



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procees of Iraq

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1. IRAQ

- **Ministry of Higher Education, UNESCO discuss National Strategy for Education**

Baghdad – The Minister of Higher Education, Ali al-Adeeb, discussed with a delegation representing the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the National Strategy for Education and Science.

A statement issued on Monday, Nov. 26, by the Cabinet's Secretariat said that the meeting that was held at the Head Quarters of the Cabinet's Secretariat discussed a number of issues, mainly. And the Organization's projects in Iraq in support of private projects in the fields of Antiquities and Culture, the UNESCO's programs to support Iraqi Universities and discussing the Ibn Sina Project.

The statement pointed out that the Iraqi Government seeks to develop the country's scientific status through the projects of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and through scientific institutions, in addition to supportive ministries, such as the Ministry of Science and Technology.

NINA

- **Agreement reached to ease Iraq's Arab-Kurd crisis**

Top federal and Kurdish security officials agreed in Baghdad on Monday to "activate" coordinating committees between their forces and work to calm the situation in northern Iraq, a statement said.

Tensions are running high in parts of the country's north that the autonomous Kurdistan region wants to incorporate over the strong objections of Baghdad, and military reinforcements have been sent to disputed areas.

Parliament speaker Osama al-Nujaifi has been pushing to resolve the crisis between Baghdad and Kurdistan, which he has warned could lead to civil war.

The two sides agreed to continue meeting "and to activate the higher coordinating committees between the (federal) armed forces and the (Kurdish) regional guard forces" known as peshmerga, a statement from military spokesman Colonel Dhia al-Wakil said, without providing details on the committees.

They also agreed to begin "calming the situation and searching for mechanisms to withdraw the units that were mobilised after the crisis to their former locations," the statement said.

The meeting was chaired by national security adviser Falah al-Fayadh and attended by Iraqi General Faruq al-Araji, US Lieutenant General Robert Caslen and delegations from the federal defence ministry and the Kurdistan ministry responsible for the peshmerga forces, it said.

The peshmerga ministry's media office said the Kurdish delegation included top peshmerga officials Jabbar Yawar and Anwar Haj Othman, though confirmation of the agreement was not immediately available from the Kurdish side.

Nujaifi has been holding talks since Wednesday with political leaders in Baghdad and Kurdistan in a bid to reduce tensions.

Earlier on Monday, Kurdistan premier Nechirvan Barzani told a news conference that "Iraq's problems will not be

addressed by force" and "will only be addressed by dialogue".

Barzani also said a high-level Kurdish delegation would travel to Baghdad on Tuesday for meetings, and expressed hope that Nuajifi's efforts would yield results.

The recent establishment of the Tigris Operations Command, which covers disputed territory in the north, drew an angry response from Kurdish leaders who want to incorporate much of the area into their autonomous region.

Kurdistan president Massud Barzani said peshmerga clashed with Iraqi forces in the disputed town of Tuz Khurmatu on November 16, after which he ordered the peshmerga to be in "a highest state of readiness".

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's office warned the peshmerga "not to change their positions or approach the (federal) armed forces," and the two sides traded accusations about reinforcements being deployed.

The territory row poses the biggest threat to Iraq's long-term stability, diplomats and

officials say. Ties between the two sides are also marred by disputes over oil and power-sharing.

<http://uk.news.yahoo.com/dialogue-only-way-solve-iraq-dispute-kurd-pm-132752050.html>

- **Iraq should utilize strategic position in international communication - Maliki**

BAGHDAD-Iraq: Iraqi Premier Nouri al-Maliki today called to utilize Iraq's strategic position in the fields of international communication.

A statement received by Aswat al-Iraq, reported that Maliki received the Acting Communication Minister along with his senior officials today.

During the meeting, he stressed the Ministry's importance with regards to services and called on the parliament to expedite endorsing the ministry's law.

Investment issues were also tackled in the meeting, particularly in fields not connected with the country's information security.

Maliki confirmed necessity to minimize communication costs to be available to all citizens.

Aswat al-Iraq

- **Barzani declares Kurdistan's support for U.S. troop's return in disputed areas**

Shafaq News / Nov 26:- President of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) announced on Monday, the region's support for the return of U.S. forces to supervise the disputed areas between Baghdad and Erbil, calling to manage these areas jointly under the auspices of the U.S. army.

Nejirvan Barzani said at a news conference in Erbil attended by "Shafaq News" that "KRG supports the return of U.S. troops to supervise the disputed areas."

Relations between Erbil and Baghdad heightened tensions after the government announced the formation of Dijla Operations Command in the disputed areas in Kirkuk, Diyala, Salahuddin provinces and the Kurdish leadership and Kirkuk Provincial Council rejection for this step.

Armed clash occurred between the guards of one of the headquarters of Kurdish parties in Tuz Khurmatu district in Salahuddin province and a force of the federal police on Friday, killing one civilian and wounding ten policemen.

<http://www.shafaag.com/en/news/4165-barzani-declares-kurdistan-support-for-the-us-troops-return-to-the-disputed-areas.html>

- **Barzani: Maliki Wants to Occupy Kurdistan Region**

Xendan/Nov 26:- Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani states that "the term of Iraqi Prime Minister has expired and we cannot work with him since he wants to occupy Kurdistan Region by F-16 jet fighters".

In his meeting with a group of journalists and writers working for Arab media channels , Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani states that "Iraqi Prime Minister wants to be the solo powerful leader in Iraq", accusing the Iraqi premier of having too many "windings and turns" , adding "he acts against agreements; there is difference between his deeds and words".

"Maliki thinks of occupying Kurdistan Region by military forces" Barzani disclosed.

Barzani also discloses that in a secret meeting military commanders demands Maliki to extend their military influence to even Salahaddin Resort [Barzani's residence] but Maliki asks them to be patient until the arrival of F-16 jets since the work will be much easier by then.

In the meeting, Barzani hops for the war not to break out with the Iraqi army in the disputed areas but he, at the same time, emphasizes that, if happened, Kurdistan Region is fully prepared and will triumph.

XENDAN

- **Nechirvan Barzani: Crisis with Federal Government will not be solved through use of arms**

Erbil – Prime Minister of Kurdistan Region, Nechirvan Barzani, said that the crisis between Baghdad and Erbil will not be solved by force or through the use of arms and tanks, but through dialogue and going back to previous agreements.

In a press conference held on Monday, Nov. 26, in Erbil, Nechirvan Barzani said that, "The Region's stance toward forming Dijla Operations Command is clear, we are not against organizing forces, but when such force includes security, Asayish and police institution in Kirkuk, then this violates agreements reached between the two sides."

He warned from continued tension that will get the country into continued crisis that harm the Region and Iraq in general; he called for solving problems through relying on the Constitution and sitting around talks table.

Nechirvan Barzani concluded, "If the ongoing meetings and talks between the Kurdish military delegation and the Federal Ministry of Defence result in agreement on Dijla Operation, then the Peshmerga forces will withdraw from their positions in the disputed areas."

NINA

- **Jindiani: "al-Maliki formed Dijla Operations Command, so Iraqi people would overlook the real crisis"**

Nov 26:- Azad Jindiani the spokesman of the Political Bureau of the Patriotic Union

of Kurdistan had proposed a question regarding Monday's meeting in Baghdad between Peshmerga Ministry and Iraqi Defense Ministry over the disputed areas especially Kirkuk, his question was; if this was the real problem or there is much bigger crisis?

Jindiani said in an article was published in Kurdish under the title "fields tension are secretions, the goal is dealing with Iraq's bigger crisis"

The joint meeting between Peshmerga Ministry and Iraqi Defense Ministry to discuss the recent tensions which were the results of forming Dijla Operations Command and the moves of the Iraqi army in the disputed areas.

Jindiani stressed that "Kurdistan delegation for today's meeting have the intention to solve the crisis, we hope that Defense Ministry have the same intention"

Al-Maliki had formed Dijla Operations in the aim of forcing the Iraqi people and the political parties to overlook the real crisis, he added.

Jindiani said “there is no doubt that preventing the crisis development in the disputed areas is a very important thing but preventing that can’t be considered as an attempt to alleviate the country from its current crisis,” adding “that may be the intention of the Prime Minister, but the political parties including Kurdistan Alliance doesn’t want to exclude the crisis in that field”.

“That is a fact and the negotiation delegation has to realize that fact, and that the crisis had grown bigger, Iraqi government’s escaping from its responsibilities is not helping any one, which is a clear fact for all parties” Jindiani added.

He stressed that dealing with the tension is a lot easier than negotiations which is canceling the formation of Dijla Operations and afterword, searching for solutions and Kurdistan Region have to have an essential role in the two sides agreements.

<http://pukmedia.co/english/index.php/77/kurdistan-region/3193-jindiani-%E2%80%9Cal-maliki-formed-dijla-operations-command,-so-iraqi-people->

[would-overlook-the-real-crisis%E2%80%9D](#)

- **Zebari, al-Zaid discuss Iraqi-Saudi prisoners' exchange agreement**

BAGHDAD - Foreign Minister Hoshiar Zebari discussed with Saudi Ambassador to Baghdad Fahad Abdul Muhsin Al-Zaid questions related to exchange of mutual prisoners, as well as the recent executions in Saudi Arabia.

In a statement by the ministry, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, both sides discussed the importance of normalizing bilateral relations, the prisoners' questions and the agreement on exchanging detainees and prisoners' agreement.

Both sides stressed the importance of ratification of the agreement to achieve a mechanism for joint action and cooperation.

On the economic level, both sides discussed economic, trade and investment relations and the need to open border vents to enhance trade and transport activities for both sides.

Aswat al-Iraq

- **Mohammed al-Askari: arrest of an armed group accused of assassinations with silenced weapons**

Baghdad -Adviser for the Ministry of Defence Lt. Gen. Mohammed al-Askari announced the arrest of an armed group accused of assassinations with silenced weapons in Baghdad.

He said in a press conference today, "The Directorate of Military Intelligence arrested two groups the first which consist of six person named / the financial group/ the second which consist of five ,carrying out kidnappings and killings consist of five person, has carried out several terrorist acts targeting citizens and employees of security services in the areas north and south of Baghdad."

NINA

2. IRAN

- **Iran's embassy rejects alleged reports on exporting free oil to Jordan**

Tehran, Nov 27, IRNA – Iran's Embassy in Amman has rejected the Jordanian Josat TV report misquoting Iranian ambassador Mostafa Moslehzadeh over export of Iran's free oil to Jordan.

In a letter to the Josat TV director, the Press Section of Iran's Embassy in Jordan complained Tuesday that certain news sites had used the Josat's report misquoting the Iranian ambassador as saying that Iran was to export free of charge oil to Jordan for 30 years for what the TV channel had called "religious tourism."

"The term 'religious tourism' was mentioned by the host of the TV channel's program while the Iranian ambassador had suggested, according to his taped statements, that Iranian and Jordanian delegations exchange views on promotion of bilateral trade, political and cultural relations including the issue of oil. It will be clear during the talks that what kind of goods could Jordan offer in return of the Iranian oil," said the letter.

It added the ambassador's remarks were made completely "in line with Iran's strategy of promoting unity among the Islamic World and meeting needs of Muslim nations in order to make them self-sufficient ."

<http://old.irna.ir/News/Politic/Iran%E2%80%99s-embassy-rejects-alleged-reports-on-exporting-free-oil-to-Jordan/80431056>

- **South Korean speaker: Iran reliable source for providing energy**

Beijing, Nov 27, IRNA – South Korean National Assembly Speaker Kang Chang-hee said Iran is a reliable source for providing energy to his country.

He made the remark in Seoul on Tuesday in a meeting with the Iranian Ambassador to South Korea Ahmad Masoumifar.

The South Korean official pointed to the history of ties between the two nations especially in cultural areas and stressed the need to enhance level of mutual economic exchanges to dlrs 18 billion.

Noting that Iran provided 10 percent of South Korea's imported energy resources, he also said that Seoul attached great importance to ties with Tehran.

Masoumifar underlined the need for expansion of parliamentarian cooperation between the two countries.

He further conveyed warm greetings of the Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani to his South Korean counterpart and voiced Iran's readiness to develop and promote ties with South Korea in all possible areas including exchange of visits between the two speakers as well as the parliamentary friendship groups.

Tehran and Seoul are preparing many special cultural and social ceremonies this year to celebrate half a century of ties.

<http://old.irna.ir/News/Politic/South-Korean-speaker,-Iran-reliable-source-for-providing-energy/80431113>

- **Iran, Hamas enjoy strategic ties: Ambassador**

Beirut, Nov 26, IRNA -- Iranian Ambassador to Beirut Ghazanfar Roknabadi said on Monday although Iran and Hamas have some differences on Syrian issue but both enjoy strategic ties.

He made the remarks in a meeting with editorial board of the Lebanese "Al-Lavaa' newspaper.

Underlying the resistance's better situation compared to 2000, Roknabadi

said that the Zionist regime had wrongly assessed Hamas as weak and tested its military power against Hamas but failed to defeat it.

He said that Iran believes in the settlement of the Palestinian issue, their return to their own homeland, holding a free election with participation of all Palestinian Muslim, Christian and Jewish citizens but the US and the other Western governments prefer to save the Zionist regime.

[http://old.irna.ir/News/Politic/Iran,-
Hamas-enjoy-strategic-ties,-
Ambassador/80430584](http://old.irna.ir/News/Politic/Iran,-
Hamas-enjoy-strategic-ties,-
Ambassador/80430584)

- **Iran becomes chair of GECF**

TEHRAN, Nov. 27 (MNA) - Iran has been named the new chair of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) and will host a GECF summit in autumn 2013.

Leaders of the world's biggest gas suppliers ended their first summit in Doha, Qatar on November 13. During the gathering, they restated the need for a fair gas price, while Iran, whose president was absent, warned that Western taxation could derail the energy market, according to AFP.

The GECF issued a declaration after the one-day summit, in which the 12 member states emphasized “the need to reach a fair price for natural gas based on gas to oil... prices indexation.”

Iranian Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi called the meeting “a turning point in the history of the natural gas industry,” but criticized the taxes imposed on energy exports by Western consumer countries.

Any taxation by consumer countries “will derail the energy market,” Qasemi stated, adding that the fall in the value of the dollar has “negatively affected the world economy.”

The forum unites 12 countries as full members and 3 as observers. The full members possess 70 percent of the world's gas reserves and account for 42 percent of gas production, 38 percent of transport through gas pipelines, and 85 percent of the liquefied natural gas (LNG) business.

The GECF members are Algeria, Bolivia, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Iran, Libya, Nigeria, Oman, Qatar, Russia, Trinidad &

Tobago, and Venezuela, while Kazakhstan, Norway, and the Netherlands have observer status.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1752270>

- **Iran's Larijani discusses regional issues with Assad, Nasrallah, Erdogan**

Larijani met with the Syrian president on Friday. However, the details of their meeting were not released.

Before leaving Tehran for Damascus on the same day, Larijani told reporters, "I am traveling to Syria for consultations about regional issues. A conference was held in Iran to help resolve the Syrian issue, and we hope that there is a clear path toward the resolution of the Syrian problem."

The Iranian Majlis speaker was referring to the first Syrian national dialogue meeting, which was held in Tehran on November 18 and 19.

During his meeting with Larijani on Friday, the Hezbollah secretary general hailed Iran's role in the victories of the resistance movements in Lebanon and Palestine over the past years and thanked the support that Iran is providing to them.

Larijani said that Iran will continue to support the struggle of the courageous Palestinians and Lebanese against the occupation of the Zionist regime.

The Iranian MP also held a meeting with Erdogan on Saturday and discussed the latest developments in the region with him.

Military solution to Syrian issue rejected outright: Larijani

On Friday, Larijani held a meeting with Syrian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Jihad al-Laham and discussed the latest development in the Arab country with him.

After the meeting, the Iranian Majlis speaker attended a press conference, in which he said, "What we are emphasizing in Syria is that reforms and democracy should be realized, and we reject military intervention in the country outright. We will continue our negotiations with other countries to achieve a political solution to the Syrian issue."

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1752349>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

• PA submits draft statehood resolution to UNGA

The Palestinian Authority late Monday night submitted a draft resolution to the UN General Assembly which, if approved, would upgrade its status to non-member observer state.

The vote is scheduled to take place on Thursday in the 193-seat body.

The Palestinian resolution reportedly is 316-words-long and calls for a resumption of peace talks with Israel following the UN vote.

According to the Wall Street Journal, the draft lacks any mention of a construction moratorium in Israeli settlements as a precondition for future negotiations, nor of joining UN agencies and treaties.

The move came despite ongoing US efforts to prevent the Palestinian Authority from bringing the resolution to a vote, a senior US official said Monday, according to the Journal.

“Our message to the Palestinians has not changed,” the official said. “We believe that bringing forward a resolution on statehood is unwise, does not help bring them closer to their legitimate aspirations, and will create an environment less positive for negotiations. We are trying to prevent this from happening, don’t want it to happen, and it has not happened yet.”

One Israeli official said that the US was working actively in the UN to try and use procedural measures to block Abbas from even being able to bring the resolution to a vote. He said the US was also working in various key capitals around the world to convince other countries not to support it.

Although the 27-member EU has not yet decided how it would vote on the resolution, the Israeli official said the majority of EU states would like to see a consensus position, and that if a consensus could be reached, they would likely abstain on the matter.

“There is still a concerted effort to reach a consensus,” one official said. “The Europeans love a consensus.”

The EU failed to agree last November when the Palestinians gained statehood admission into UNESCO, with five EU countries voting against the move, 11 supporting and another 11 abstaining.

That Palestinian move led to an automatic halting of US funds to UNESCO, as mandated by US law.

The senior American official said whether the US would have to cut off funding to the UN General Assembly if it adopted the Palestinian resolution depended on “what is in the resolution and what form it takes.”

Congress, he added, “has already said there will be repercussions in our system.”

The official said that the US was “as supportive of a two-state solution as it has ever been, and intends on working on it.”

But, he added, “this step runs counter and makes things harder.”

The Financial Times reported Monday that the United Kingdom is preparing to support the PA's UN bid. Citing unnamed officials, the report stated that London

was seeking assurances from the PA that: it would not seek to join the International Criminal Court or other UN agencies; it would not take its statehood bid to the UN Security Council; and that it would return to negotiations with Israel without preconditions.

According to the report, London would support the bid in an attempt to bolster PA President Mahmoud Abbas, who is viewed as a moderate alternative to Hamas and other rival Palestinian organizations.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=293589>

- **'Israel to wait for Abbas's next move before reacting'**

The magnitude of Israel's response to the Palestinian Authority's bid to gain recognition at the United Nations a non-member observer state will depend on what PA President Mahmoud Abbas does once he obtains that status, diplomatic officials said Sunday.

The officials were echoing remarks National Security Council head Yaakov Amidror said in a Meet the Press interview on Saturday. Amidror did not detail what

action Israel would take, beyond saying that it could not “accept a unilateral action that breaks the rules of the game.” Amidror said the move in the General Assembly, unlike the PA’s unsuccessful attempt in 2011 to go through the Security Council and gain entrance into the UN as a member state, was “mostly symbolic.”

“We will have to wait and see what he does with it, and then act,” Amidror said, refusing to even reveal what possible reactions were in Israel’s arsenal.

Diplomatic officials said that Israel has been urged by the EU and the US not to “overreact” to the Palestinian bid, and to wait and see what Abbas did once the resolution passed before taking any “irreversible” actions.

Israel’s possible responses have ranged from the mild – such as withholding PA tax revenue – to the harsh: annexing the large settlement blocs.

One voice in the government advocating rupturing ties with Abbas and the PA over the move is Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman, who for months has accused

Abbas of engaging in diplomatic terror against Israel, and has advocated severing all ties with him.

Liberman will convene a meeting Monday of senior Foreign Ministry officials to discuss Abbas’s move.

One ministry official clarified, however, that this meeting will deal more with Israel’s attempts to convince the world’s democracies not to support the move, than with deciding what Israel’s response will be – a decision that will be made at the cabinet level.

European diplomats have been in discussion with the PA about securing a commitment not to take Israel to the International Criminal Court if it achieves non-member statehood status in the UN, in order to mollify Israel and ensure a tamer response from Jerusalem.

<http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=293437>

- **Mixed reactions from Hamas to Abbas's UN bid**

The Hamas leadership appeared on Monday to be divided over Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas’s

effort to ask the UN General Assembly to upgrade the status of the Palestinian entity to nonmember observer state.

Meanwhile, Abbas arrived in Jordan Monday, from where he is expected to head to New York to file the request for upgrading the status to a Palestinian state. Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal phoned Abbas to express his support for the statehood bid, according to a statement the president's office issued.

Mashaal "welcomed" Abbas's effort to upgrade the status of Palestine, the statement added. The Hamas leader stressed that the statehood bid should be "in the context of a national and strategic vision that preserves the national rights and principles and is based on elements of power possessed by the Palestinians, first and foremost the resistance."

Mashaal also emphasized the need to end the Hamas- Fatah rivalry in the wake of "our people's victory in the Gaza Strip" during Operation Pillar of Defense.

Ezat Risheq, a senior Hamas official, explained that Mashaal supported the statehood bid on condition that it did not

include relinquishing or making concessions on "one inch of our Palestinian land – from the sea to the river."

Last week, Abbas's office announced that Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh had phoned the PA president to "welcome" the UN bid. It also claimed Islamic Jihad had voiced support for the statehood bid, although this claim was later denied by one of its officials in the Gaza Strip.

Taher a-Nunu, spokesman for the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip, quickly denied that Haniyeh had expressed support for the statehood bid.

Azzam al-Ahmed, a top Fatah official in the West Bank, praised Mashaal for supporting the statehood bid as a "step in the right direction."

But Mahmoud Zahar, a senior Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, mocked Abbas's statehood bid. He told Palestinian reporters during a meeting in Gaza City that Abbas was going to the UN to ask for a "rugged state."

Zahar also ridiculed Abbas for stating recently that Operation Pillar of Defense was designed to thwart the statehood bid at the UN.

“Abbas says he is responsible for all the Palestinians everywhere,” Zahar said.

“But I say that Abbas does not represent me and is not responsible for me in anything.”

He revealed that he has asked the prosecutor-general’s office to arrest Abbas when and if he visits the Gaza Strip.

Zahar said that he had filed a complaint for slander and libel against Abbas over remarks the PA president made during Operation Cast Lead in 2008 and 2009.

Abbas was at the time quoted as saying that Zahar had fled the Gaza Strip to Egypt out of fear for his life.

“When [Abbas] comes to Gaza, I will ask the prosecutor- general to arrest him because he is a liar. He is a president who lies. How can someone like him represent me?” the Hamas leader added.

Zahar’s remarks drew sharp criticism from Fatah officials in the West Bank who accused him of seeking to damage renewed efforts to end the dispute between the two parties.

Following the recent IDF offensive in the Gaza Strip, both Hamas and Fatah have pledged to resume negotiations to end their power struggle. Before leaving Ramallah, Abbas said that after the UN vote he will work toward achieving reconciliation with Hamas.

Fatah spokesman Ahmed Assaf called on the Hamas leadership to “rein in” Zahar and put an end to his “shameful and strange” statements.

Assaf said that Zahar was “singing out of tune” and trying to sabotage efforts to achieve reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas.

The Fatah spokesman said that the “battle of going to the UN was not a personal battle, but the battle of the entire Palestinian people.”

This was not the first time that differences have erupted between Mashaal and

Hamas leaders in the Gaza Strip. Earlier this year, Zahar and other Hamas officials in the Gaza Strip criticized Mashaal for signing the Doha Declaration to end the Hamas-Fatah dispute.

The agreement, which was never implemented, called, among other things, for the establishment of a new Palestinian government headed by Abbas as a first step toward ending the rivalry between the two sides.

Zahar said then that it would be a mistake for Abbas to head the Palestinian government.

He and other Hamas officials complained that Mashaal had failed to consult with them before signing the declaration with Abbas.

<http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=293529>

- **Arafat's remains exhumed, experts seek evidence of poison**

The body of the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was exhumed on Tuesday by a team of international experts trying to discover if he was poisoned, as many Palestinians believe.

French magistrates opened a murder inquiry in August into Arafat's death in Paris after a Swiss institute said it had discovered high levels of radioactive polonium on his clothing, which was supplied by his widow, Suha.

Arafat, who led the Palestinians' bid for a state through years of war and peacemaking, died in Paris aged 75 in 2004 after a short, mysterious illness.

No autopsy was carried out at the time, at the request of Suha, and French doctors who treated him said they were unable to determine the cause of death.

But allegations of foul play immediately surfaced, with many locals pointing the finger at Israel, which confined Arafat to his West Bank headquarters in Ramallah for the final two and a half years of his life after a Palestinian uprising erupted.

Israel has denied any wrongdoing, inviting the Palestinian leadership to release all his medical records, which were never made public following his death.

The official radio station Voice of Palestine reported that Arafat had been disinterred on Tuesday after work began at dawn.

Experts from Switzerland, France, Russia and the Palestinian territories took part in the exhumation, which was carried out far from the public gaze, behind blue sheeting carefully erected around his limestone mausoleum in Ramallah.

Workers strung up a huge Palestinian flag to cover the top of the city centre landmark, which lies inside the presidential compound of Arafat's successor, Mahmoud Abbas.

"Samples will be taken according to a very strict protocol and these samples will be analysed," said Darcy Christen, spokesman for the Lausanne University Hospital in Switzerland that carried out the original tests on Arafat's clothes.

"In order to do these analyses, to check, cross check and double cross check, it will take several months and I don't think we'll have anything tangible available before March or April next year," he added.

French investigators

Polonium, apparently ingested with food, was found to have caused the death of former Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko in London in 2006. But some experts have questioned whether Arafat could have died in this way, pointing to a brief recovery during his illness that they said was not consistent with radioactive poisoning. They also noted he did not lose all his hair.

Eight years is considered the limit to detect any traces of the fast-decaying polonium and the Lausanne hospital questioned in August if it would be worth seeking any samples if access to Arafat's body was delayed to "October or November."

Not all of Arafat's family has agreed to the exhumation and Suha herself has not come to Ramallah for the operation. Arafat's remains will be reburied with full military honours later on Tuesday after the forensic work is complete.

Working in parallel with the forensic team, French magistrates are also in Ramallah this week questioning members of Arafat's inner circle to see if they can shed light on his death.

One source told Reuters the French had a list of 60 questions, with at least one man facing five hours of grilling.

While many Palestinians believe that Israel was behind the death, they acknowledge that a Palestinian would almost certainly have had to administer the poison, wittingly or unwittingly.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/27/252029.html>

- **Arafat's Grave Opened to Investigate into His Death**

RAMALLAH, November 27, 2012 (WAFA) – Late leader Yasser Arafat's grave was opened on Tuesday at al-Muqata'a, in Ramallah, to take samples from his remains as part of the investigation into the reasons behind his death.

The grave was opened during a military ceremony and without any media coverage. It will be re-closed later today.

Tawfiq Tirawi, head of committee investigating the death of Yasser Arafat, said that "we are convinced Israel assassinated Arafat... and no matter what the results given by Russian, Swiss and

French experts will be, the case will remain open."

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21182>

- **UNRWA Calls To "Seize Opportunity" after Gaza Ceasefire**

JERUSALEM, November 26, 2012 (WAFA) - UNRWA's Commissioner General Filippo Grandi Monday called on the international community and the parties to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to "seize the opportunity" provided by the Gaza ceasefire.

He described last week's Israeli war on Gaza as "tragic escalation" and urged all to "address the real problems underlying the crisis."

Speaking to UNRWA's Advisory Commission, Grandi called for "the illegal Israeli blockade (on Gaza) to be lifted in all its aspects— crossings, fishing zones, imports, exports – with proper guarantees given to and by all parties in respect of the security of all civilians."

Grandi recognized that to address root causes "difficult political work would have to be carried out, including promoting and

supporting lasting Palestinian unity. But failing to act now will have dire consequences. The greatest danger is to return to the status quo ante, and restore the prison-like conditions of Gaza. If this happened, it would be only a matter of time till violence resumed.”

He added that the crisis in Gaza was 'about the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a broader sense, with all its elements, including the situation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.”

Grandi also briefed Advisory Committee members on the crisis in Syria, where he said “concerns about the welfare of the half million Palestine refugees there have grown as they are increasingly affected by the conflict.”

He said that the vast majority of Palestinians in Syria “maintain the shield of neutrality aware that their protection depends on it.”

However, Grandi warned that “we do observe explicit efforts to draw them into the conflict. It is therefore not difficult to imagine that they become, increasingly, targets of attacks – in the midst of a

situation in which the killing and kidnapping of civilians, the destruction of their homes, and widespread fear have become so common that they don't make the headlines any longer.”

“UNRWA's strategy in Syria, as in Gaza”, he said, “is to be there, maintain services and address the growing emergency needs as much as possible.”

UNRWA, he said, “possesses proven operational abilities, through its existing staff capacity and infrastructure and will continue to build Palestinian resilience by continuing education, health and relief services, meeting emergency needs for food and supplies, particularly during winter, and assisting with shelter repair.”

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21179>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Egypt's Morsi stands by decree**

Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi has told the country's senior judges that he did not infringe on their authority when he seized near absolute powers.

An aide to Morsi said the decree was limited to "sovereignty-related issues," but that did not satisfy his critics.

The uncompromising stance came during Monday's meeting between Morsi and members of the Supreme Judiciary Council in a bid to resolve a four-day crisis that has plunged the country into a new round of turmoil with clashes between the two sides that have left one protester dead and hundreds wounded.

The judiciary, the main target of Morsi's edicts, also has pushed back, calling the decrees a power grab and an "assault" on the branch's independence.

Judges and prosecutors stayed away from many courts in Cairo and other cities on Sunday and Monday.

Meanwhile, the Muslim Brotherhood has called off a mass demonstration in Cairo, originally planned for Tuesday, "until further notice" in order to "avoid clashes".

'Sovereign matters'

Activists on Monday were camped in Cairo's Tahrir Square for a fourth 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.

Mona Amer, spokesman for the opposition movement Popular Current, said Tuesday's protest would go on.

"We asked for the cancellation of the decree and that did not happen," she said.

Before the president's announcement, leftist politician Hamdeen Sabahy said protests would continue until the decree was scrapped and said Tahrir would be a model of an "Egypt that will not accept a new dictator because it brought down the old one".

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 ten per cent - halted only by automatic curbs - was the worst since the uprising that toppled former President Hosni Mubarak in February, 2011.

"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.

But his calls for dialogue have been rejected by members of the National Salvation Front, a new opposition coalition of liberals, leftists and other politicians and parties, who until Morsi's decree had been a fractious bunch struggling to unite.

The Front includes Sabahy, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Mohamed ElBaradei and former Arab League chief Amr Moussa.

The military has stayed out of the crisis after leading Egypt through a messy 16-month transition to a presidential election in June.

Analysts say Morsi neutralised the army when he sacked top generals in August, appointing a new generation who now owe their advancement to the president.

Though the military still wields influence through business interests and a security role, it is out of frontline politics.

"There is no room for dialogue when a dictator imposes the most oppressive, abhorrent measures and then says 'let us split the difference'," 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 fleshes out Hamas-Israel truce deal**

Egyptian mediators have begun separate talks with Hamas and with Israel to flesh out details of a ceasefire agreed last week that ended eight days of fighting in the Gaza Strip.

An Egyptian official told Reuters the talks would discuss Palestinian demands for the opening of more Israeli crossings into Gaza - a move that would help end six years of blockade of the coastal enclave ruled by the Hamas movement.

He also said that Cairo would also urge both sides to cement their commitments to the ceasefire agreement.

Senior Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahar told reporters on Saturday that the group wanted to see the opening of all four goods crossings with Israel that used to operate before 2006.

Only one operates at present, with a second passenger terminal reserved for the handful of Palestinians and foreigners who are allowed in and out of the territory.

Ceasefire

The Egyptian-brokered ceasefire came into force last Wednesday, ending hostilities between the two sides that cost the lives of 167 Palestinians and six Israelis.

Israeli soldiers shot dead a Palestinian man on Friday after he approached the Gazan "no-go" border area, apparently in the belief that under the terms of the ceasefire deal he was unable to go up to the heavily patrolled fence.

Alarmed by the prospect of the truce failing, Egypt encouraged Hamas police to be deployed along the border line to keep Gazans away and prevent further violence.

A day later Israeli troops avoided interfering when Gaza farmers neared the fence to tend to their land, and Israel also eased its restrictions at sea, permitting

Gaza fishermen to head farther away from the coast than in the past three years.

However, the text of the truce stipulated that issues such as access to the borders, free movement for Gazans and the transfer of goods would be dealt with "after 24 hours".

Israeli blockade

Israel imposed restrictions on Gaza in 2006, following an election victory by Hamas. Some of the import and export limits have since been eased, but Israel still prevents a long list of goods into the territory - including many items needed for construction - arguing they could be used for the manufacture of weapons.

Israel launched its air offensive against the Gaza Strip on November 14 with the declared aim of deterring fighters from firing rockets into its territory.

In the process of targeting Hamas fighters during its latest operation: Pillar of Clouds, the Israeli military has killed over 100 Palestinians, the majority of which were women and children.

The Israeli military also says its soldiers have come under increasing attack from the border area this year, including earlier this month when a jeep was hit by an anti-tank missile.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/11/20121126223424685424.html>

- **FM discusses political crisis, Gaza with Clinton**

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke with Egyptian Foreign Minister Mohamed Kamel Amr on Monday to underscore US hopes that Egypt's political crisis can be resolved in a democratic manner, the State Department said.

Clinton reiterated US concerns about Egyptian President Mohamed Morsy's decision to assume sweeping powers and checked in on the progress of discussions between Morsy and senior judges on the way forward, State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland told a news briefing.

"The secretary underscored the importance of settling these disputes in a democratic manner, so we look forward to

seeing the outcome of that (discussion)," Nuland said.

"We want to see the constitutional process move forward in a way that does not overly concentrate power in one set of hands," Nuland said.

She said Clinton also used the phone call to follow up on Gaza, where Egypt brokered a truce after a week of fighting between Israel and the Palestinians.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/fm-discusses-political-crisis-gaza-clinton>

- **Morsy 'optimistic' about current instability; another Constituent Assembly member resigns**

President Mohamed Morsy is optimistic that Egyptians will overcome the current political instability caused by his recent constitutional declaration, presidential spokesperson Yasser Ali said Monday, as the only woman on the Constituent Assembly's drafting committee withdrew from the constitution-drafting body.

He added that the declaration does not mean the president intends to dominate the judiciary.

“[The 22 November declaration] is allowed under legislative powers granted to the president by the 12 August constitutional declaration,” Ali said. “The president explained this in his meeting with the Supreme Judicial Council, during which he assured his respect for the judiciary.”

“The declaration aims to achieve economic stability and social justice, and to form an elected parliament that reflects the aspirations of the people,” Ali told reporters after Morsy’s meeting with Arab justice ministers on Monday.

“It also aims to end the transitional phase as soon as possible,” he said. “If the president was seeking absolute power, he would have extended the transitional period.”

“The transitional period will never end if we do not have a constitution and a Parliament,” he added.

The presidential spokesperson stressed that, “Democracy means respect for the opposition, which we have ... But we wish there had been no casualties.” He said the president ordered investigation into the

deaths of two protesters over the past days, one in Cairo and the other in Damanhour.

Ali added that there is no time left for disagreement within the Constituent Assembly. “There are only eight or 10 contentious points in the constitution,” he said. “And the president gave more time for the assembly to resolve them.”

Manar al-Shorbagy, professor of political science at The American University in Cairo, announced Monday that she left the assembly in protest against Morsy’s decree.

Shorbagy’s withdrawal came after a series of resignations last week in objection to Islamist domination over the assembly. Representatives of churches, liberal parties, youth movements and the Journalists Syndicate have withdrawn.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/morsy-optimistic-about-current-instability-another-constituent-assembly-member-resigns>

- **Interior Ministry: Police won't use force against protesters, but thugs may incite violence**

Thugs are likely to infiltrate Tuesday's protests to incite clashes between demonstrators and police, alleged Interior Minister Ahmed Gamal Eddin on Monday.

Leftist forces have called for mass protests in Tahrir Square against President Mohamed Morsy's recent constitutional declaration, while a rival pro-Morsy rally has been called by the Muslim Brotherhood in front of the Renaissance Monument in Giza.

"All troops have instructions to respect peaceful demonstrations which do not entail acts of vandalism," he stated.

Security measures will be strict around all public institutions that could be exposed to threats. The Interior Ministry is "neutral toward all political forces," Eddin added.

The minister met with Morsy and Prime Minister Hesham Qandil on Monday afternoon, he said, to assess the security situation. Eddin briefed Morsy on security procedures and the president stressed that the police must not use force against the demonstrators, Eddin claimed.

Despite these reassurances, some institutions plan to close or work half days tomorrow due to the planned protests. Cairo University head Hossam Kamel said that the university would stop work at 2 pm on Tuesday due to the events.

Kamel told Al-Masry Al-Youm that the Giza Traffic Department notified the university that traffic would be rerouted in the area starting from 2 pm, so the university decided to end work and lectures at that time and run the staff buses early.

Marches led by student movements are scheduled to depart from the university's main gate to Tahrir Square at 3 pm.

The Muslim Brotherhood intends to demonstrate in front of the Renaissance Statue in Giza very close to the university at 5 pm.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/interior-ministry-police-won-t-use-force-against-protesters-thugs-may-incite-violence>

- **DR Congo rebels dispute deal on Goma pullout**

M23 rebels controlling the eastern city of Goma in the DR Congo have said they are not about to withdraw as demanded by regional leaders.

The rebels said on Tuesday they were still in charge of Goma, just hours after General Aronda Nyakairima, the head of the Ugandan military, was quoted by the Reuters news agency as saying that their leader, Sultani Makenga, had told him he would pull out of Goma and Sake.

"We met last night and I communicated to him the decision of regional leaders reached on Saturday and he accepted to pull back his forces out of Goma and Sake and also stop any further advances southward," Nyakayirima said.

Uganda, which shares a border with the DR Congo and has been accused along with its neighbour Rwanda of backing the rebels, is leading efforts to find a solution to the conflict.

Al Jazeera's Peter Greste, reporting from the Ugandan capital Kampala, said it was hard to confirm the claim that the rebels

were planning to pull out of Goma unless they corroborated it.

African leaders, mainly from the Great Lakes region - Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and DR Congo, called on the rebels on Saturday to abandon their aim of toppling the government and leave the city of Goma they captured last week.

Goma is the main city in DR Congo's North Kivu province.

The rebels take their name from a March 23, 2009, agreement that the DR Congo government signed with the CNDP, a rebel group whose fighters were integrated into the national army.

Those fighters mutinied in April 2012 citing poor pay and working conditions before they started fighting the government.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2012/11/2012112782314279481.html>

- **2 officers killed in attack on Nigerian police HQ**

A "large number" of gunmen have attacked a major police station in the Nigerian capital Abuja, killing two officers

and enabling five detainees to escape, police officials say.

The attack on the Special Anti-Robbery Squad headquarters occurred around 2 a.m. on Monday, with police claiming to have repelled the assailants and arrested two of them, Reuters reported.

"Policemen on duty responded swiftly and engaged the gunmen in a gun battle that lasted for some minutes, at the end of which the gunmen were successfully repelled," police spokesman Frank Mba said.

Mba also said that the attackers freed 30 prisoners but the police recaptured 25 of them, and noted that none of those who escaped were held on terrorism-related charges.

The latest assault on the nation's beleaguered security forces came only about 14 hours after a double bombing killed 11 people in a church inside a military barracks in Kaduna state, north of the capital.

No group has claimed responsibility for Monday's attack on the police station, but

the authorities say Boko Haram militants are the prime suspects.

The extremist group has claimed responsibility for a number of deadly gun and bomb attacks in various parts of Nigeria since 2009.

Human rights groups report that violent actions by Boko Haram since mid-2009 have claimed about 1,500 lives, including over 760 this year alone.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/26/274720/2-killed-in-attack-on-nigeria-police-hq/>

- **40 Tunisia Islamists still on hunger strike**

At least 40 Tunisian Islamist prisoners are still on hunger strike, the justice ministry said on Monday, hours after announcing that the almost two-week protest had ended.

"After checking, only some of the strikers have ended (their protest). We have no set number because it changes all the time," said justice ministry official Fadhel Saihi. "Of around 120 striking at the beginning, nearly 80 have stopped, so there are around 40 left," he added.

Earlier in the day, Saihi said the hunger strike had ended apart from one prisoner who had been taken to the hospital because of his condition.

Abdelbasset Ben Mbarek, a lawyer for one of the inmates, swiftly denied the report, telling AFP that the justice ministry only wanted to "mislead the public." None of Monday's claims could be verified by an independent source.

Up to 200 prisoners have refused to eat, according to lawyers, most of them since mid-November when two fellow inmates died after refusing food for nearly two months.

Most of the strikers were arrested in connection with a wave of attacks blamed on Tunisia's hardline Salafists that has rocked the country since its revolution of January 2011. Saihi said earlier that joint efforts by the justice ministry, the prisoners' lawyers and civil society groups helped end the strike.

"The judiciary has promised to bring forward their trials," he said.

The justice ministry also said last week that a large number of prisoners had ended their hunger strike, claims again denied by lawyers. Around 220 Salafist Islamists have been arrested in 2011 and 2012 over numerous attacks, Saihi said.

The targets of the attacks have included Nessma TV channel, an art exhibition in a Tunis suburb and the US embassy, which was stormed by Islamists on 14 September in violence that left four people dead.

The Salafists themselves, who adhere to an ultra-orthodox form of Sunni Islam, say around 900 fellow hardliners have been arrested since the uprising that ousted president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/59209/World/Region/-Tunisia-Islamists-still-on-hunger-strike.aspx>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• • Lebanon's Arabic press digest

Following are summaries of some of the main stories in a selection of Lebanese newspapers Tuesday. The Daily Star

cannot vouch for the accuracy of these reports.

An-Nahar

President to announce postponement of Dialogue Wednesday

14 figures from March 14 head to Gaza today in sign of solidarity

There will not be a dialogue [session] at Baabda Thursday, with the March 14 coalition still insisting on boycotting the session until Hezbollah agrees to discuss its weapons as the first item on the agenda.

Sources said the March 14 coalition would prepare an individual meeting with President Michel Sleiman if he continues to insist on his call for Dialogue. During the meeting, should it take place, discussions would focus on relevant files and serve an opportunity for the opposition to reiterate its stance on Hezbollah's weapons and any arms outside the state control.

Key sources in the coalition said that the March 14 coalition believes that

Hezbollah's latest stances further provides proof that the [resistance] party is not convinced it should discuss the issue of its weapons and that the decisions reached in prior sessions over the last six years have not been implemented. According to the sources, any Dialogue session, if it takes place, will be futile.

In a separate development, a March 14 delegation heads today [Tuesday] to the Gaza Strip in a show of solidarity with Palestinians after the latest Israeli offensive against the territory. The delegation includes 14 individuals from political to media figures.

March 14 Secretariat-General Fares Soueid said that the one-day visit comes in solidarity with the Palestinian people after the latest aggression against Gaza and aims to drive home the message that defending Arab causes is not exclusive to a single party in Lebanon or even in the region.

The March 14 delegation's visit to Gaza comes after visits by Iran's Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani to both Damascus and Beirut. While in both capital, Larijani declared that Iran was the country that

embraced Gaza and secured its victor [against Israel].

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2012/Nov-27/196258-lebanons-arabic-press-digest---nov-27-2012.ashx#axzz2DKYO5aXY>

- **Nasrallah vows to strike Tel Aviv if Lebanon hit**

BEIRUT: Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah has warned Israel that thousands of rockets would rain down on Tel Aviv and other cities if the Jewish state attacked Lebanon.

In a televised speech commemorating Ashoura Sunday, Nasrallah warned Israel against trying to regain momentum following what he said was its “defeat” in the Gaza Strip.

His speech came four days after an Egyptian-brokered cease-fire ended eight days of ferocious fighting between Israel and Hamas militants in Gaza, during which Palestinian factions lobbed missiles that hit Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Some 166 Palestinians and six Israelis were killed in the fighting.

“Israel, which was shaken by a handful of Fajr-5 rockets during eight days – how would it cope with thousands of rockets which would fall on Tel Aviv and other [cities] ... if it attacked Lebanon?” Nasrallah said, drawing cheers from thousands of Hezbollah’s supporters assembled at Al-Raya Stadium in Beirut’s southern suburbs. The crowd, including women and children, was dressed in black marking Ashoura, the day when the Prophet Mohammad’s grandson Imam Hussein was killed in battle 13 centuries ago.

“If the confrontation in the Gaza Strip, given its blockade, included missiles with a range of 40 to 70 kilometers, the battle with us will range over the whole of occupied Palestine [Israel] – from the Lebanese border to the Jordanian border and the Red Sea,” Nasrallah said, speaking through a huge screen via video link.

“From Kiryat Shmona to Eilat,” he added, referring to Israel’s northernmost town on the Lebanese border to the Red Sea port furtherest south.

Nasrallah has in the past warned that Tel Aviv would be targeted with rockets in any future war with Israel.

The Fajr-5s, with a range of 75 km (45 miles) – able to strike Tel Aviv or Jerusalem – and 175 kg warheads, are the most powerful and long-range rockets to have been fired from Gaza.

Nasrallah, who heads the March 8 coalition, reiterated Hezbollah’s willingness to attend a new session of National Dialogue which President Michel Sleiman has been trying to convene in an attempt to resolve the political crisis sparked by last month’s assassination of police intelligence chief Brig. Gen. Wissam al-Hasan.

However, Future bloc MPs hit back at Nasrallah, saying his speech did not contain anything new concerning the National Dialogue.

The opposition March 14 parties have demanded the government’s resignation before attending any Dialogue session with the Hezbollah-led March 8 bloc.

“We are ready to respond to [Sleiman’s] invitation for [National] Dialogue on Nov. 29 but we reject conditions by anyone with regard to Dialogue and those being pompous [toward us on this matter],” Nasrallah said.

He added that his party wanted to prevent any Sunni-Shiite strife in Lebanon following the sectarian tension stoked by the 20-month-old bloody conflict in Syria.

He also said that his party did not consider the March 14 parties as “enemies but merely as political rivals.”

“We do not see any Lebanese party as an enemy but a rival ... our only enemy is Israel,” Nasrallah said, adding that his party was keen on preserving civil peace in the country.

He warned against attempts to “portray Israel as the friend and Iran as the enemy,” saying the Islamic Republic was the true friend of Arabs and Muslims.

On the conflict in Syria, Nasrallah said Hezbollah supported all “oppressed people around the world,” and described

Syria with all its people and army as oppressed.

“Victory in Syria today requires an end to the fighting, bloodshed, destruction and everything that is happening there ... Syria as a whole is a target,” he said.

“Sayyed Nasrallah tried to tell [March 14 parties] that you must come to Dialogue under my own conditions and you must come subdued,” MP Ammar Hourri told Al-Sharq radio station. He reiterated the March 14 stance that the solution to the political crisis lay with the government’s resignation.

Future MP Atef Majdalani called on Hezbollah to put its arms aside and sit equally with March 14 politicians at the Dialogue table.

“Dialogue is not possible between heavily armed people and unarmed people. The one who is being pompous is Hezbollah, which accuses others of treason,” Majdalani told Future TV. “We are ready for dialogue but on condition of equality, and let them put their arms in the custody of the Lebanese state.”

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Nov-27/196223-nasrallah-vows-to-strike-tel-aviv-if-lebanon-hit.ashx#axzz2DKYO5aXY>

- **Armenia, Lebanon agree to abolish diplomatic visas**

BEIRUT: Armenia and Lebanon agreed Monday to abolish visas for diplomats between the two countries and to mutually recognize college diplomas.

Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan and President Michel Sleiman signed the two agreements at Baabda Palace upon the arrival of the former to Lebanon.

According to Sleiman’s office, the two signed an agreement “to mutually abolish visas for the two countries and recognize college diplomas,” in the presence of the Armenian delegation and several Lebanese ministers.

Sargsyan also discussed with Sleiman bilateral agreements aimed at improving ties between the two countries.

In a joint news conference at Baabda Palace, Sargsyan said he held “productive talks” with Sleiman and discussed ways to

widen the scope ties between Lebanon and Armenia.

“This year marks 20 years since we began bilateral relations,” Sargsyan said.

“We have signed 30 agreements since then and we will add two more with this visit,” he added.

For his part, Sleiman said he informed the Armenian official of his efforts to launch Dialogue and distance Lebanon from regional conflicts.

“We affirmed the mutual desire to strengthen ties between the two countries and focused on the need to strengthen cultural and social cooperation,” Sleiman said.

The two also discussed changes in the Arab world and the 8-day conflict between Israel and Hamas which ended last week with a shaky truce.

They also discussed means for a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict

On Syria, the two agreed that the only optimal solution for the 21-month-old

crisis was a political solution based on dialogue without any military intervention.

Sargsyan will also meet Prime Minister Najib Mikati later Monday at the Grand Serail.

Speaker Nabih Berri will hold a lunch in honor of the Armenian official in his Ain el-Tineh residence in the presence of Lebanese MPs.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Nov-26/196157-armenia-lebanon-agree-to-abolish-visas.ashx#axzz2DKYO5aXY>

- **Jordan charges 3 opposition activists with 'incitement'**

A Jordanian court on Sunday charged three members of the main opposition party -- the Muslim Brotherhood's political wing -- with incitement against the government during recent protests, a judicial source said.

The Islamic Action Front in response called for the immediate release of all prisoners detained in connection with the protests.

The three suspects, charged by the kingdom's state security court with

"incitement to oppose the regime," will be kept in custody for 15 days pending three separate cases, the source told AFP.

There are now 107 people awaiting trial in connection with a spate of recent protests sparked by fuel price hikes, including one woman, according to the same source.

Senior party official Ali Abu al-Sukar called for the "immediate release of all prisoners."

"Arrests will not scare Islamist and popular movements," which will continue to demonstrate to "reform the regime," he said in a statement.

A government announcement last week that fuel prices, including household gas, were set to rise by up to 53 percent sparked a series of protests, some calling for King Abdullah II to step down.

Calling for the king's overthrow is punishable by imprisonment.

The demonstrations were a major departure for the kingdom, which had previously been spared the kind of unrest

in other countries rocked by the Arab Spring.

The initial protests against the announcement descended into violence, with one person killed, 71 injured, and 158 arrests made, police said.

A judicial source said on Monday that the public prosecutor had "charged 101 suspects with incitement against the government, rioting and illegal gathering."

Prime Minister Abdullah Nsur defended the price hike, saying the decision was "unavoidable" given the country's \$5-billion (3.9-billion-euro) budget deficit, and that the measures would save \$42 million by year end.

Jordan relies on imports for 95 percent of its energy needs and has been struggling to find affordable alternatives to Egyptian gas supplies, which been repeatedly hit by sabotage.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/59130/World/Region/Jordan-charges--opposition-activists-with-inciteme.aspx>

6. SYRIA

- **Syrian warplanes 'bombard rebel HQ'**

Syrian warplanes have bombed a rebel headquarters near the Turkish border, missing their target but sending hundreds of Syrians fleeing across the frontier.

Monday's attack on the Free Syrian Army (FSA) base in Atima, two kilometres from the border, came a day before Turkish and NATO officials were due to start assessing where to station surface-to-air missiles close to the 900km border.

Ahmed, an opposition activist who lives within a few blocks of the base, said: "Two Syrian fighter jets came and fired five rockets. Three have hit farm areas and another two hit buildings near the base."

Ahmed said it was the first time they targeted the FSA base set up by senior rebel Mustafa al-Sheikh when he crossed over to Syria from Turkey two months ago.

The strike was one of the closest to the Turkish border carried out by Syrian jets.

'Increased weapons movement'

Rebels fired anti-aircraft guns at the jets but they were flying too high to be hit, activists said.

"I think the reason for the raid may have something to do with increased weapons movements [from Turkey]," Ahmed said.

Several hundred Syrians fled into Turkey after the raid and were being taken care of by the Turkish army. At least two wounded people were taken across the border.

The Turkish Anatolian news agency said an anti-aircraft shell fired during clashes in another Syrian border town, Harem, hit the roof of a house in the Turkish district of Reyhanli, causing no casualties.

After 20 months of conflict, rebels have been tightening their hold on farmland and urban centres to the east and northeast of Damascus, and have seized a string of military bases in the past 10 days.

On Monday, Syrian rebels have reportedly captured a hydroelectric dam on the Euphrates River in the country's north after days of heavy fighting, activists said.

They have reportedly seized crates of ammunition from the government troops who were protecting the strategic facility in the latest battlefield success for opposition fighters.

Children killed

Activists said rebel fighters overran regime defences and captured the Tishrin Dam, near the town of Manbij, before dawn.

On Sunday, they captured a regime helicopter base outside Damascus before pulling back for fear of government airstrikes.

Amid the intensifying clashes, humanitarian crisis in Syria has been exacerbating, and the death toll continues to rise.

Activists on Sunday reported that 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 in Deir al-Asafir, a village 12km

east of Damascus, when fighter jets struck, activists and residents said.

At least 172 people were reportedly killed on Sunday, including 14 children. Most of the deaths were reported in Damascus and its suburbs.

Al Jazeera is unable to independently verify reports of violence, as the Syrian government has placed strict restrictions on reporting.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/11/2012112616469990730.html>

- **Injured taken to Turkey after Syrian border air strikes**

Syrian war planes attacked rebels at the Bab al-Hawa border crossing on Monday, members of the Free Syrian Army said.

Taken to Turkey for treatment, those who witnessed the attack said many people had been injured.

"Bab al-Hawa was bombed by war planes as we were gathering in the area. We were bombed around six times consecutively. There were lots of people injured, with light injuries and serious ones. I saw many wounded people on the

border before I was brought here. They also shelled the camp full of refugees," said Mahmoud Ahmad of the Free Syrian Army.

Syrian jets also bombed the makeshift tents on the Syrian side of the border that were erected by a Turkish charity to accommodate displaced Syrians, Turkey's state-run Anadolu Agency reported. Nobody was harmed during the attack as the tents were empty, the agency said.

Syrian rebels took control of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing, opposite the Turkish Cilvegozu gate in Hatay province, in July.

<http://blogs.aljazeera.com/topic/syria/injured-taken-turkey-after-syrian-border-air-strikes-0>

- **Syria opposition coalition names London 'ambassador'**

Syria's opposition coalition on Monday named a human rights activist as its "ambassador" in London, it said in a statement posted online, the second such appointment by the newly formed coalition.

"The coalition of the opposition announces the nomination of the

president of the Syrian Commission for Human Rights, Walid Safur, as ambassador to London. He is the second ambassador of the Syrian revolution," the National Coalition said on its Facebook page.

Originally from the central city of Homs, the 62-year-old former teacher set up the SCHR in 1986 and was imprisoned several times, before moving to London, where he represented the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Syria's opposition coalition was formed on November 11, amid much fanfare in the Qatari capital Doha.

Last week, British Foreign Secretary William Hague announced that London recognized the coalition as the sole representative of the Syrian people, joining France and Turkey in doing so.

He invited the group, set up in a bid to unify Syria's fragmented opposition, to appoint a political representative to Britain, after a similar move by France.

The coalition has failed to win universal backing because of doubts about whether

it is genuinely representative of all sections of Syrian society.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/26/251970.html>

- **Syrian warplanes hit refugee camp near Turkey, forcing hundreds to flee**

Hundreds of Syrian refugees fled to Turkey after President Bashar al-Assad regime's warplanes hit Atme refugee camp near the Turkish borders, the Syrian Media Center reported Monday.

A Syrian warplane also launched three bombs or rockets at a rebel command center in the northwest of the country near the Turkish border on Monday without causing casualties, an AFP journalist said.

The aerial attack on the town of Atme occurred around 10:00 am (0800 GMT), the reporter said from the site. The target was a school that houses a military command and the Damascus Eagles rebel brigade.

The reporter said three houses, a garden and a road were damaged. Residents spoke of three bombs while others said rockets caused the damage.

The village of Atme, located just two kilometers (1.2 miles) from the border, was once home to 7,000 inhabitants. Near Atme refugee camp, there are other military camps belonging to the Free Syrian Army.

Ongoing violence has forced many to seek shelter in a refugee camp in nearby Qaa, or even in surrounding olive groves.

This border region is a hub for the rebellion and Atme and its environs in particular are home to numerous rebel groups.

Gunfire reaches Golan Heights

Meanwhile, 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.

Rebels marking successes

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>

- **Syrian rebels take airbase in slow progress toward Damascus**

AMMAN, (Reuters) - Syrian rebels said on Sunday they had captured a helicopter base east of Damascus after an overnight assault, their latest gain in a costly battle to unseat President Bashar al-Assad that is drawing nearer to his seat of power.

The Marj al-Sultan base, 15 km (10 miles) from the capital, is the second military facility on the outskirts of the city reported to have fallen to Assad's opponents this month.

Activists said rebels had destroyed two helicopters and taken 15 prisoners.

"We are coming for you Bashar," a rebel shouted in an internet video of what activists said was Marj al-Sultan. Restrictions on non-state media meant it could not be verified.

The rebels have been tightening their hold on farmland and urban centers to the east and northeast of Damascus while a major battle has been underway for a week in

the suburb of Daraya near the main highway south.

"We are seeing the starting signs of a rebel siege of Damascus," veteran opposition campaigner Fawaz Tello said from Berlin. "Marj al-Sultan is very near to the Damascus Airport road and to the airport itself. The rebels appear to be heading toward cutting this as well as the main northern artery to Aleppo."

Assad's core forces, drawn mainly from his minority Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shi'ite Islam that has dominated power in Syria for nearly five decades, are entrenched in the capital.

They also have devastating air superiority although they have failed to prevent rebels increasing their presence on the edge of the capital and in neighborhoods on the periphery.

A Syrian government air strike on the rebel-held village of Deir al-Asafir, 12 km (8 miles) east of Damascus, killed 10 children on Sunday, opposition activists said.

Internet video footage also showed residents collecting young bodies hit by shrapnel. A sobbing woman picked up the lifeless body of a girl, while the bodies of two boys were shown in the back seat of a car.

"None of those killed were older than 15 years old. There are two women among 15 people wounded," said Abu Kassem, an activist in the village told Reuters.

A Western diplomat following the fighting said Assad still had the upper hand. "The army will allow positions to fall here and there, but it can still easily muster the strength to drive back the rebels where it sees a danger," the diplomat said.

"The rebels are very short of international support and they do not have the supplies to keep up a sustained fight, especially in Damascus."

IRAN CONDEMNS PATRIOT PLAN

Iran said Turkey's request to NATO to deploy Patriot defensive missiles near its border with Syria would add to problems in the region, where Iran is pitted against

mostly Sunni Turkey and Gulf Sunni powers.

Iran's Shi'ite rulers have stepped up support for Assad while Sunni Arab powers helped forge a new opposition coalition this month recognised by France and Britain as the sole representative of the Syrians.

Syria has called the missile request "provocative", seeing it as a first step toward a no-fly zone over Syrian airspace which the opposition is seeking to help them hold territory against an enemy with overwhelming firepower from the air.

Most foreign powers are reluctant to go that far.

NATO has said the possible deployment of the missiles was purely defensive. The U.S.-led Western alliance has had some talks on the request but has yet to take a decision.

Turkey fears security on its border may crumble as the Syrian army fights harder against the rebels, some of whom have enjoyed sanctuary in Turkey in their 20-month-old revolt against Assad's rule.

Ankara has scrambled fighter jets and returned fire after stray Syrian shells and mortar bombs from heavy fighting along the border landed in its territory.

More than 120,000 Syrian refugees are sheltering in camps in southern Turkey and more are expected with winter setting in and millions of people estimated to be short of food inside Syria.

Abu Mussab, a rebel operative in the area of Hajar al-Aswad in south Damascus, said the opposition fighters had given up expecting a no-fly zone. "The bet is now on better organization and tactics," he said.

The video said by activists to have been filmed at the Marj al-Sultan base showed rebel fighters carrying AK-47 rifles.

An anti-aircraft gun was positioned on top of an empty bunker and a rebel commander from the Ansar al-Islam, a major Muslim rebel unit, was shown next to a helicopter.

"With God's help, the Marj al-Sultan airbase in eastern Ghouta has been

liberated," the commander said in the video. Eastern Ghouta, a mix of agricultural land and built-up urban areas, has been a rebel stronghold for months.

Damaged mobile radar stations could be seen on hilltops, with rebels waiving as they walked around the compound.

Footage from Saturday evening showed rebels firing rocket-propelled grenades at the base, and what appeared to be a helicopter engulfed in flames.

Last week rebels briefly captured an air defence base near the southern Damascus district of Hajar al-Aswad, seizing weapons and equipment before pulling out to avoid retaliation from Assad's air force.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=31939>

- **Syrian Kurds form unified army, call for feralism**

Erbil, Asharq Al-Awsat – A Syrian-Kurdish source, speaking to Asharq Al-Awsat on the condition of anonymity, revealed that “Kurdish forces represented in the People’s Council of West Kurdistan and the Kurdish National Council arrived in Erbil to pave the way for the unification of

fighters inside Syria’s Kurdish regions, to establish a popular army as an alternative to the armed militias that have run the security situation in Syria for a number of months”.

This group of Kurdish parties and forces, along with coordinating bodies, met in Erbil a few days ago to reach an agreement on unifying Kurdish efforts. This is in order to confront the threats that Kurdish regions are currently facing from Salafi groups, who in recent days have engaged in military confrontations with members of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party, which effectively controls the situation on the ground in Syria’s Kurdish cities.

A leading Kurdish source informed Asharq Al-Awsat that “talks were conducted in Erbil under the auspices of the leaders of the Kurdistan region. These talks brought about a consensus to activate the remainder of an earlier agreement signed by the two Kurdish councils (the People’s Council of West Kurdistan and the Kurdish National Council) several months ago in Erbil, known as the Hewlêr [Kurdish name for Erbil] Agreement”.

The source stressed that “a comprehensive review was conducted of developments since that agreement was signed, as well as discussions about what has been accomplished and what remains in progress. Developments on the ground that have taken place in the region, namely the radical [Salafi] Islamist forces intensifying their confrontation with the Kurdish people in Syrian cities, necessitates the accelerated implementation of the rest of the agreement’s terms. Thus we reached an agreement to unite our armed forces inside Syria and to link them to the Kurdish Supreme Committee that represents both councils and the coordinating bodies”.

The source added that “there was also an agreement to increase the number of members in the Kurdish Supreme Committee to 21 members from each council. Each council now provides 16 of its own members in addition to 5 further members drafted from the coordinating bodies or independents”.

On the military front, the Kurdish source informed Asharq Al-Awsat that “it was agreed that a new armed force will be

formed to replace the existing forces - formed previously by the Kurdish Democratic Union Party - who currently run the security situation in the liberated Kurdish cities. The new force will also consist of armed elements affiliated to that party, but in addition to 650 young Syrians who were previously trained in Iraqi Kurdistan. This force will be tasked with defending the liberated Kurdish regions in cooperation with all other parties, and it will also be ready to contribute to the liberation of the rest of the Kurdish cities and regions, should this be necessary”.

The source added that “this new joint force will be the nucleus of a wider local entity that will take over security operations and fill the vacuum that is left after the fall of the ruling regime in Damascus”.

In terms of politics, the source said that “the latest Erbil meeting raised democratic slogans for an independent Syria and for federalism in West Kurdistan. Furthermore, the Kurdish Supreme Committee, consisting of the People’s Council of West Kurdistan, the Kurdish National Council and local coordinating

bodies should be the sole legitimate representative of the Kurdish people in Syria”.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=31947>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Bahrain police break up march after Ashura memorial service**

Bahraini security forces used tear gas and stun grenades to scatter hundreds of youths who tried to march towards the centre of the capital on Monday after annual Ashura services marking one of the holiest days in the Shia Muslim calendar.

Bahrain, an important US ally and base for US warships, last year used martial law and help from Gulf neighbors to crush an uprising mainly by its Shia majority against alleged discrimination. But unrest has since resumed with frequent clashes between demonstrators and police.

Witnesses said some 400 people marched from Diya village near Manama towards the site of Pearl Roundabout in the capital after the Ashura services held to mark the

anniversary of the death of Prophet Mohamed's grandson, Imam Hussein.

The roundabout was the main rallying point of the 2011 uprising by Shias to push for political reforms and equality with Sunni Muslims, and security forces have kept it off-limits to protesters since the revolt was put down.

Consequently, clashes erupted on Monday when demonstrators numbering in the thousands, according to opposition activities and a news website, neared the roundabout and were confronted by security forces.

Witnesses said at least one protester was arrested and security forces used tear gas, stun grenades and birdshot to rout the crowd. Dozens were overcome by tear gas.

The Interior Ministry said it confronted a group of "troublemakers" who used firebombs and used stones and wooden barricades to block a main street there.

Sunni-ruled Bahrain said last month it was temporarily banning protests while new

procedures are put in place to ensure peaceful demonstrations.

The move, along with the revocation of the citizenship of 31 Bahrainis accused of fomenting violence, had been criticized by Western countries and international rights groups.

Muslims across the Middle East commemorate the death of Imam Hussein in the battle of Kerbala in Iraq in 680 AD, with ritual mourning ceremonies and recitation of religious songs.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/bahrain-police-break-march-after-ashura-memorial-service>

- • **Bahraini forces attack protesters**

Bahraini security forces have fired tear gas and stun grenades to disperse demonstrators protesting against the Al Khalifa regime.

Protesters were attacked by regime forces on Tuesday, as they marched from the village of Deih to the former Pearl Square, the site of month-long anti-regime

demonstrations that were brutally suppressed by the government last year.

The Bahraini Interior Ministry said on its Twitter page that police confronted a “group of vandals” on the Budaiya artery, after they “blocked the road, hurled petrol bombs, and terrified passers-by.”

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 campaign of suppression and accused Manama of torturing political activists, politicians, and protesters.

The popular uprising began in Bahrain in mid-February 2011. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates sent security and military forces to the country upon a request from Manama to help the Bahraini government quash the peaceful protests.

Dozens of people have been killed in the crackdown, and the security forces have arrested hundreds including doctors and nurses.

Bahrain hosts the US Fifth Fleet and is among the Persian Gulf countries such as Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates that receive military equipment from the United States.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/26/274687/bahraini-forces-attack-protesters/>

- **Surge of killings in South Sudan's Jonglei: MSF**

Women and children are increasingly targeted in a surge of violence in South Sudan's Jonglei state, riven by ethnic killings, a rebellion and an army crackdown, Doctors Without Borders said Tuesday.

"Tens of thousands of men, women and children have been repeatedly attacked, killed and displaced, with devastating impacts on their lives," the report by the medical aid agency MSF read, documenting an upsurge in violence since 2011.

"The lives and health of Jonglei's population are hanging by a thread," said Chris Lockyear, MSF's operational manager, warning of a further "spike in violence" in the approaching dry season.

Violence includes an escalation of traditional cattle raiding between rival tribes into a wave of brutal revenge attacks, exacerbated by an easy availability of automatic weapons.

The nature of the attacks is shifting, MSF said, documenting multiple cases of rape in the vast and grossly impoverished state, while four of MSF's six clinics in Jonglei have also been looted or destroyed since 2011.

"While appropriating cattle used to be the main aim of the attacks, nowadays civilians are targeted, with women and children making up a large proportion of victims treated by MSF teams," the report read.

More than 2,600 people have been killed in Jonglei in the past 18 months, according to the United Nations.

"They set huts on fire and threw children in the fire," said one 55-year-old woman treated by MSF, whose testimony of an attack by unidentified gunmen is quoted in the report.

"Because I am old, I cannot run fast and they killed the children that were with me," she said. "If the child can run, they will shoot them with the gun; if they are small and cannot run, they will kill them with a knife."

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/59263/World/Region/Surge-of-killings-in-South-Sudans-Jonglei-MSF-.aspx>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Rehman Malik announces Rs 200 million for information on Ehsanullah Ehsan**

ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Rehman Malik on Tuesday said anyone providing information on the whereabouts of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan would be awarded rupees 200 million, DawnNews reported.

Speaking to media representatives in Islamabad, Malik said Ehsan was working for foreign elements and vowed to soon reveal all on the TTP spokesman.

The minister added that the TTP was a divided organisation and now constituted of various groups, including the Waliur Rehman faction, the Hakimullah Mehsud group and other small factions.

Malik moreover questioned as to what kind of shariah the TTP spokesman wanted to enforce in the country which legitimised the killings of innocent civilians and sanctioned suicide bombings.

He said "terrorists" were defaming the religion and shariah for money, adding that, the government had struck a peace agreement with the Taliban in Swat which the latter had themselves violated.

Malik added that if "terrorists and miscreants" surrendered and gave up their weapons, the government could consider giving them amnesty.

<http://dawn.com/2012/11/27/rehman-malik-announces-rs-200-million-for-information-on-ehsanullah-ehsan/>

- **Karzai hints at flexibility in Afghan-US troop talks**

KABUL: Afghan President Hamid Karzai hinted on Tuesday that his government would be flexible in negotiating "sensitive" issues in a new security pact with the United States.

Karzai did not spell out what issues he was referring to, but one of the most sensitive

questions involves immunity from local prosecution for US troops remaining in Afghanistan after Nato forces withdraw in 2014.

Washington recalled all its troops from Iraq after Baghdad refused to grant US soldiers immunity, and Karzai has in the past warned there could be similar problems in Afghanistan.

But in a speech to industrialists and businessmen in Kabul, the president suggested that a deal would be reached.

“With the Americans we will make a deal, in which neither the skewer burns nor the kebab,” he said, referring to an Afghan proverb on a settlement which benefits both parties equally.

“Where they are sensitive, we shouldn’t touch too much, but we should consider our interests 100 per cent,” he said.

But Karzai also accused US of using predictions by the Western media and analysts of post-2014 chaos to put pressure on his government “to surrender to their demands”. He vowed to “stand firm”.

Negotiations on the security pact were launched this month but negotiators said the immunity issue was not discussed in the first round.

President Barack Obama is weighing plans to keep roughly 10,000 US troops in Afghanistan after the Nato-led force hands over security to the Afghan government, a senior US official said this week.

The troop levels under consideration remain tentative but the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said options under consideration range from 6,000 to 15,000 American boots on the ground.

The follow-on force would carry out counter-terrorism operations against Al-Qaeda and provide training and logistical support for Afghan forces, Defence Secretary Leon Panetta has said.

The US has about 66,000 troops in Nato’s total force in Afghanistan of slightly more than 100,000.

<http://dawn.com/2012/11/27/karzai-hints-at-flexibility-in-afghan-us-troop-talks/>

- ● **Pakistan Oct fuel oil imports plunge to 1-1/2 year low**

SINGAPORE: Pakistan's fuel oil imports dropped to a 1-1/2 year low in October, with demand dipping on ample stocks, official data showed.

Pakistan bought a total of 372,866 tonnes of fuel oil in October, its lowest volume since April last year, figures from the Oil Companies Advisory Committee showed.

High sulphur fuel oil (HSFO) volumes fell 25 per cent from the previous month to around 309,704 tonnes, while imports of low sulphur fuel oil (LSFO) were 50 per cent lower at 63,162 tonnes.

Pakistan State Oil, the country's main buyer, bought less fuel oil for October due to surplus supply from its previous tender cycle.

The company also skipped LSFO purchases as it prepares to switch to winter-grade fuel oil from November.

Pakistan made a record purchase of 1.09 million tonnes of fuel oil in August. However, the country saw increased rainfall around September, which boosted hydropower output and in turn softened demand for fuel oil for power generation, industry sources said.

Imports are expected to recover towards the end of the year, as electricity demand is likely to increase during winter.

PSO last bought 55,000 tonnes of LSFO, for delivery over December to January, from Galana Petroleum at a premium of \$95.00-\$97.00 a tonne to Middle East quotes, on a cost-and-freight (CFR) basis.

It is seeking up to 650,000 tonnes of HSFO and 165,000 tonnes of LSFO, for delivery over January-February next year.

The tender is due to close on Dec. 12, with offers to remain valid until Dec. 21. It is also due to award a term tender to buy up to 2 million tonnes of HSFO over a 12-month delivery period.

<http://dawn.com/2012/11/27/pakistan-oct-fuel-oil-imports-plunge-to-1-12-year-low/>

- **HRW says Pakistan’s judges muzzling criticism in media**

NEW YORK: Pakistan’s judges should cease using their contempt of court powers to prevent the media from airing programming critical of the judiciary, the Human Rights Watch said today.

Since Pakistan’s independent judiciary was restored to office in 2009, the judiciary has repeatedly sought to prevent its criticism in the media through threats of contempt of court proceedings, which can bring prison terms, the HRW said in a press release.

The statement from the HRW added that since Oct 2012, the high courts in Islamabad and Lahore have been issuing orders to stop the broadcast of television programs criticising the judiciary.

“Judges sworn to uphold the rule of law should not be using their broad contempt powers to muzzle criticism by the media,” said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch.

“Judges have no special immunity from criticism. Unless they want to be seen as instruments of coercion and censorship,

they should immediately revoke these curbs on free expression.”

The group added that recently, courts in Pakistan had openly issued a spate of orders that sought to limit the media’s free expression rights. On Oct 9, Judge Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui of the IHC had issued a restraining order to the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (Pemra) to stop airing criticism of the judiciary on television. The court sought to justify its order by asserting that the media ban was “to ensure that no program containing uncommendable, malicious, and wicked material is telecast by any of the channels in which person of the honourable chief justice of Pakistan and other honourable judges of the superior court are criticised, ridiculed, and defamed.”

The group moreover stated that on Nov 20, the court maintained the stay order preventing the airing of critical programming and demanded a progress report from the Pemra on a television show broadcast Oct 26 on a private channel, which criticised the conduct of Chief Justice Iftikhar. The court also issued

a contempt notice to the channel's chief executive officer, Haji Jan Mohammad.

Earlier on Oct 16, a judge of the Lahore High Court issued a stay order against the airing of "anti-judiciary" programming on television.

Moreover, on Nov 7, the court extended the stay against airing of television programming "intended to scandalise" the judiciary and directed the Pemra to ensure implementation of the order.

The statement added that journalists had told the HRW that major television stations and newspapers were informally advised by judicial authorities that they would be summoned to face contempt of court charges for criticising or commenting unfavourably on judicial decisions or specific judges. In 2010, editors and former editors of several publications faced contempt proceedings for publishing a story alleging misuse of office by the Sindh High Court chief justice, which was averted after their papers apologised publicly to the court.

Moreover, Pakistan's courts have been facing recurring allegations of judicial

overreach into the constitutional domain of the legislature and the executive.

"No branch of government, including the courts, should be immune from public opinion in a democratic society," Adams said.

"Pakistan's judges have demonstrated the independence to hold the government accountable. But their credibility will be lost so long as they fight against scrutiny and accountability of the judiciary itself."

<http://dawn.com/2012/11/27/hrw-says-pakistans-judges-muzzling-criticism-in-media/>

- **Bicycle bomb wounds 26 Afghans**

KABUL, Nov. 26 (Xinhua) -- A powerful explosive device placed on a bicycle went off on Monday in Khost city, capital of Khost province 150 km southeast of Afghan capital Kabul, leaving over two dozen people, all civilians, injured, the provincial administration confirmed in a statement sent to media.

"The terrorists planted explosive object in a bicycle and detonated it in Sargardan Choak area in Khost city this morning,

injuring 26 innocent civilians," the statement added.

In the statement the Khost provincial administration put the attack on the "enemies of peace", a term referring to Taliban militants by Afghan officials.

The statement also called on security organs to spare no efforts in identifying and punishing those behind subversive activities in Khost and elsewhere in the country.

Earlier, a local official on the condition of anonymity reported killing two people and injuring 18 others in the blast that rocked Khost city.

"The terrorists planted the bomb in the cavities of a bicycle and detonated it with a remote control in Sargardan Choak area, Khost city at around 11:00 a.m. local time, killing two people and injuring 18, mostly civilians," the official told Xinhua but declined to give his name, saying authorized officials would brief the media after investigation.

Hospital sources have also confirmed the injury of over two dozen people in the blast.

Director of health department in Khost city, Amir Badshah has confirmed that 26 injured people had been taken to hospitals for medical treatment, some of whom were in critical condition.

In the conflict-ridden Afghanistan, the non-combatants often bear the brunt of the endemic conflicts.

"Between January 1 and June 30, 2012, conflict-related violence resulted in 3,099 civilian casualties or 1,145 civilians killed and 1,954 others injured, a 15 percent decrease in overall civilian casualties compared with the same period in 2011," a report of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) released here in last August said. The report attributed 80 percent of harming civilians to the anti-government militants.

According to the report, 3,021 civilians died last year, 1,510 of them in the first six months in the conflict-battered Afghanistan.

<http://www.aopnews.com/today.html>

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

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