

The general stated that the country's armed forces would respond with stronger action if US drones attempted to violate Iran's airspace again.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/25/274458/iran-protests-us-airspace-violations/>

- **Muslim countries duty-bound to help Gaza: Iran**

TEHRAN, Nov. 21 (MNA) – Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast has said that all countries, particularly Muslim states, should provide assistance to the people of Gaza, who are currently facing a relentless Israeli military onslaught.

Mehmanparast made the remarks during his regular press briefing in Tehran on Tuesday in reply to a question about claims that Iran gives Hamas Fajr-5 missiles, which were recently launched from Gaza into Israel.

“You should ask military officials which country made these missiles. But the Palestinian people should be aware of their rights, and it is the duty of all countries to support them,” he stated.

Mehmanparast added, “It is the duty of all countries, particularly Muslim countries, to help the people of Gaza. And it is necessary that all countries take the measures necessary to defend the oppressed Palestinian people when the well-equipped Zionist regime commits crimes.”

“Supporting the Palestinian people is one of the main priorities of Iran's foreign policy, and we have announced our readiness to provide medical and food assistance,” he said.

Israel seeking to give impression Hamas has requested ceasefire

Mehmanparast also commented on the fact that Israeli President Shimon Peres, in an interview with CNN published on Tuesday, accused Iran of encouraging the Palestinians to continue rocket attacks against Israel rather than negotiating a ceasefire.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said, “Now that they (the Zionists) have faced a strong defense by the people of Gaza and have been taken aback, they are seeking a ceasefire. Hamas officials are opposed to the media warfare meant to give the impression that a ceasefire has been requested by the Palestinian side and have announced, ‘We are in full preparedness to defend ourselves, and it is the Zionist regime that has become desperate.’ Therefore, although we do not approve of conflict, war, violence, and endangering the lives of innocent people, we believe that this criminal regime should be prosecuted for war crimes.”

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1749107>

- **Majlis to review Eutelsat SA ban on Iranian channels**

A senior Iranian lawmaker says Iran's Majlis is set to review the ban by French-based satellite provider Eutelsat SA on the country's channels.

Chairman of the Legal and Judicial Committee of Iran's Majlis Allahyar Malekshahi said on Monday that the ban on the broadcast of Iranian channels can be pursued with regards to the financial costs inflicted on Iran.

According to Malekshahi, the committee addresses those moves by foreign countries and organizations that cause financial losses to the Islamic Republic.

On October 15, the European Telecommunications Satellite Organization, Eutelsat SA, stopped the broadcast of several Iranian satellite channels allegedly based on an order by the European Commission.

In a blatant violation of freedom of speech, the company ordered media services company, Arqiva, to take Iranian satellite channels, including Press TV, al-Alam, Jam-e-Jam 1 and 2, Sahar 1 and 2, Islamic Republic of Iran News Network, Quran TV, and the Arabic-language al-Kawthar, off one of its Hot Bird frequencies.

Pundits say the ban was enforced because the Iranian news channels broke the West's monopoly on news broadcast by reflecting the voice of the oppressed people to the world.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/26/274582/iran-majlis-to-review-eutelsat-sa-ban/>

- **Iran supporter of Arab, Muslim countries: Nasrallah**

Hezbollah Secretary-General Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah says the Islamic Republic of Iran is a friend and supporter of Arab and Muslim countries.

“Day by day, it becomes clear to the Arab and the Muslim people that the Islamic Republic of Iran is a friend of the Arabs and the friend of all Muslims and a supporter of the oppressed people and the people whose territories are occupied,” Nasrallah said Sunday.

He was addressing Shia Muslims commemorating Ashura, the martyrdom anniversary of Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) grandson Imam Hussein (PBUH), in Beirut.

“This was clear during the last confrontation which occurred in the Gaza Strip and before that in Lebanon,” added Nasrallah, saying, “We rely on this courageous, fateful and confident Islamic Republic which is not paying any attention to the pressure by the US President Barack Obama, nor the threats of [former US president] George Bush before Obama.”

Over 160 Palestinians, including women and children, were killed and about 1,200 others were injured during the latest Israeli attacks on Gaza from November 14 to 21, 2012.

In retaliation, Palestinian resistance fighters fired rockets and missiles into Israeli cities, killing at least five Israelis.

On Wednesday, Egypt announced that the Israeli regime and the Palestinian resistance movement of Hamas had reached a ceasefire agreement to end all hostilities.

In his Sunday speech, the Hezbollah secretary-general also warned Arab and Muslim countries against those who want to present Iran as an enemy and the Israeli regime as a friend.

“There are some people in the Arab and the Islamic world who are working politically in the media and in every angel in order to portray Israel as a friend and to show Iran as an enemy,” Nasrallah said.

“I would like to tell these people that all their efforts will fail,” he added.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/25/274464/iran-supporter-of-muslim-countries/>

- **Iran to surpass Qatar in South Pars gas production**

A senior Iranian energy official says the country plans to surpass Qatar in gas production from the massive offshore South Pars gas field, which is shared by the two countries.

Managing-Director of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC) Mousa Sourı said Sunday that Iran’s gas recovery from South Pars would equal Qatar’s after five new phases of the giant field come on stream.

He added that the development of phases 12, 15, 16, 17 and 18 of South Pars would add nearly 200 million cubic meters per day (mcmpd) of sour gas to the shared field’s output on the Iranian side.

Iran is currently producing 300 mcmpd of gas from South Pars.

Sourı said seven new offshore rigs are to start operation in South Pars before the end of the current Persian calendar year (ends March 20, 2013).

Iran’s Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi recently announced that 775 mcmpd of gas could be recovered from South Pars after underway projects come on stream.

Iran, which sits on the world's second largest natural gas reserves after Russia, has been trying to enhance its gas production by increasing foreign and domestic investments, especially in its South Pars gas field.

The South Pars gas field covers an area of 9,700 square kilometers, 3,700 square kilometers of which are in Iran's territorial waters in the Persian Gulf. The remaining 6,000 square kilometers, i.e. the North Dome, are in Qatar's territorial waters.

The Iranian gas field contains 14 trillion cubic meters of natural gas, about eight percent of the world's reserves, and more than 18 billion barrels of LNG resources.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/25/274467/iran-to-overtake-qatar-in-sp-gas-output/>

- **Germany holds Iran civilization expo**

An exhibition of diverse works of art demonstrating Iranian civilization has been mounted at the European Viadrina University in Frankfurt, Germany.

The exhibition was inaugurated during a ceremony attended by the Iranian Ambassador to Germany Ali Reza Sheikh-Attar along with more than 100 students and professors of the university, IRNA has reported.

Sheikh-Attar explained about Iran's great history and civilization in delivering his speech, while encouraged the audience to visit Iran and its rich historical treasures.

According to the report, Israel embassy in Germany planned attempts to prevent holding the exhibition but encountered the university officials' disagreement.

A team of 26 professors and students of the university's history department had earlier traveled to Iran in last March and visited a number of ancient spots and historical structures.

The visitors gathered their achievements into an 80-minute documentary film that was showcased at the exhibition.

Iran is home to one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations, with historical and urban settlements dating back to 4000 BCE.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/26/274587/germany-holds-iran-civilization-expo/>

3. SYRIA

- **Support for anti-Assad fighters unacceptable: Russia's Medvedev**

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev slammed as “unacceptable” the recognition and support by France and other states of the Syrian opposition battling the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

Britain and France have joined Turkey and Arabian Peninsula states in recognizing a newly formed opposition bloc as the sole representative of the Syrian people. Paris has also suggested arming the opposition fighters.

“From the point of view of international law, this is absolutely unacceptable,” Medvedev told Agence France-Presse and Le Figaro newspaper in an interview ahead of a working visit to Paris starting Monday.

“I remind you that in line with the principles of international law, no state can take measures aimed at the forced change of a government in another state.”

“A desire to change the political regime of another state by recognizing a political force as the sole carrier of sovereignty seems to me to be not completely civilized,” he added.

France was the first Western state to recognize the newly-formed Syrian National Coalition as the sole representative of the Syrian people and was swiftly joined by Britain, Italy and the European Union.

Paris has also raised the idea of excluding defensive weapons for the opposition fighters from the current blanket EU embargo on Syria. The United States has been more circumspect, saying it is not ready to recognize the opposition and has appeared wary of arming them.

Medvedev described France's stance as "very controversial".

"Let the Syrian people decide the personal fate of Assad and his regime. It is preferable if they (the opposition forces) came to power legally and not because of deliveries of arms from other countries," he said.

The Syrian National Coalition is a bloc of opposition groups led by moderate cleric Ahmad Moaz al-Khatib formed after talks in Qatar this month as part of a Western-backed push to make the opposition a more cohesive force.

Russia has been repeatedly criticized throughout the Syrian conflict, which according to activists has claimed at least 40,000 lives, for failing to condemn the violence committed by the Assad regime.

But Medvedev -- who was serving as president when the conflict began before giving way in May to his mentor Vladimir Putin -- insisted that Moscow had not taken sides.

"Russia does not support the Assad regime or the opposition. We have a neutral position."

"We condemn the actions of the government for the level of violence in the country and the actions carried out by the opposition, as they are also spilling blood.

"The result is a civil war."

Russia has come under particular attack for not cutting its military cooperation with the Assad regime.

Even with the conflict in full spate, Turkey last month forced a Syrian jet to land owing to a suspicious cargo that according to Moscow was Russian radar equipment for Syrian missile defense systems.

“The military cooperation with Syria did not start today and always had a legal and open character... All we have delivered are arms for defense against external aggression,” said Medvedev.

“And we have contracts, which we are obliged to fulfill.”

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/26/251830.html>

- **Gunfire from Syria hits occupied Golan Heights as fighting lingers**

Gunfire from Syria hit the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights overnight close to an Israeli military vehicle monitoring the ceasefire line but causing no injuries, the military said on Monday.

“There was gunfire near an Israeli military vehicle which was driving along the security fence,” a military spokeswoman said, adding the incident had occurred late on Sunday.

But she said troops in the area had not returned fire as they have done on previous occasions.

Such incidents have occurred with increasing frequency in the past few weeks as violence from the civil war in Syria spills across the ceasefire line.

Earlier this month, Israeli troops fired warning shots and tank shells across the U.N.-monitored ceasefire line in response to Syrian fire, in the first instance of Israeli fire directed at the Syrian military in the Golan Heights since their 1973 war.

Fears of a spillover of the conflict which has ravaged Syria for the past 20 months and left more than 40,000 dead, have widened as violence has spread to Syria's borders with Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.

Meanwhile on Monday, rebels seized control of a strategic dam on the Euphrates river in northern Syria after days of fierce fighting, activists and a watchdog said on Monday.

Videos posted on the Internet show about a dozen rebel fighters in military fatigues walking at night on a road crossing the Tishreen dam, which straddles Aleppo and Raqa provinces, with others inside a control room, as one man proclaims: "The Tishreen dam is under Free Syrian Army control."

The authenticity of the videos could not be confirmed but the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which receives information from a network of activists and medics on the ground, confirmed the dam had fallen to the rebels.

The Observatory also reported that Syrian troops on Monday pressed an assault on rebel strongholds in the northeastern outskirts of Damascus, killing a boy and girl from the same family in shelling attacks on the town of Irbin.

Elsewhere, fighting erupted along the ceasefire line of the Golan Heights, with two rebels killed in the villages of Al-Buraykah and Bir Ajam, both of which lie within the Syrian section of the demilitarized zone, the watchdog said.

The Israeli military earlier reported that gunfire on Sunday night from Syria hit the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights close to an Israeli military vehicle monitoring the ceasefire line but causing no injuries.

A military spokeswoman said Israeli troops in the area had not returned fire as they have done on previous occasions.

Also early Monday, Al Arabiya TV reported a massacre is reported in the Syrian town of Sheikh Miskeen in Daraa, activists said.

On Sunday, Syrian rebels captured a helicopter base just outside Damascus in what an activist called a “blow to the morale of the regime” near President Bashar Assad’s seat of power, while the bombardment of a village near the capital killed at least eight children.

Activists said the children were killed when Syrian warplanes bombed the village of Deir al-Asafir just outside the Damascus. The village is close to suburbs of the capital that has been witnessing clashes, shelling and air raids between troops and rebels over the past months.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/26/251872.html>

- **Syria rebels take loyalist Palestinian training camp: NGO**

Syrian rebels on Sunday seized the training camp of a pro-regime Palestinian faction in Damascus province and took control of an arms depot after fierce clashes, a watchdog reported.

“Rebels stormed a Popular Front-General Command (PFLP-GC) training camp in the Rihan area of Damascus province, after violent clashes with local fighters,” the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

It said the rebels took full control of the camp after launching an attack on Saturday, with casualties suffered on both sides, including among the families of a number of the Palestinian militants.

Separately, rebels took over arms depot after several days of fighting in Deir Suleiman, also in Damascus province, seizing weapons and ammunition, the Observatory said.

The training camp “functioned for over 30 years as a base of resistance, graduating thousands of Palestinian youth and hundreds of guerrillas who have humiliated the Zionist enemy with important operations,” the PFLP-GC said in a statement condemning the attack on Saturday.

State news agency SANA quoted an official as saying that the attack was “carried out by armed terrorist groups... Mossad proxies working for the Zionist enemy in response to operations carried out by the Front against Tel Aviv.”

The PFLP-GC on Wednesday claimed responsibility for a Tel Aviv bus bombing, in which 29 Israelis were wounded.

“Our guerrilla cells in the heart of Palestine managed to bomb one of the city buses in Tel Aviv and send a strong message to the leaders of the enemy that committing massacres against our civilians will not pass without punishment,” it said.

The Israeli internal security service, Shin Bet, arrested members of a cell accused of the bombing on Thursday, allegedly “associated with Hamas and Islamic Jihad”. It said that the men had recruited an Israeli national to carry out the attack.

In early November, the PFLP-GC fought alongside loyalist troops against rebels in Yarmuk in southern Damascus, the largest Palestinian refugee camp in Syria.

Activists said other Palestinian factions fought with the rebels.

The PFLP-GC is headed by Ahmad Jibril, a staunch ally of President Bashar al-Assad, who has been fighting an unprecedented revolt against his regime that began as a peaceful uprising in Mar. 2011.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/26/251828.html>

- **Syrian children 'killed by cluster bombs'**

Syrian opposition activists say a government air raid on a rebel-held village near the capital, Damascus, has killed 10 children as they played outdoors.

The children went out after a lull in fighting on Sunday in Deir al-Asafir, a village 12km east of Damascus, when fighter jets struck, activists and residents said.

Video footage distributed by activists showed residents collecting bodies torn by shrapnel.

"None of those killed were older than 15 years old. There are two women among 15 people wounded, mostly hit as they were inside the courtyards of their houses," Abu Kassem, an activist in the village told Reuters news agency.

"There were no fighters inside Deir al-Asafir when the bombing occurred. They operate on the outskirts. This was indiscriminate bombing."

Abu Kassem said the munitions dropped by the fighter jets were cluster bombs. Other footage showed a row of what appeared to be unexploded small bombs.

'Vengeance act'

Al Jazeera's Rula Amin, reporting from Beirut in neighbouring Lebanon, said it was difficult to tell what kind of weaponry had been used in the attack but stressed that the pictures were "very strong".

"It's going to hit cord with many Syrians and in the Arab world," she said.

"The residents in the village insist there was a lull in fighting. It's a village controlled by the opposition. They believe the government was doing this as a vengeance act as the rebels have

been making significant advances around that area, in the eastern part of Damascus, taking control of more areas."

Activists say more than 3,000 children are among more than 38,000 people killed since the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad's regime began in March last year.

Most foreign reporters have been barred from entering the country legally, making it difficult to independently verify reports of violence from both sides of the conflict.

Syrian authorities made no comment on Sunday's reported killings, but official media have said the army has been on the offensive to "cleanse" the area of what the government calls terrorists.

Earlier this month, the UN political affairs chief told the Security Council of credible reports that the Syrian military has used cluster bombs in efforts to crush the revolt.

The Syrian army has denied a Human Rights Watch report issued in October that Assad's forces have used cluster bombs, saying it did not possess such weapons.

Cluster bombs are banned under a 2010 UN treaty, though Syria, like Israel, Russia and the US, have not signed the pact.

As fighting continued on Monday, Syrian fighter jets bombed rebel headquarters near the Turkish border but appeared to miss their target, activists in the region said.

"The [Free Syrian Army] joint command is located in a school. It seems they have missed it. There were two jets - one of them looked like a reconnaissance aircraft. They had been flying over the area for an hour," Mohammad Abdallah, an activist, said.

Activists also reported that rebels have captured a hydroelectric dam on the Euphrates River following days of fighting.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the Tishreen dam, near the town of Manbij, fell to the rebels before dawn on Monday.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/11/20121126104539712284.html>

- **War planes drop bombs on border town of Atma**

Rebel sources in Atma, on the Syrian side of the border with Turkey, tell Al Jazeera that two regime planes have been dropping bombs on the town.

Our correspondent Sue Turton, who spent the last few days in Atma, says the town is known as a base for rebels fighters and a kind of safe haven where fighters can get some relaxation before they go back to the frontline. This is the first time the regime hits this town, she says.

"We're hearing from people on the ground that one of the bombs dropped just a hundred metres from the [rebel] military council and another a kilometre away from a refugee camp at the outskirts of Atma."

<http://blogs.aljazeera.com/topic/syria/war-planes-drop-bombs-border-town-atma>

4. ISRAEL-PALESTINE

- **Piles of rubble: Gazans rebuild following Israel ceasefire**

Thousands of home owners and businessmen in the Gaza Strip are hoping to rebuild houses, shops and factories which were reduced to piles of rubble during eight days of Israeli air raids.

Forty-eight hours after a ceasefire came into effect, and despite torrential rains, many ruined buildings were still smoldering when Hamas official Dr. Mahmoud Zahar toured bomb sites in the Zeitoun neighborhood of Gaza City.

One of the biggest obstacles will be finding construction materials as Israel bans the import of gravel, steel and cement to the territory.

In recent years building supplies have been smuggled into Gaza from neighboring Egypt through dozens of tunnels, but Israel's air force has inflicted heavy damage on these.

Residents along the border say smugglers and tunnel owners are still inspecting the damage to their businesses but it appears that many are still in operation.

As part of the ceasefire agreement Israel wants the Egyptian government to put a stop to smuggling operations.

A strict blockade was imposed on Gaza in 2007 after the militant Hamas group wrestled power off the hands of the government of Western-backed Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas.

While the blockade was eased in 2010, the restrictions on the construction material remained.

Only UN agencies and international bodies in Gaza are allowed to import such material from Israel for their own projects.

1.1 of Gaza's 1.6 million residents are registered as refugees and depend on assistance from UN agencies.

Mohammed Falah Azzam has been through this before.

His family home was bombed in the 2008-2009 Israeli war on Gaza that left hundreds killed and thousands of homes destroyed.

Last week an entire bloc of buildings housing his extended family was badly damaged in an airstrike that Israel said was targeting a militant.

None of his family members were killed in the strike, but now he has to worry about providing shelter for his extended family.

Azzam finds himself caught again in a web of paper work to claim assistance to rebuild his home and secure construction materials.

Only this time, he and hundreds of others like him hope the prospect of opening the borders with Israel and allowing construction material through, along with Hamas' new found political clout regionally, can help speed up the process.

Just a block away, Ayman el-Kholi's two-story building also collapsed under Israeli strikes, which were also said to be targeting militants.

No one was harmed. The 41-year old baker has sent his six children to stay with relatives and he is staying with a friend.

El-Kholi said Hamas government representatives and fighters visited him and promised compensation.

The Hamas government says the preliminary estimation put the cost of this war at 750 million US dollars.

This pales compared to the estimated 2.5 billion US dollars' worth of damage in the 2008-2009 war.

Israel promised to ease the blockade as part of a cease-fire last week that ended eight days of intense fighting but difficult negotiations lie ahead and there is no firm timeline for lifting the restrictions.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/26/251850.html>

- **Abbas heads to New York ahead of U.N. bid, gets Hamas support**

Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas will head to New York on Monday to seek the U.N.'s approval for upgrading the PA's status to non-member observer.

Disregarding demands from the U.S. and some EU countries, Abbas is planning to present the request to the U.N. this coming Thursday.

Palestine is far from being established, but U.N. recognition would affirm its future borders and enable the Palestinians to join U.N. organizations. Israel, backed by the Obama administration, opposes the U.N. bid as an attempt to bypass negotiations.

Abbas says he's willing to resume talks once the 1967 borders have been recognized as the baseline, something hardline Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refuses to do. Israel, while willing to cede some land, says it will not withdraw to the 1967 lines, and has instead moved half a million Israelis into settlements on war-won land.

"The upgraded status would permit Palestinians to take part in General Assembly debates, and more importantly, improve their chances of joining U.N. agencies and the International Criminal Court," wrote London-based writer and Arab commentator Sharif Nashashibi for Al Arabiya last week.

"If they are able to sign the ICC's founding treaty, the Rome Statute, this would allow legal action in the court to challenge Israel's occupation," he added.

"I'm going to the UN to demand a just peace based on international legitimacy to achieve an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital," Abbas declared. He also pledged to work toward seeking the release of Palestinian "heroes" from Israeli prisons.

"We are going to the U.N. fully confident in our steps. We will have our rights because you are with us," he told a crowd of around 1,000 people demonstrating support on Sunday for the bid to upgrade the Palestinian rank.

“We ask for a just peace, which is agreed on by the international community which will give us our state with east Jerusalem as its capital. Without that, there is no hope at all,” he said.

Abbas said the attempt to secure upgraded status was backed by many U.N. member states and by all the Palestinian political factions.

“We are on our way to the United Nations and there are a lot of states supporting us, who support peace and justice. All of the factions are with us in going to the United Nations,” he said.

Hamas chief Khaled Meshaal on Monday told Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas that his movement backs a bid for enhanced U.N. status for the Palestinians, a Hamas statement said.

“Khaled Meshaal... held a telephone conversation with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas in which he affirmed that Hamas welcomes the step of going to the United Nations for state observer status,” the statement said.

But both Meshaal and fellow political bureau member Izzat al-Rishq said Monday that they supported the move, though they warned it should not “compromise” Palestinian “constants and rights.”

“This move must be in the context of a vision and national strategy to maintain the national constants and rights and based on elements of power in the hands of our Palestinian people, the first of which is the resistance,” Meshaal’s statement said.

Last week, Gaza’s ruling Hamas movement denied a report by the official Palestinian news agency Wafa that Hamas prime minister Ismail Haniya had expressed support for the U.N. bid in a phone call with Abbas.

Abbas said the U.N. move would be followed by steps to bridge the bitter political divide between his Fatah movement and its Islamist rival Hamas.

“Today, the U.N.. After that, reconciliation, and after that, our own state,” he said.

But even such recognition, likely to be granted, may not be enough for the Western-backed backed proponent of non-violence and a peace deal with Israel to stay relevant.

Earlier this week, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton again urged Abbas in a meeting at his West Bank headquarters to drop the U.N. plan, said Abbas aide Saeb Erekat.

However, Abbas, widely known as Abu Mazen, told Clinton and other recent visitors, including the French and German foreign ministers, that he is determined to move ahead.

The Palestinians can count on support from Arab, Muslim and many developing and non-aligned countries. They have been courting European Union member states, many of them skeptical, but it's not clear if they've made inroads there.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/26/251824.html>

- **Gaza cease-fire raises hopes for reconstruction**

Mohammed Falah Azzam has been through this before.

His mother's home was bombed in the 2008-09 Israeli military offensive in the Gaza Strip, which left hundreds dead and thousands of homes destroyed. In renewed fighting last week, an entire block of buildings housing his extended family was badly damaged in an airstrike that Israel said was aimed at a militant.

While none of his relatives was hurt, the 61-year-old retired schoolteacher once again has to worry about providing shelter for his family. Some relatives are sleeping in an empty shop, squeezed in with other family members. Others are spending their nights in rooms covered in plastic wrap to shield them from the winter rain because all the windows were blown out.

"This is going to cost thousands," Azzam said. "The longer I wait, the more damage will happen," he added, pointing to a heavily damaged building sitting atop tilting concrete columns.

Azzam finds himself caught again in a pile of paperwork to seek assistance, trying to secure hard-to-get construction materials. This time, he hopes the process will be smoother, thanks to both Israel's pledges to ease its longstanding border blockade and the newfound political clout of Gaza's Hamas rulers in the region.

Israel promised to ease the blockade as part of a cease-fire last week that ended eight days of intense fighting. But difficult negotiations lie ahead, and there is no firm timeline for lifting the restrictions.

Israel launched its offensive Nov. 14 in response to months of rocket fire out of Gaza. It carried out some 1,500 airstrikes during the fighting, while Palestinian militants lobbed a similar number of rockets into Israel.

The damage to buildings in Gaza appears less extensive than it was four years ago. The United Nations estimates 10,000 homes were destroyed or damaged, while Hamas has put the number at about 8,000, including 500 that were destroyed or heavily damaged. In comparison, U.N. relief agencies said as many as 40,000 homes were affected in the earlier round of fighting.

Israel says its airstrikes are aimed at militants, and it blames Hamas for the damage, accusing the group of using residential areas for cover.

Reconstruction since the 2008-9 fighting has been slow, in large part because of Israel's blockade. Israel imposed the restrictions in 2007, after Hamas, a militant group sworn to its destruction, wrested power over the coastal strip from the government of Western-backed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Under international pressure, Israel loosened the blockade in 2010 but maintained tight restrictions on imports of glass, cement, metal and other construction materials, saying they

could be diverted for military use. Only U.N agencies and international organizations in the Palestinian territory are allowed to import such material from Israel for their own projects.

To make up the shortage, a bustling smuggling industry through underground tunnels along the Egyptian border has sprung up. While prices for key construction goods have come down, they still remain expensive for the majority of the population in Gaza, where the unemployment rate is over 30 percent and 80 percent of the people rely on U.N. handouts.

"The blockade in terms of housing impacts us primarily - the U.N. -and the people who are most vulnerable who don't have access to jobs or economic opportunity," said Scott Anderson, deputy director of the U.N. Relief and Works Agency. "People who have money, it is easily available."

In the short term, there is no relief in sight. During the recent offensive, Israel heavily targeted the tunnels, which are also used to bring weapons into Gaza. Residents along the border say that smugglers and tunnel owners are still inspecting the damage but that many of the tunnels still operate, though at reduced capacity.

An Egyptian security official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media, estimated that half the tunnels are not functioning.

With a sullied face and wearing only his undergarments, Azzam gave up his search for valuables in the rubble of his destroyed home on a recent day. He sat down to take a break and do some math.

His mother's house was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike in 2009. Since then, he has barely managed to rebuild one of its two floors. A \$25,000 grant he received from an Arab fund did not cover the costs, and materials for the project have been hard to come by.

The Hamas government has given him \$1,000 to find a place to live for now, and each member of the extended family received a similar amount. With housing in tight supply and rents skyrocketing, Azzam said the money will not last long.

"As we look there are no places to begin with," he said. "If we find a place, rent will be around \$300 or \$400. Before it was \$200."

Yasser al-Shanti, deputy of the ministry of public works and housing in the Hamas government, said construction materials will start flowing into Gaza again once the tunnels are up and running again.

But Hamas' real hope is that Israel and Egypt will lift border restrictions to allow large quantities of goods into the territory through proper border crossings. Hamas has high hopes for Egypt's new Islamist government, which is far more sympathetic to the Islamic group than the ousted regime of Hosni Mubarak.

The Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt is currently limited to foot traffic. Hamas, an offshoot of Egypt's ruling Muslim Brotherhood, wants Egypt to turn the crossing into a bustling cargo terminal.

"We expect that international and Arab institutions are ready to help. We don't expect to have a problem," al-Shanti said.

Hamas has put the damage to Gaza's civilian infrastructure at roughly \$750 million, a sum that will probably have to be raised through special U.N. emergency appeals and donations from wealthy Arab countries.

The future of the crossing will be a central issue in indirect, Egyptian-brokered negotiations between Israel and Hamas. Under the cease-fire, Israel made a vague commitment to ease its closing of Gaza. But the details must be negotiated.

With Hamas rejecting Israel's key demand - that arms smuggling into Gaza be halted - it remains far from certain whether Hamas will get what it wants. Egypt also has not been clear how far it is willing to open its border, fearing that this will allow Israel to "dump" Gaza on Egypt and

undermine hopes for reconciliation between Hamas and Abbas' rival government in the West Bank.

Ayman el-Kholi, whose two-story home was destroyed in an Israeli airstrike aimed at militants, said Hamas government representatives and fighters, including Hamas strongman Mahmoud Zahar, visited him and promised compensation.

"They promised that after things calm down, they will begin to reconstruct all homes destroyed and not just ours," he said.

In the meantime, the 41-year-old banker has sent his six children to sleep at various relatives' homes, and he is staying with a friend. The rubble from the destroyed building was still in a heap on Sunday as he waited for the only government tractor to come remove it.

The entire block was damaged by airstrike. Shops were buried and a nearby workshop for electrical appliances was severely damaged.

"We don't save in banks. All my money was in the house. All of it is now under the rubble, around \$10,000 plus my wife's gold," el-Kholi said. "We are waiting for an opening of the crossing. We are waiting for donor countries, from Arab countries, to help us rebuild the house again."

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/26/251784.html>

- **Hamas chief announces support for UN bid**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- Hamas chief-in-exile Khalid Mashaal telephoned President Abbas on Monday to confirm the Islamist movements' support for the upcoming UN bid, the official news agency Wafa reported.

A Hamas statement received by Ma'an reiterated Mashaal's call, stressing that the Nov. 29 bid must be based on a nationalistic vision and strategy which upholds the inalienable rights of the Palestinians.

The UN move should also be based on strong Palestinian principles, the most important of which is resistance.

Mashaal further stressed that political reconciliation is a necessity and should be achieved "in light of the positive atmosphere following the victory of our people in Gaza."

Reconciliation talks have repeatedly stumbled since Hamas and Fatah signed an Egyptian-brokered reconciliation agreement in May 2011, but Israel's eight-day war on the Gaza Strip which ended Wednesday gave political impetus to ending the division.

In a rare conciliatory move between the rival factions, Hamas announced Friday that it would grant an amnesty to all suspects and prisoners related to its conflict with Fatah in 2006.

The Palestinian Authority responded with a similar gesture, saying it would release all Hamas prisoners held for political reasons in the coming days.

PLO official Nabil Shaath also said that Hamas party representatives in the West Bank would begin to participate in high-level political meetings, including sessions of the executive committee of the PLO.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=542116>

- **Israel's Barak says quitting politics**

JERUSALEM (Reuters) -- Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said in a surprise announcement on Monday that he was quitting politics and would not run in the January 22 national election.

"I have decided to retire from political life and not to run for the next Knesset ... I will end my term as defense minister once the next government is established, in about three months," he told a news conference.

"I want to dedicate more time to my family. I feel I have exhausted dealing with political life, which has never been a passion of mine, and I feel there is room to allow other people to serve in senior roles in Israel," he said.

Opinion polls had predicted a poor showing for the small party that Barak currently leads, Atzmaut, but recently indicated voter support had strengthened as a result of Israel's eight-day offensive in the Gaza Strip that ended in a ceasefire on Wednesday.

Barak, 70, has been a key player in Israel's tough policy towards curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions and a pointman in Israel's strategic relations with the United States.

He has been defense minister since 2007 and served as prime minister from 1999 to 2001.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=542091>

- **Palestinian Dies of Wounds in Gaza**

GAZA, November 26, 2012 (WAFA) – A Palestinian, who was critically injured in an Israeli attack on the Gaza strip, died of his wounds on Monday at al-Shifa hospital, according to medical sources.

They said that Ahmad Mashharawi was critically injured when Israeli jets bombed his house in al-Zaitoun neighborhood in Gaza City on the first day of the war, on November 14. His sister-in-law and her son were killed in the strike.

This brings the total of Palestinians killed in the Israeli war on Gaza to 169.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21173>

- **Gaza cleric calls violation of Israel truce sinful**

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — A leading Islamic cleric in the Gaza Strip has ruled it a sin to violate the recent cease-fire between Israel and the Hamas militant group that controls the Palestinian territory.

The fatwa, or religious edict, issued by Suleiman al-Daya late Saturday accords a religious legitimacy to the truce and could justify any act by Gaza's government to enforce it.

"Honoring the truce, which was sponsored by our Egyptian brethren, is the duty of each and every one of us. Violating it shall constitute a sin," the fatwa read.

The Wednesday truce put an end to an eight-day Israeli offensive against Gaza militants who fired rockets into Israel. The agreement remains fragile because details beyond the initial cease-fire have not yet been worked out.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=31929>

- **Abbas heads to NY ahead of UN statehood bid**

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is set to head to New York on Monday to seek the UN's approval for upgrading the PA's status to non-member observer.

PA officials, meanwhile, said they were not taking seriously Israeli and American threats to punish the PA leadership for going to the UN, noting that Arab countries have expressed readiness to compensate the Palestinians financially.

Ignoring demands from the US and some EU countries, Abbas is planning to present the request to the UN this coming Thursday.

Addressing his supporters, Abbas said that after obtaining the status of non-member observer, he will work toward ending the dispute between his Fatah faction and Hamas.

Abbas said that “all Palestinian factions” supported the statehood bid. Last week, however, Hamas denied that it was in favor of the statehood bid at the UN.

“I’m going to the UN to demand a just peace based on international legitimacy to achieve an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital,” Abbas declared. He also pledged to work toward seeking the release of Palestinian “heroes” from Israeli prisons.

Abbas said he was going to the UN after having won the support of all “peace-lovers and countries that believe in the Palestinians’ right to self-determination.”

A large number of countries supported the statehood bid, he added.

PA Foreign Minister Riad Malki said that November 29 would be a “historic turning point in the march of our people toward a state and independence.”

He predicted that a majority of UN members would vote in favor of the PA’s statehood bid “as an expression of the international status of Palestine.”

Malki is also scheduled to travel to New York Monday to put the final touches to the PA resolution.

Malki said he would continue his efforts in New York to persuade as many countries as possible to vote in favor of upgrading the status of a Palestinian entity.

Meanwhile, Jamal Muhaisen, a member of the Fatah Central Committee, warned that his group would not hesitate to resort to “armed struggle” in light of Israeli threats to take punitive measures against the PA because of the statehood bid.

“The armed struggle is a guaranteed right for the Palestinian people to defend themselves against the Israeli threats,” Muhaisen said. “The Israeli threats are part of a policy aimed at deterring the Palestinian leadership from going to the UN.”

The Fatah official said that he nevertheless did not expect Israel to carry out its threats. He claimed that Israel had issued similar threats before Yasser Arafat declared the establishment of a Palestinian state in 1988 in Algiers.

Muhaisen said the Palestinians would be able to cope with any sanctions imposed on them by the US and Israel, including cutting off financial aid to the PA. He said that Arab countries have promised to support the PA financially if the US and Israel carried out their threats.

Top Fatah official Nabil Sha'ath also dismissed as "worthless" Israeli threats against the PA.

"Who has an interest in the abrogation of the Oslo Accords?" Sha'ath asked. "They [Israel] will lose. Do they want to bear the costs of occupation?"

Referring to US pressure on the PA leadership to refrain from presenting the statehood bid to the UN, Sha'ath said: "Instead of threatening us, they should give the Palestinians their rights."

He too said that the Palestinians have received promises for financial support from Arab countries if the US cuts off aid and Israel withholds tax revenues belonging to the PA.

Hanan Ashrawi, a member of the PLO Executive Committee, warned that canceling the Oslo Accords would jeopardize security and stability in the region and the entire world.

However, she said, she did not expect Israel to take such a drastic step "because this is not in the interest of any political party."

PA Labor Minister Ahmed Majdalani was quoted by the PA's official news agency Wafa as saying that Israeli threats to withhold tax revenues were part of the Israeli government's "election campaign."

Majdalani said that canceling agreements that regulate security and economic relations between the PA and Israel “effectively mean that Israel has recognized the Palestinian state.” He said that withholding the tax revenues would force the PA to stop paying full salaries to its civil servants and reduce health, social and educational services to the Palestinians.

<http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=293438>

5. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Egypt's Morsi to meet judges over new powers**

Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi is set to meet senior judges on Monday to try to ease a crisis over his new powers which has set off protests reminiscent of the revolution last year that brought him to power.

Activists on Sunday were camped in Cairo's Tahrir Square for a third day, blocking traffic with makeshift barricades to protest against what they said was a power-grab by Morsi. Nearby, riot police and protesters clashed intermittently.

One Muslim Brotherhood member was killed and 60 people were injured late on Sunday in an attack on the main office of the movement in the Nile Delta town of Damanhour, the website of the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party said.

More than 500 people have been injured in clashes between police and protesters worried Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood is trying to consolidate power.

The country's highest judicial authority hinted at compromise to avert a further escalation, though Morsi's opponents want nothing less than the complete cancellation of a decree they see as a danger to democracy.

The Supreme Judicial Council said Morsi's decree should apply only to "sovereign matters", suggesting it did not reject the declaration outright, and called on judges and prosecutors, some of whom began a strike on Sunday, to return to work.

Morsi will meet the council on Monday, state media said.

Temporary measures

Morsi's office repeated assurances that the measures would be temporary, and said he wanted dialogue with political groups to find "common ground" over what should go in Egypt's constitution, one of the issues at the heart of the crisis.

Hassan Nafaa, a professor of political science at Cairo University, saw an effort by the presidency and judiciary to resolve the crisis, but added their statements were "vague".

"The situation is heading towards more trouble," he said.

Sunday's stock market fall of nearly 10 per cent - halted only by automatic curbs - was the worst since the uprising that toppled former President Hosni Mubarak in February, 2011.

Morsi's supporters and opponents planned big demonstrations for Tuesday that could be a trigger for more street violence.

"We are back to square one, politically, socially," said Mohamed Radwan of Pharos Securities, an Egyptian brokerage firm.

Morsi's decree marks an effort to consolidate his influence after he successfully sidelined Mubarak-era generals in August, and reflects his suspicions of a judiciary little reformed since the fall of his predecessor.

Issued just a day after Morsi received glowing tributes from Washington for his work brokering a deal to end eight days of Israeli attacks on Gaza, the decree drew warnings from the West to uphold democracy.

'Protect the revolution'

The Morsi administration has defended his decree as an effort to speed up reforms that will complete Egypt's democratic transformation.

Yet leftists, liberals, socialists and others say it has exposed the autocratic impulses of a man once jailed by Mubarak.

"There is no room for dialogue when a dictator imposes the most oppressive, abhorrent measures and then says 'let us split the difference'," prominent opposition leader Mohamed ElBaradei said on Saturday.

Morsi framed his decisions on Thursday as necessary to protect the revolution that toppled Mubarak nearly two years ago and to cement the nation's transition to democratic rule.

Morsi also ordered the retrial of Mubarak and top aides on charges of killing protesters during the uprising.

"He had to act to save the country and protect the course of the revolution," Pakinam al-Sharqawi, one of Morsi's aides, said.

"It is a major stage in the process of completing the January 25th revolution," she said, alluding to the starting day of last year's uprising against Mubarak.

He also created a new "protection of the revolution" judicial body to swiftly carry out the prosecutions.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/11/2012112520126225396.html>

- **Egypt protesters tear-gassed as world concern grows**

CAIRO, (AFP) - Anti-riot police fired tear gas on Saturday to disperse protesters camped out in Cairo's Tahrir Square as Western governments voiced growing concern over Islamist President Mohamed Morsi's assumption of sweeping powers.

A hard core of opposition activists had spent the night in the iconic protest hub -- epicentre of the popular uprising that toppled veteran strongman Hosni Mubarak last year -- erecting some 30 tents, an AFP correspondent reported.

But when more demonstrators attempted to join them in the morning, police responded with volleys of tear gas forcing them to retreat into surrounding streets.

Opposition-led protests were held in most of Egypt's major cities on Friday sparking violent clashes in the canal city of Suez and the Mediterranean city of Alexandria, where offices of the Islamist Freedom and Justice Party, which backed Morsi for the presidency, were torched.

The mainly secular liberal activists voiced determination to keep up the momentum of their protests against Morsi's decree on Thursday which placed his decisions beyond judicial scrutiny, vastly adding to his power.

"Egypt is at the start of a new revolution because it was never our intention to replace one dictator with another," activist Mohammed al-Gamal told AFP, showing his broken spectacles and hand in a plaster cast than he said were the result of the police action.

Washington, which only Wednesday had voiced fulsome praise for Morsi's role in brokering a truce between Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers to end eight days of deadly violence, led international criticism of the Islamist president's move.

Members of the Muslim Brotherhood and other groups were also out in strength on Friday in a show of support for the president in his move to prevent the courts dissolving the Islamist-dominated constituent assembly and upper house of parliament as they have already the lower house.

Clashes broke out between the rival supporters in several cities, AFP correspondents and state television reported.

In an address to supporters outside the presidential palace, Morsi insisted that Egypt remained on the path to "freedom and democracy", despite his move to undercut the judiciary.

"Political stability, social stability and economic stability are what I want and that is what I am working for," he said.

The president already held both executive and legislative powers and Thursday's decree puts him beyond judicial oversight until a new constitution has been ratified in a referendum.

It also means that the Islamist-dominated panel drawing up the new charter can no longer be touched and gives it a two-month extension -- until February next year -- to complete its work.

Washington and European governments voiced concern about the concentration of power in Morsi's hands and its implications for the democratic gains of last year's uprising which toppled Mubarak.

"The decisions and declarations announced on November 22 raise concerns for many Egyptians and for the international community," said US State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland.

"One of the aspirations of the revolution was to ensure that power would not be overly concentrated in the hands of any one person or institution."

The European Union urged the Egyptian president to respect the democratic process.

"It is of utmost importance that democratic process be completed in accordance with the commitments undertaken by the Egyptian leadership," a spokesman for EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said.

Morsi must ensure the separation of powers, the independence of justice, the protection of fundamental freedoms and the holding of democratic parliamentary elections "as soon as possible", said spokesman Michael Mann.

Hesham Sallam, a political analyst at Georgetown University, said Morsi's decree gave him as much power as Mubarak.

"The decrees effectively render the presidential decisions final and not subject to the review of judicial authorities, which marks a return to Mubarak-style presidency, without even the legal cosmetics that the previous regime used to employ to justify its authoritarian ways," he told AFP.

But a spokesman for the Freedom and Justice Party, headed by Morsi before his election, said the president's decree was necessary to cut short the turbulent transition.

"We need stability," said Murad Ali. "That's not going to happen if we go back again to allowing the judges, who have personal reasons, to dissolve the constituent assembly in order to prolong the transitional phase."

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=31915>

- **Islamist teenager killed, dozens injured in Egypt anti-govt clashes**

A young Islamist on Sunday became the first casualty since Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi's constitutional declaration last week.

Islam Fathi Mohammed, reported to be 15, died after clashes with protesters outside a local Muslim Brotherhood office in the Nile Delta.

“Islam Fathi Mohammed was killed” in clashes outside the Brotherhood headquarters in the town of Damanhour, one of the movement’s leaders Jamal Hichmat said, according to AFP news agency.

Witnesses said clashes had broken out in Damanhour between supporters and opponents of President Mursi, during protests there against the sweeping new powers he has assumed, with petrol bombs, sticks and stones being used.

The president’s constitutional declaration on Thursday allows him to issue decisions and laws unchallenged. The president said in a statement on Sunday evening that the new power were only “temporary,” and “not meant to concentrate power, but... to devolve it to a democratically elected parliament.

But this has not yet been enough to calm protests, which were sparked over fears by the opposition that he was taking on dictatorial powers.

Several offices belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party have been torched since Thursday announcement.

In Damanhour, Mahmoud Dafraoui, a doctor at a local hospital in Damanhour, confirmed to AFP that an Islamist was killed in the clashes and 10 people wounded.

But the brotherhood puts the figure higher.

“60 were injured after thugs attacked the Muslim Brotherhood’s headquarters in Damanhour in the total absence of police forces,” the party’s website said.

The witnesses said clashes have been going on for the past three days between the Islamists and Mursi’s opponents, who have tried to storm the Brotherhood office in the Nile Delta town.

Hundreds of Mursi supporters demonstrated late on Sunday in front of mosques in Cairo and across the country in protests called for by the Muslim Brotherhood, from which the president hails, witnesses said.

The moderate Islamist movement has also called for a “million man” march on Tuesday, to coincide with a huge demonstration organized by Mursi opponents.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/26/251820.html>

- **Morocco says breaks al Qaeda cell sending youth to Mali**

RABAT (Reuters) - Morocco said on Saturday it had broken up a militant cell that was training youths to send them to fight in Mali, which has become the focus of international concern over the spread of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

The interior ministry said in a statement on state news agency MAP it broke up a cell operating in the cities of Nador, Casablanca, Guercif, Laayoune and Kalaat Sraghna.

Around 20 people had been sent to fight with AQIM and al Qaeda ally the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa, and others had been sent to Libya, it said.

Morocco, a Western ally, often says it has broken militant cells accused of plotting inside and outside the country.

European leaders are growing increasingly anxious that Mali could turn into a platform for militant attacks, including in Europe.

Meanwhile, a rights activist said riot police had broken up a prison protest this week by ultraconservative Islamist Salafis, who share a similar ideology to al Qaeda.

The protests followed Salafi prison riots over conditions last year in the same jail of Sale, just outside Rabat.

Salafis have become active in Morocco in recent years as their influence spread in other Arab countries. Islamists, including Salafis, have risen to prominence in Egypt and Tunisia following last year's "Arab Spring" uprisings.

Anas Haloui of the Joint Committee for Defending Islamist Prisoners said Salafis began protesting on Wednesday but police tried to break up their protest the next day by force.

"One prisoner was tortured by ordinary prisoners and guards, so a demonstration was organised to push the administration to allow all the Salafi prisoners to be in the same building together," Haloui said.

"Since the police intervention, the cells are closed and there's no information on what happened to the injured people."

Prison officials were not available for comment.

The authorities released some Salafi leaders from prison this year in an apparent effort to win them on side in the monarchy's efforts to outwit opposition.

Some 120 Salafi detainees are still in Sale prison after the riots in May last year. Salafis were then distributed in different prisons around the country. Around 600 Salafis in total are thought to be held in Moroccan jails.

Under pressure after the uprisings, which provoked protests in Morocco, King Mohammed approved a new constitution conceding more powers to the elected government and allowed the head of an Islamist party to take charge after elections last year.

While Salafis have remained largely outside the political system, analysts say they spread considerable influence among poor sectors of a country where unemployment, inflation, and unequal wealth distribution are major threats to stability.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=31927>

- **Egypt's top Islamist expects assassination of liberal figures**

A senior member of Egypt's former militant Islamist group al-Gamaa al-Islamiya has warned that liberal politicians and intellectuals who oppose President Mohammed Mursi's latest constitutional declaration could face a campaign of targeted assassinations starting from December.

Nageh Ibrahim, the ideologue of the Gamaa al-Islamiya, which took up arms against ousted president Hosni Mubarak's regime in the 1980s, told Al Arabiya that his expectation "was based on an analysis of the political situation not on information."

He said recent escalation of violence in different parts of the country, including successive attacks on security forces in Sinai, attacks on Muslim Brotherhood offices and on mosques, point to a possible bloody reaction against liberals.

Ibrahim first made his statement in an interview with the London-based Asharq al-Awsat, saying targeted assassinations against prominent liberals would be a "natural reaction" to violence and mistrust, and political polarization in Egypt.

And while he supported President Mursi's latest decrees to consolidate his powers by making his decisions irrevocable by the judiciary, Ibrahim called for the president to include more civil and liberal figures in his government and take their demands into consideration when making decisions.

"Had the president included representatives of the civil powers in the new government, he would not have had so many enemies," Ibrahim said.

"This has to be done before Egypt becomes divided, not only politically but possibly geographically as well."

He warned that if Mursi backtracks on his decisions, the country would plunge further into turmoil.

But his statement on the assassination of liberals drew sharp criticism from his colleague Essam Derbala who is chairman of al-Gamaa al-Islamiya's Advisory Council and member of the group's political wing Construction and Development Party.

Derbala described Ibrahim's statements as "irresponsible" and not representative of the group's or the party's opinion.

"This is a very bad timing for issuing such statements," Derbala was quoted as saying by the Egyptian newspaper al-Mesryoon. "This would promote divisions in the Egyptian society and spread fear of Islamist groups."

Derbala expressed his doubts that Ibrahim issued those warnings based on factual information and saw them more as mere speculations.

"These are just speculations that reflect his own point of view, but are not official especially that he does not hold any positions now in the group."

Tarek al-Zomor, leading member of the group, also played down Ibrahim's statements as mere speculations.

"All the changes in Egypt are made in a peaceful way," he said. "This is the path Egypt has taken since the January 25 Revolution."

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/26/251886.html>

- **Mursi says his decrees are 'temporary,' calls for dialogue with opponents**

Egyptian President Mohammed Mursi reiterated on Sunday the "temporary nature" of his decrees, saying he wanted dialogue with political forces.

Mursi made the announcement in a statement released by his office as he sought to contain a simmering crisis triggered by his decisions seen by many as a roadmap to dictatorship.

The presidency said Mursi needed to hold to account those responsible for crimes, corruption of “previous regime” and transitional period.

"This declaration is deemed necessary in order to hold accountable those responsible for the corruption as well as other crimes during the previous regime and the transitional period," the presidency statement said.

Mursi ordered the reopening of investigations into those deaths, and new prosecutor general Talaat Ibrahim Abdallah said "revolutionary courts" would be set up that could see ousted president Hosni Mubarak, his sons and his top security chiefs retried "should there be new evidence."

Mubarak and his interior minister were sentenced to life over the killing of protesters in last year’s popular uprising against him, but six security chiefs were acquitted in the same case sparking nationwide outrage.

The presidency statement said “these measures will preserve the rights of martyrs and victims, which is a fundamental issue for the Egyptian public opinion.”

Egyptian Justice Minister Ahmed Mekky, meanwhile, began mediation efforts to try to end a crisis between Egypt’s executive and judicial authorities, state TV reported on Sunday.

It was the first public sign of a government attempt to resolve a crisis ignited by President Mursi’s decision to expand his powers and protect his decisions from judicial review.

Mekky, who has said he has "some reservations" about Mursi’s decree, convened a meeting at the Supreme Court headquarters in Cairo, state TV reported, without giving further details.

The Supreme Judicial Council said Mursi's decrees must only be applied to decisions or laws relating to "sovereign matters."

The Supreme Judicial Council in a statement read on state TV also called on judges to keep courts and prosecution offices functioning after the influential Judges' Club called on Saturday for a countrywide strike in protest at Mursi's decree.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/25/251744.html>

- **Egypt journalists call for strike to demand guarantees of press freedom**

Egyptian journalists called on Sunday for a general strike to protest guarantees of press freedom in a draft constitution, amid a political crisis sparked by decree by President Mohamed Mursi granting himself sweeping powers.

They called for the strike during an emergency meeting of the Journalists Syndicate but have yet to set a date, attendants told AFP.

An Islamist-dominated panel currently drafting the country's new charter has come under heavy criticism for seeking to impose a strict interpretation of Islamic law and failing to secure key rights.

The legality of the 100-member assembly was being challenged in the courts but Mursi's decree on Thursday says no court can now dissolve the panel.

Earlier, scuffles broke out at the meeting between supporters and foes of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Supporters of the Islamist group, from which Mursi emerged, argued that not enough members were present to conduct the meeting, citing syndicate bylaws. That sparked a heated debate on the technicalities of the meeting, which ended in a fist fight.

“The people want the downfall of the Muslim Brotherhood,” journalists chanted, as fighting continued on stage and speakers struggled to be heard over the chaos.

Mursi’s decree, which allows him to issue decisions and laws unchallenged, has sparked furor among the judiciary and the opposition, who have put their long-standing divisions aside, to confront Thursday’s decree.

Protesters declared a sit-in on Friday in Cairo’s Tahrir Square and courts in Egypt’s second city of Alexandria have suspended work in protest at what they called an attack on the independence of the judiciary.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/26/251783.html>

- **Interior minister: Mohamed Mahmoud protesters shot by their comrades**

Interior Minister Ahmed Gamal Eddin denied policemen were involved in shooting protesters with birdshot near the ministry, saying police only use tear gas to separate demonstrators and hold them back.

Health Ministry reports said that many of the dozens injured in clashes between security forces near the Interior Ministry and protesters were caused by birdshot. The encounters that broke out last Monday followed demonstrations commemorating the death of more than 40 in clashes near Mohamed Mahmoud Street last November.

In an interview with state-run newspaper Al-Ahram published Monday, Gamal Eddin said that, unlike wounds sustained by police, birdshot injuries sustained by protesters reveal they had been shot from close range. He claimed this meant the firing came from the demonstrations, not police.

The minister said Gaber Salah, an April 6 Youth Movement member who was pronounced dead Sunday, bore signs of birdshot injuries received from close range, despite the long distance between him and security forces during the demonstrations.

“The Interior Ministry had asked the Public Prosecution to search the scene of events and to inquire about the weaponry used by police forces so as to avoid false accusations to security forces,” he said. “Prosecutors had visited the area, but did not make any notes.”

“The [police] forces are the victims here,” the minister argued.

Gamal Eddin added that police have been deterring attacks on the Interior Ministry and the Shura Council.

He put forth that the security performance is faring well in general, but added that events in Tahrir Square and surrounding areas give the impression of a security void.

“We do not confront peaceful protests,” he claimed, adding that his ministry’s role is to secure important facilities.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/interior-minister-mohamed-mahmoud-protesters-shot-their-comrades>

- **Tahrir Square calm on third day of anti-Morsy sit-in**

A sit-in by dozens of protesters in Tahrir Square entered its third day Monday. Demonstrators are protesting the new constitutional declaration issued by the president Thursday, which granted him sweeping legislative and executive powers.

The area has returned calm again after a day of clashes between police and protesters, which shifted from Qasr al-Aini Street, where the Cabinet and Parliament buildings are located, to Simon Bolivar Square.

The number of sit-in tents has increased inside the square's central island. The square's entrances remain closed by protesters for the fourth day in a row, with traffic movement redirected to alternative roads.

President Mohamed Morsy issued a constitutional declaration on Thursday, making his decrees immune to judicial challenges. He also removed controversial Prosecutor General Abdel Meguid Mahmoud, and made the country's constitution-drafting assembly and the Shura Council immune to dissolution.

The measure sparked an uproar among judges and non-Islamist movements, which called for massive protests Tuesday in Tahrir. Meanwhile, the Muslim Brotherhood, of which Morsy was a former leader, called for parallel demonstrations to support his decisions.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/tahrir-square-calm-third-day-anti-morsy-sit>

6. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Lebanese army: 5 Syrians arrested with explosives**

BEIRUT (AP) — Lebanese soldiers raided an apartment in the country's south on Saturday and arrested five Syrian nationals for possession of explosives, the army said, the latest incident fanning fears that Syria's civil war is spilling across the border.

The arrests came on the eve of Ashoura, the annual Shiite commemoration of the 7th-century death of Imam Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson. Shiite processions — one of which will take place in Nabatiyeh where the arrests occurred — have been attacked by Sunni extremists in Iraq and other countries.

Lebanese media reports said the suspects planned to use the explosives to attack Shiite mourners marking Ashoura Sunday. An army spokesman declined comment to The Associated Press, pending judicial investigations.

Lebanon and Syria share a complex web of political and sectarian ties and rivalries which are easily enflamed. Lebanon, a country plagued by decades of strife, has been on edge since the uprising in Syria against President Bashar Assad began in March 2011, with deadly clashes between pro and anti- Assad Lebanese groups erupting on several occasions.

Many among Lebanon's Sunni Muslims have backed Syria's mainly Sunni rebels, in which radical Islamists have become increasingly active. Lebanese Shiite Muslims and the militant group Hezbollah have tended to back Assad, whose tiny Alawite sect is an offshoot of Shiite Islam.

In this latest incident, an army statement said the five Syrians were arrested in the southern market town of Nabatiyeh following a tip that they were involved in "suspicious security activity." Army personnel seized 450 grams (one pound) of explosives, a detonator, and ammunition for a 160 mm mortar with Hebrew writing on it, the statement said.

Last month, Lebanon plunged into several days of violence after the country's intelligence chief, Brig. Gen. Wissam al-Hassan was assassinated in a Beirut car bomb.

Al-Hassan was a powerful opponent of Syria's influence in Lebanon and many here blamed his killing on Syria.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=31928>

- **Lebanese leader blames Iran for Hezbollah UAV**

Lebanese President Michel Sleiman has sent a letter of protest to his Iranian counterpart, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, complaining about the recent Hezbollah drone launch into Israeli airspace, the Lebanese daily Al Mustaqbal reported on Sunday.

The report cited a high-level official who accompanied Sleiman on his visit to Rome over the weekend as saying that the president wrote to Ahmadinejad via Iran's Energy Minister Majid Namjoo during his recent visit to Lebanon.

Sleiman slammed Iran for failing to inform the Lebanese government about the drone operation, and said Tehran had disregarded all diplomatic norms in its dealings with Lebanon.

“This step is an utter disregard of the feelings of the Lebanese and their commitment to national sovereignty,” Al Mustaqbal cited Sleiman as writing in his letter to Ahmadinejad. Iran’s Lebanese proxy Hezbollah said it launched the Iranian-made drone, dubbed the “Ayoub,” which Israel downed on October 6.

Iran’s state-controlled media and news sites linked to the IRGC have reported extensively on the drone, claiming it had obtained images of top-secret Israeli sites.

However, a senior Israeli military official later said he did not believe the drone possessed a camera. “To the best of our knowledge, no,” the official told Reuters.

The report of Sleiman’s letter came after a visit by Iran’s powerful Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani to Beirut on Saturday, following a short visit to Damascus.

During his Beirut visit, Larijani leveled criticism at some Arab countries for sending arms to Syrian rebels fighting against Tehran’s ally, Bashar Assad.

“Sides sending arms to fuel internal fighting in Syria aim at dealing a blow to defiance and resistance against Israel,” Larijani said. Alluding to Hezbollah, Iran’s parliament speaker also lauded Lebanon’s “resistance” against Israel, saying that it and Hamas were “strategic forces.”

Al Mustaqbal cited the same official source as saying that Sleiman was angered by Larijani’s criticisms, saying that they went against the Baabda Declaration, the resolution adopted by Lebanon’s national dialogue committee in June which aims to distance Lebanon from regional conflicts.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah threatened on Sunday to fire “thousands of rockets” at Israeli cities if Lebanon was attacked.

The Iranian-backed terror group would be “able to target the entire occupied territories, from the Lebanese border to Jordan to the Red Sea, from Kiryat Shmona to Eilat,” Nasrallah said, according to Lebanon’s As-Safir newspaper.

In a speech in southern Beirut to mark the Shi’ite festival of Ashura, Nasrallah urged Arab and Islamic governments to arm “resistance factions” in Gaza.

Nasrallah vowed to bomb Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities with thousands of rockets in any future war.

“If Israel is shaken and confused by a small number of Fajr-5 rockets, less than 10 in eight days, how will it cope with thousands of rockets that will hit Tel Aviv if Lebanon is attacked?” he said.

Echoing remarks made last week by Iran’s Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani, Nasrallah urged Arab and Islamic governments to send military aid to Gaza.

“Gaza and Palestine don’t only need your sympathy and visits, but they also need your weapons and money,” Nasrallah said, according to As-Safir.

<http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=293426>

- **Hezbollah says it would hit Tel Aviv in future war**

BEIRUT (AP) — Lebanon's Hezbollah group would fire thousands of rockets into Israel in any future war and target cities in the country's heartland, the group's leader said Sunday.

Sheik Hassan Nasrallah's warning came days after an eight-day Israeli offensive against Gaza ended with a truce. Nasrallah said Gaza militants had won "a clear victory" against Israel with their rocket bombardment.

Hezbollah, like Hamas and other Gaza militant factions, maintains a rocket arsenal and regularly threatens to use it. It fought an inconclusive 34-day war with the Jewish state in 2006 that left 1,200 Lebanese and 160 Israelis dead.

The Gaza war marked the first use by Palestinian factions of a longer ranged Iranian-made rocket, the Fajr-5. It caused no casualties but did trigger air raid warnings in the heartland cities of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, which, unlike cities closer to the Lebanese and Gaza borders, have not experienced any sustained missile attack since Iraqi Scuds were fired in the 1991 Gulf War.

Hezbollah fired at least one long-range rocket ineffectually in the 2006 war. But Israeli intelligence now believes the militant group has the capability to strike anywhere in the country, although Israel now deploys air defense systems designed to counter the threat.

In the Gaza conflict, Israeli aircraft launched some 1,500 strikes on targets linked to the Palestinian territory's Hamas rulers and other groups, while Gaza militants fired roughly the same number of rockets into Israel.

Nasrallah said in a speech in Beirut that the Fajr-5 attacks "shook Israel." He asked: "How is it (Israel) going to stand thousands of rockets that will fall on Tel Aviv and other areas if it launches an aggression against Lebanon?"

Nasrallah spoke via a video link from a secret location to tens of thousands of supporters in Beirut who gathered to mark Ashoura, the annual Shiite commemoration of the 7th-century death of Imam Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson.

Hezbollah fired nearly 4,000 rockets at Israel during the 2006 war and is believed to have upgraded its arsenal since then. Nasrallah did not say how many missiles and rockets his group possesses, although in the past he said they have more than 20,000. Israel estimates the number at several times that.

"The battle with us is going to be all over occupied Palestine," the black-turbaned Nasrallah said.
"From the border with Lebanon to the frontier with Jordan to the Red Sea."

"The Israelis should listen well to me. From Kiryat Shemona to Eilat," Nasrallah said referring to a northern Israeli town near the border with Lebanon to the southern resort town of Eilat on the Red Sea.

Since the 2006 war ended, both Israeli and Hezbollah officials have been warning each other that the next battle between the two groups will be more destructive.

Some Israeli generals had spoken of the "Dahiya doctrine," named after the Beirut suburbs considered a Hezbollah stronghold where Israel turned dozens of buildings to piles of debris in 2006.

In August, Nasrallah said Hezbollah will transform the lives of Israelis to "hell" if Israel attacks Lebanon, adding that the group would not hesitate to hit targets that would leave tens of thousands of Israelis dead.

Hezbollah was created in 1982, weeks after Israel invaded Lebanon. Israel withdrew in 2000 to a border drawn by the U.N., but Lebanon says Israel still occupies a slice of its territory.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=31935>

- **Jumblatt says a return to dialogue only means to end crisis**

BEIRUT: MP Walid Jumblatt said Monday his initiative to resolve the political crisis in the country stipulates a return to dialogue and an end to Lebanon's involvement in the Syrian crisis.

"The initiative stipulates a commitment to National Dialogue as the only means to resolve crises and the need for political parties to commit to the state as the sole authority," Jumblatt said during a news conference at his residence in Mukhtara.

He also said that Lebanese media outlets should “stop incitement,” and play a more effective role.

“[Parties] should refrain from meddling in the Syrian crisis ... Lebanese political parties are mere tools in a conflict bigger than what Lebanon can handle,” Jumblatt said.

Following the assassination of a top intelligence chief last month, the country plunged into a political crisis with the opposition group boycotting all government work, adding further pressure on the Cabinet to resign.

Lawmakers with the March 14 coalition has also accused Prime Minister Najib Mikat’s Cabinet of providing the necessary cover for the Oct. 19 car bomb that killed Brig. Gen. Wisam al-Hasan.

Jumblatt’s so-called initiative to resolve the ongoing stalemate between rival groups surfaced after President Michel Sleiman’s efforts to convene all-party talks failed.

The Future Movement has rejected Dialogue, demanding Mikati’s resignation and the formation of a neutral government to oversee the 2013 parliamentary polls.

Speaker Nabih Berri, Sleiman, and Mikati threw their support behind Jumblatt’s efforts, which he said prevents Shiite-Sunni strife.

During his chat with reporters, the head of the Progressive Socialist Party said there were two contentious issues obstructing political life in the country: the international tribunal and Hezbollah’s arms.

Although a supporter of Hezbollah’s tripartite formula of “The Army, the people, and the resistance,” as means to defend the country, Jumblatt said such a formula was ambiguous and needed revision.

“One day after we resume Dialogue we should come up with a new formula because we can no longer have a formula that is unclear and confuses the role of the Army with that of the resistance,” he said.

“The sole jurisdiction over arms should be in the hands of the Army,” the PSP leader added.

He also noted that the dispute over the Special Tribunal for Lebanon was the other issue, defending the Cabinet’s record in dealing with the U.N.-backed court.

“Despite internal obstacles, the Cabinet funded the court twice and maintained its international obligations in coordination with U.N. Chief Ban ki-Moon and is still committed to the tribunal,” Jumblatt said.

The court indicted last year four Hezbollah members of involvement in the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. The resistance party has denied the allegations.

“Reminding everyone that [four members were indicted] only deepens the divided between the two sects [The Sunni and Shiite],” the PSP leader said.

Jumblatt also discussed regional players using Lebanon to achieve certain goals.

“No to [Arabs] seeking to fight Iran via Lebanon and we refuse to be just another Gaza Strip,” he said.

“We reject Iran using Lebanon as a base to gain leverage over Arabs.”

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Nov-26/196149-jumblatt-says-a-return-to-dialogue-only-means-to-end-crisis.ashx#axzz2DKYO5aXY>

- **School for Syrian refugees opens in Jordan camp**

Jordan on Sunday opened a Bahrain-funded school in the Zaatari refugee camp near the Syrian border that can take up to 4,000 students, a Jordanian official said.

Jordan's education ministry and the UN children's fund UNICEF jointly run the school, in which 3,400 Syrian refugees are currently enrolled and taught by Jordanian and Syrian teachers.

A \$2-million (1.5-million euro) grant from Bahrain funded the project.

Meanwhile 62 trucks carrying aid from Saudi Arabia arrived in the Mafraq region, 85 kilometres (53 miles) north of Amman, where the Zaatari camp is located, according to Petra news agency.

It is the sixth Saudi convoy to arrive in the country, Petra said.

Jordan says it has taken in 230,000 Syrian refugees, more than 125,000 of whom have registered with the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) since the Syrian conflict broke out in March last year. More than 40,000 people have been killed in the violence, according to activists.

Around 42,000 Syrians live in the Zaatari camp, and Amman has announced the setting up of two more camps in the north of the country.

The number of Syrian refugees registered in neighbouring countries has nearly doubled since the beginning of September to more than 440,000, the UN refugee agency said on Friday.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/25/251765.html>

- **Lebanese, Armenian presidents discuss regional developments**

Lebanese President Michel Suleiman discussed the latest regional developments on Monday with Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan, particularly developments in neighboring Syria.

During a joint press conference with the Armenian president, Suleiman said he briefed Sargyzyan on “efforts deployed to resume dialogue [in Lebanon] and keep it away from the negative repercussions of the regional crises,” the National News Agency reported.

The Lebanese president also voiced his country’s support for Armenia’s independence, and its “pride in the accomplishments of Lebanese people of Armenian descent.”

He also expressed his desire to “reinforce the ties between Lebanon and Armenia in the cultural and social fields.”

Meanwhile, Sargyzyan voiced his concern over the fate of the Syrian people.

“Armenia has always stood against bloodshed, and it is impossible for the situation in Syria to be resolved without dialogue,” Sargyzyan said.

Fears of a spillover of the Syrian conflict, which has raged for more than 20 months and left over 40,000 people dead, have increased as violence has spread to Syria's borders with Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Israel.

Earlier on Monday, the Armenian president arrived in Lebanon for an official visit.

Sargyzyan had been scheduled to address the Lebanese parliament. However, last week Speaker Nabih Berri dismissed his earlier call for a plenary legislative session to receive Sargyzyan, ostensibly due to the absence of several ministers and MPs who travelled to the Vatican to participate in the ordination ceremony of Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros al-Rai as a cardinal.

Parliamentary activity in Lebanon has been disrupted since the opposition March 14 coalition announced that it would cut all ties with the current government, including meetings held by parliamentary committees to discuss proposals transferred by the cabinet.

The boycott decision followed the assassination of Lebanon’s Internal Security Forces intelligence chief Wissam al-Hassan on October 19 in Beirut’s Ashrafieh.

<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=460667>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Saudi religious center to open in Vienna**

The inauguration of a new Saudi-backed interreligious dialogue center in the Austrian capital city of Vienna has sparked controversy in the European country and abroad.

The King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) is set to officially open its doors on Monday amid its critics’ disapproval who say that Riyadh could use the center in order to spread Wahhabism and deflect attention away from human rights violations in the country.

“This dubious Wahhabist center in Vienna” will “only serve Saudi Arabia's political and religious interests abroad, under the guise of dialogue” and the only objective it pursues is to make Riyadh “respectable,” said a Muslim group in Austria.

With an annual budget of over 10 million euros (\$12.9 million) and a staff of 25, the Vienna center is set up jointly by Saudi Arabia, Spain and Austria.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and top representatives of the world's leading religions are scheduled to attend the Monday inauguration at Vienna's Hofburg Palace, while KAICIID has already embarked on an effort to persuade people of its impartiality.

Meanwhile, KAICIID secretary-general Faisal bin Abdulrahman bin Muaammar, a former Saudi deputy education minister, has said that despite Riyadh’s financing of the center for the first three years, there will be “zero politics, zero influence” in it.

He further stated that the KAICIID's decision-making body, comprised of a nine-member board of directors including important representatives of Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism, will monitor that.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/24/274269/saudi-religious-center-to-open-in-vienna/>

- **UN team to visit Bahrain over crackdown**

A team of experts from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) will travel to Bahrain next week amid concerns over the Al Khalifa regime's decision to revoke the nationality of 31 people and ban public protests.

The experts, who will be sent by UN Human Rights Commissioner Navi Pillay to the tiny Persian Gulf kingdom, will focus on the judicial system as well as on accountability for present and past human rights violations and follow up on a preliminary mission that took place last December.

"The High Commissioner regretted the decision taken by Bahraini authorities on 7 November to revoke the nationality of 31 citizens for 'having undermined state security,'" the OHCHR said.

The decision violated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which prohibits states from arbitrarily depriving people of their nationality, the office stated.

The citizens include London-based dissidents Saeed al-Shehabi and Ali Mushaima, the son of jailed opposition leader Hassan Mushaima, as well as clerics, human rights lawyers and activists.

The OHCHR said it was also "deeply concerned about the restrictions on public demonstrations and other public gatherings."

On October 30, Bahraini authorities banned all demonstrations and public gatherings amid rising protests against the ruling Al Khalifa regime.

The popular uprising began in Bahrain in mid-February 2011.

The Bahraini government promptly launched a brutal crackdown on the peaceful protests and called in Saudi-led Arab forces from neighboring states.

A report published by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry in November 2011 found that the Al Khalifa regime had used excessive force in the crackdown and accused Manama of torturing political activists, politicians and protesters.

Bahraini protesters say they will continue holding anti-regime demonstrations until their demand for the establishment of a democratically elected government is met.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/25/274372/un-team-to-visit-bahrain-over-crackdown/>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **US aims to keep 10,000 troops in Afghanistan: report**

WASHINGTON: The administration of President Barack Obama aims to keep around 10,000 US troops in Afghanistan after formal combat operations in that country end in 2014, The Wall Street Journal reported late Sunday.

Citing unnamed senior US officials, the newspaper said the plan was in line with recommendations presented by General John Allen, commander of US and international forces in Afghanistan, who has proposed a force between 6,000 and 15,000 US troops.

This force will conduct training and counterterrorism operations after the NATO mission in Afghanistan formally concludes at the end of 2014, the report said.

About 67,000 US troops are currently deployed in Afghanistan alongside 37,000 coalition troops and 337,000 local soldiers and police that make up the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

The United States and Afghanistan launched crucial talks on November 15 on the status of US forces remaining in Afghanistan after the NATO withdrawal of combat troops in 2014.

The US has stressed that it is not seeking permanent bases in Afghanistan. It is also considered likely to shy away from a security guarantee, which would require it to come to the nation's assistance against aggressors.

That, however, is seen as one of the targets of Afghan negotiators.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai is said to be willing to accept a US troop presence post-2014 as long as his key demands are met.

According to the Journal, his main request is that American forces come under the jurisdiction of Afghan courts.

However, the paper said, some defense analysts outside of the US government believe that the training and counterterrorism mission would require a much larger US presence -- perhaps as many as 30,000 troops.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/International/2012/Nov-26/196156-us-aims-to-keep-10000-troops-in-afghanistan-report.ashx#axzz2DKYO5aXY>

- **Two killed, 18 injured in east Afghanistan bomb blast**

A bomb explosion in a local market in Afghanistan's eastern province of Khost has claimed the lives of two people and injured 18 more.

The incident took place on Monday when a bomb planted on a bicycle was detonated by a remote control in the traditional bazaar in Sargardan Choak area of Khost City.

The injured have been taken to a nearby hospital, some of whom are in critical condition, medics say.

No group has yet claimed responsibility for the blast, but officials usually blame the Taliban for such attacks.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001 as part of Washington's so-called war on terror. The offensive removed the Taliban from power, but insecurity remains rampant across the country.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/26/274621/two-killed-18-injured-in-afghan-blast/>

- **Seven Shia Muslims killed, 90 injured in Pakistan Ashura bombing**

At least seven Shia Muslims have been killed and more than ninety others injured in a bomb attack during a Shia procession commemorating the Day of Ashura in northwest Pakistan.

The bombing was carried out in Dera Ismail Khan district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province early on Sunday when the procession was under way commemorating the martyrdom anniversary of Imam Hossein (PBUH).

Rescue and emergency teams were sent to the site of the bombing. Security forces cordoned off the area and launched an investigation into the attack, which was the second such incident in the district in less than two days.

Pro-Taliban militants have claimed responsibility for the deadly attack.

On Saturday, a bomb attack targeted a similar procession in the district, killing at least nine Shia Muslims, seven of them children, and injuring several others.

Security forces have been on high alert over fears of large-scale attacks on Shia Muslims across the country, as al-Qaeda-linked militants have threatened to carry out more attacks against Shias.

Heavily armed militants have targeted similar religious ceremonies in different regions of Pakistan over the past days.

According to Pakistani intelligence information, more such attacks have been planned for the coming days in the capital city of Islamabad, as well as in the cities of Karachi and Quetta.

Violence has escalated against Shia Muslims in different parts of Pakistan in recent months. Since the beginning of 2012, hundreds of Shias have been killed in the country.

Pakistani Shia leaders have called on the government to form a judicial commission to investigate the bloodshed.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/25/274390/pakistan-bombing-kills-three-on-ashura/>

This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Assistant Ebru DEMİR. 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.*

Bu bülten **ORSAM Asistanı Ebru DEMİR tarafından hazırlanmaktadır. Bülten Ortadoğu ülkelerinin yerel haber kaynaklarından derlenmektedir. Belirtilen görüşler bölge ülkelerinin haber kaynaklarına ve ismi geçen yazarlara ait olup ORSAM'ın görüşünü yansıtmamaktadır.*