



# MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

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## 1. IRAQ

- **PUK attributes Kirkuk bombings to disputes over formation of Dijla OC**

Baghdad, Nov 27 (AIN) –The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan headed by the President, Jalal Talabani, attributed the latest bombings that took place in Kirkuk provinces and Duz district to the latest disputes over forming Dijla Operations Command.

The spokesperson of the political Bureau of the PUK, Azad Jindiani, in a statement on Tuesday, that he condemned the terrorist explosions which targeted protesters in Kirkuk and Duz.

"More than 20 people were injured in Kirkuk and Duz, when a booby trapped car explosion targeted a demonstration organized by the civil society organizations to protest the formation of the Dijla OC, the explosion resulted in significant material damages to the shops near the scene," he added.

"The Political Bureau of PUK expresses its remorse regarding the injured and killed victims in Kirkuk and Duz, assuring it's fully support for the democratic civil strife," he added. Pointed out "The terrorist attacks are the result of the tensions caused by the formation of Dijla OC."

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=23464](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23464)

- **Wassit annexed to new military operations command - Governor**

WASSIT, Nov 27 / Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqi Armed Forces' Command decided to annex Wassit province within the operations range of Rafidain Operations Command, as reported by the governor.

Governor Mehdi al-Zubaidi told Aswat al-Iraq that the province was detached from Mid-Euphrates Operations Command. Rafidain Operations Command includes Wassit, Missan, Nassiriya and Muthanna provinces.

He added that the operations commands are under the control of the central government which has the right to move them according to security situations.

The Mid-Euphrates Operations Command covered Karbala, Diwaniya and Babel provinces.

[http://en.aswatiliraq.info/%28S%28dcn5fb45ou0voc55ha0zqj45%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article\\_page&id=151567&l=1](http://en.aswatiliraq.info/%28S%28dcn5fb45ou0voc55ha0zqj45%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=151567&l=1)

- **IHEC completes contracting of employees for electoral centers**

Baghdad, Nov 27 (AIN) –The Independent High Electoral Commission completed the contracts with the employees of the electoral centers.

The Director General of the Operations Directorate within the IHEC, Walid al-Zaidi, stated in a press statement received by AIN on Tuesday "The IHEC completed the contracts with the employees of the electoral centers for the next local elections in addition to starting training them about the procedures of the elections."

"The training included 1,000 employees in all the provinces and for three days," he concluded.

It is worth mentioning that the IHEC will open the electoral centers to activate the electors' file from the 9th of September 2012 till the 3rd of January 2013.

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=23470:ihec-completes-contracting-with-employees-of-electoral-centers-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23470:ihec-completes-contracting-with-employees-of-electoral-centers-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2)

- **Iraq to grant Jordan 100,000 barrels of oil to help overcome its economic woes**

BAGHDAD, Nov 27 — Iraq says it is giving neighboring Jordan 100,000 barrels of oil as a gift to help overcome its economic difficulties.

The decision by the Cabinet Tuesday could be seen as an attempt by the Shiite-led Iraqi government to offer support to one of its Sunni neighbors. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have fled to Jordan because of violence that followed the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of their country.

This month Jordan announced hikes in gas and fuel prices, sparking nationwide protests that turned violent in some areas. They included unprecedented calls on Jordan's King Abdullah II to step down.

According to an agreement with Iraq, Jordan buys 15,000 barrels of oil a day, with preferential prices of less than \$18 a barrel, about one-fifth of the current market price of oil.

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/iraq-to-grant-jordan-100000-barrels-of-oil-to-help-overcome-its-economic-woes/2012/11/27/c644dd06-389a-11e2-9258-ac7c78d5c680\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/iraq-to-grant-jordan-100000-barrels-of-oil-to-help-overcome-its-economic-woes/2012/11/27/c644dd06-389a-11e2-9258-ac7c78d5c680_story.html)

- **Iraq's Grand Cleric Pleased with Iran's Military Aid to Palestine**

TEHRAN, Nov 27 (FNA)- Grand Shiite Cleric Ayatollah Mohammad Bahr al-Ulloum thanked Iran's assistance and military aid to the Palestinian resistance groups during the recent Israeli invasion of the Gaza Strip.

"When Khaled Mashaal said that we gained victory first with the help of the God and then with the backups of the Islamic Republic of Iran, we became glad to hear that Iran was helping Palestine to overcome Israel," Bahr al-Ulloum said in a meeting with visiting Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani in Iraq on Tuesday.

The grand Ayatollah also expressed pleasure in the victory of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, over the Israeli enemy during the eight-day invasion.

Also during the meeting, the two sides stressed further development of the bilateral ties between Iran and Iraq as two friendly and brotherly countries.

Iran's technological support for Hamas and other Palestinian groups' weapons systems helped them defeat Israel on the 8th day of an Israeli onslaught on the Gaza Strip last week.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107122438>

- **Iraqi MP Blames Qatar for Annulment of Baghdad's Arms Deal with Moscow**

TEHRAN, Nov 27 (FNA)- A senior Iraqi legislator took Qatar responsible for the annulment of an arms deal between Baghdad and Moscow, saying that Doha wants to see the weakening of Iraq.

"Qatar tried to send a group to Russia and cancel the weapons contract between Russia and Iraq so that Baghdad won't be equipped with Russian weapons and remain weak," Iskandar Vatout told FNA in Baghdad on Tuesday.

He said that Qatar attempts to keep Iraq weak in line with its regional and international goals.

Stressing that Iraq severely needs the Russian weapons, Vatout urged the Iraqi officials to revive the contract.

An Iraqi spokesman said on Monday that the country will renegotiate the massive weapons deal with Russia after Baghdad cancelled a \$4.2 billion agreement that would have made Moscow Iraq's biggest supplier after the US.

"The Iraqi government has not signed any deal to buy weapons from Russia so far, but the process is ongoing to purchase weapons from Russia because of Iraq's needs," Government Spokesman Ali al- Dabbagh said in a statement.

He said Iraq's National Security Council had decided on Sunday to "fully renegotiate" with Moscow, and had formed a new committee to do so. "It will renegotiate with Russia to put an end to suspicions of corruption in the weapons deal," Dabbagh said.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107122434>

- **Insurgent attacks kill 30, wound dozens in Iraq (AP)**

BAGHDAD, Nov 27 (AP) -- Insurgents launched attacks against security forces and civilians in central and northern Iraq on Tuesday, killing at least 30 people and wounding dozens, officials said.

Shiite mosques in Baghdad were main targets, along with a city claimed by squabbling ethnic groups in a disputed northern region. The conflicts threaten the stability of Iraq following the final pullout of U.S. military forces nearly a year ago.

Car bombs exploded near three mosques shortly after nightfall in the capital, killing 21. Police and hospital officials said the first exploded near a Shiite mosque following evening prayers in the Hurriyah neighborhood, killing nine worshippers and wounding 20 others. Minutes later, another car bomb went off near Gaereat mosque, killing five people.

Later, police said a third car bomb exploded, killing seven Shiite worshippers and wounding 21 others in Shula neighborhood in northern Baghdad.

Ali Habib, a taxi driver, said he was driving near the Shiite mosque in Hurriyah when he heard a loud explosion. He rushed to the blast site and helped take wounded to the hospital.

"The scene was horrific, with people screaming for help," he said. "Such attacks bring back memories of the darkest days of sectarian strife that took place several years ago in Iraq."

[http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML\\_IRAQ?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_IRAQ?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT)

## 2. IRAN

- **Iran self-sufficient in defense sector: Navy cmdr.**

Iran's Navy Commander Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari says the country has reached self-sufficiency in the defense sector and can now meet its defense demands.

"Since the beginning of the Islamic Revolution, we have learned not to ask for help from other countries and stand on our own feet in meeting our demands," Sayyari said on Wednesday.

“Thanks to the Islamic Revolution, Iran has acquired the know-how to build submarines. No one believed that we would reach a point where we would build destroyers capable of carrying helicopters and missiles in the Sea of Oman and oceans... because it’s a very difficult task to build destroyers and submarines,” he added.

He went on to say that the Iranian Defense Ministry is now capable of meeting the defense demands of the country, especially for the Navy.

Sayyari made the remarks in a ceremony to launch two upgraded versions of the indigenously-built Ghadir-class light submarine and two overhauled hovercrafts.

The Ghadir submarine was first unveiled in 2007. The 120-ton vessel has excellent shallow-depth performance, and can carry out long-term coastal missions.

Along with submarines, Iran also unveiled the main structure of the Sina 7 missile-launching frigate.

In recent years, Iran has made great achievements in the defense sector and attained self-sufficiency in essential military equipment and systems.

The Islamic Republic has so far launched different classes of advanced submarines including Fateh, Ghadir, Qaem and Nahang.

Iran has repeatedly assured other nations, especially its neighbors, that its military might poses no threat to other countries, insisting that its defense doctrine is based on deterrence.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/28/274963/iran-can-meet-defense-demands/>

- **Iran Cmdr.: Navy fleet to visit Sudan**

The Iranian Navy’s deputy commander for operations says the Navy’s 23rd fleet to be sent to the north of the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea is to dock at Sudan’s coast in the coming days.

Rear Admiral Seyyed Mahmoud Mousavi told Fars News Agency that the fleet is composed of the Jamaran destroyer and the logistical vessel Bushehr, the agency reported on Wednesday.



He noted that such visits serve to send across the message of peace and friendship to the friendly countries and said, “The mission is also [being carried out] in line with the announcement of the preparedness of our country’s Navy for performance of mission in the international waters and also the establishment of security in the region and connecting routes, [a goal] which can be achieved with the help of the region’s countries.”

Previously, the 22nd Iranian naval fleet, likewise composed of a destroyer and a logistical vessel, visited Port Sudan in northeastern Sudan.

Iran's Navy has been increasing its naval presence in international waters since last year.

In addition, in line with international efforts to combat piracy, the Iranian Navy has been conducting anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden since November 2008 to protect vessels involved in maritime trade, especially ships and oil tankers owned or leased by Iran.

The Islamic Republic has repeatedly asserted that its overseas naval presence is meant to convey the message of peace and friendship to regional countries.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/28/274940/iran-navy-fleet-to-berth-at-sudan-coast/>

- **Salehi says waiting for Egypt’s response to visit Gaza**

Tehran, Nov 28, IRNA – Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said he is waiting for the response of the Egyptian government to visit Gaza.

The Iranian foreign minister made the remarks while talking to IRNA on Wednesday at the sideline of a ceremony during which Basij members of Presidential Office met with President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

He explained that since the Rafah border point was the only available crossing into the Gaza Strip, Tehran has been waiting for the Cairo response before visiting the area.

As for the date of his visit to Gaza, Salehi said he has discussed the issue with his Egyptian counterpart both on phone and during the recent D-8 meeting in Pakistan.

He said his ministry was still awaiting the response of Egypt's Foreign Ministry.

<http://old.irna.ir/News/Politic/Salehi-says-waiting-for-Egypt%E2%80%99s-response-to-visit-Gaza/80432885>

### 3. SYRIA

- **Syrian rebels 'shoot down army helicopter'**

Fighters say they used ground-to-air missile for the first time to down an aircraft bombing the country's northwest.

Syrian rebels have said they downed an army helicopter with a ground-to-air missile for the first time as it was bombarding a besieged base in the country's northwest.

The downing came at the strategic Sheikh Suleiman base, 25km west of Aleppo, the last garrison in government hands between Syria's second city and the Turkish border.

It is reportedly the first time that the rebels have shot down a helicopter with a surface-to-air missile.

Footage posted by activists on YouTube showed rebel fighters shouting: "We hit it, God is greatest," as a helicopter plunged to the ground in a ball of flames.

Meanwhile in Damascus, rebels battled government forces in the neighbourhood of Kfar Souseh, on the edge of the centre of the capital.

Fighting was also reported in the neighbourhood of Bab Amr in Homs city, an area that was overrun by government troops in February.

Earlier on Tuesday, a government jet fired barrel bombs - cylinders packed with explosives and petrol - at the Abu Hilal olive oil press, 2km west of Idlib city, activist Tareq Abdelhaq said.

Abdelhaq said at least 20 were killed and 50 wounded. The victims were civilians, according to activists, who acknowledged rebel fighters were in the area.

Rebels have captured at least five army and air force installations in the past 10 days, putting pressure on President Bashar al-Assad forces in the northern provinces of Aleppo and Idlib and the eastern oil region of Deir al-Zor.

Lethal aid

Opposition forces are calling for international military support, particularly against air attacks, but the west is so far hesitant to provide rebels with lethal aid.

On Tuesday, diplomats said that the UK was pushing the European Union to hold frequent reviews of its arms embargo on Syria.

The proposal, which is said to have been driven by Prime Minister David Cameron, marks a hardening of Britain's position and shows how the formation of a united Syrian opposition has galvanised overseas support for the rebels.

EU sanctions on Syria include visa bans and asset freezes on individuals and businesses connected to Assad's government, a ban on oil imports from Syria, and an embargo on the supply of arms to the country, imposed to prevent the flow of weapons to Assad's forces.

Under EU rules, the Syria sanctions package has to be extended for a year by December 1.

Britain, however, has proposed to review the arms embargo segment of the restrictions every three months and has received French backing.

EU diplomats debated the proposal on Tuesday and were expected to continue discussion on Wednesday.

However, many capitals expressed their reluctance about the proposal, the diplomats said.

France was the first EU country to recognise the new opposition group, the Syrian National Coalition, after its formation on November 11. Few days later, Laurent Fabius, the country's foreign minister, suggested lifting the arms embargo to allow the supply of arms to rebels.

#### Protecting refugees

Opposition activists say 40,000 people have been killed in the revolt against the rule of Assad, which started out as peaceful protests 20 months ago only to descend into full civil war.

Hundreds of thousands of others have fled the violence in the country.

On Tuesday, Valerie Amos, the UN humanitarian chief, accused Syria of firing mortar bombs near the border with Jordan to prevent refugees from fleeing the country.

In an interview with the Reuters news agency at the Jordanian refugee camp of Zaatari, Amos said that during a visit to the border the night before she was able to see "what was definitely mortar fire on the Syrian side of the border to try to prevent people from crossing."

"We need the agreement by all those involved in the conflict to ensure they will not in any way bomb or shell or fight [refugees]," she said.

World powers are divided over the crisis and have been unable so far to agree on action to halt the violence, with Assad's allies Russia and China having vetoed three UN Security Council resolutions.

"We will do all we can to help the refugees and people of Syria but this requires the international community to work together to find a political solution which meets the needs of the Syrian people," Amos said.

She said that a UN appeal for Syria's 2.5 million internally displaced people has only been 50 per cent funded, and that the world body was planning for numbers of up to four million.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/11/20121127181126196572.html>

- **Citizens Martyred, Others Injured in Two Car Bomb Blasts in Jaramana**

Terrorists on Wednesday blew up two car bombs loaded with large amounts of explosives in the Main Square in Jaramana city in Damascus Countryside, killing a number of citizens and injuring others and causing huge material damage to the residential buildings and shops.

SANA reporter said the two terrorist bombings coincided with the detonation of two explosive devices by terrorists in al-Nahda and al-Qerayyat neighborhoods in the city.

The explosive device blasts resulted in minor material damage.

<http://sana.sy/eng/337/2012/11/28/454589.htm>

## 4. ISRAEL-PALESTINE

- **Israel protests EU meeting on labeling settlement products**

Meeting follows European memo discussing visa ban for "violent settlers"; J'lem singles out British, Irish, Danish and EU foreign services for promoting the conference along with various NGOs.



Israel registered a protest with the EU last week regarding a conference scheduled for Wednesday in Brussels about the possibility of labeling goods made in the settlements.

Rafi Schutz, the Foreign Ministry's deputy director-general for Europe, called the ambassadors of Denmark, Ireland and the EU to the ministry on November 19, in the midst of Operation Pillar of Defense, to protest the scheduled meeting, called an "informal technical workshop on settlement products and related policy issues."

Schutz also protested by phone to a ranking official at the British Embassy.

Britain, Ireland and Denmark, as well as the EU's foreign service, were singled out for promoting the conference along with various NGOs.

Denmark started the ball rolling on labeling goods in Europe that came from the settlements, following a decision in principle to do so that South Africa made earlier this year.

That decision has not yet been fully implemented; one of the issues holding it up has been how to label the goods. It was finally decided to label them "Made in Israeli Occupied Territory."

Schutz told the ambassadors that the move unfairly singled out and discriminated against Israel, because while this was not the only area in the world where there was a territorial dispute, it was the only area in the world regarding which the EU was discussing specially labeling goods.

For example, goods originating from northern Cyprus, Tibet, Kashmir, the Russian-held regions of Georgia, Armenian-held regions of Azerbaijan, and Kosovo are not specially labeled.

Schutz also said that some of the NGOs participating in the conference, such as the Irish Trocaire, were involved in the boycott and divestment movement against Israel. Meanwhile, he pointed out, some NGOs that didn't support the labeling had not been invited to the meeting.

He also said that such a move ran contrary to the spirit of the World Trade Organization, which calls for free trade and open borders for merchandise.

This was the latest move in various EU steps related to the settlements in recent days – steps that Israeli diplomats said were being recommended to mollify local public opinion.

Nearly two weeks ago, a group of EU ambassadors wrote a memo encouraging member states to “explore possibilities of denying access of known violent settlers to the EU.”

The memo also called for EU diplomats, in an effort to counter settler violence, to recommend that “the EU missions in Tel Aviv as well as in Jerusalem and Ramallah... step up monitoring on the Israeli authorities' action against violence by extremist settlers with a view to having systematic and trustworthy information.

In so far as possible, the EU missions could attend trials in the most serious cases.”

While noting the “strong condemnations by the Israeli Government of violent acts by extremist settlers,” the memo recommended that the EU “continue to urge Israeli authorities to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law.”

The memo said the EU would “systematically condemn publicly serious attacks by extremist settlers and reinforce language used in such statements. Member States willing to issue individual statements should ensure consistency in the messaging.”

According to the memo, “settler violence has developed in a political context where the number of settlers has continued to expand, where the political strength of the settlement movement has grown and where the Israeli authorities have generally not taken firm action against outposts illegal also under Israeli law, contributing to a culture of impunity in which the violence continues.”

<http://www.ipost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=293729>

- **Abbas ramps up efforts for votes in statehood bid**

PA leader intensifies efforts to persuade as many countries as possible to vote in favor of status upgrade at UN.



The Palestinian Authority intensified its efforts on Tuesday to persuade as many countries as possible to vote in favor of upgrading its status at the UN to non-member observer state.

“We are seeking – through peaceful and democratic means – to persuade a large number of members to vote in favor of our resolution,” said Riad Mansour, head of the PA’s diplomatic mission to the UN.

“We hope everybody will honor the results of the democratic vote, when the General Assembly recognizes the state of Palestine and makes it a non-member state in the UN.”

Mansour said the PA statehood bid was aimed at “salvaging the two-state solution.”

The PA, he added, should not be punished because of its effort to upgrade its status at the UN; rather, it should be rewarded.

He said the statehood bid was a continuation of what happened at the UN in 1947, when the GA voted in favor of establishing two states in Mandatory Palestine.

He expressed hope that a UN vote in favor of the statehood bid would pave the way for “ending occupation and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in order to open the doors for real peace in the Middle East.”

Mansour said PA President Mahmoud Abbas was planning to deliver a speech at the GA on Thursday, during which he would present the request for admitting the Palestinian entity as nonmember observer state.

“We expect the resolution to be approved by a large number of countries,” he said. “What we are doing is a political thing and a natural right. This is also a legal matter and not a unilateral or illegal move like Israel’s actions on the ground.”

Wasel Abu Yusef, a member of the PLO Executive Committee, said Tuesday that the US administration now realized its attempt to block the statehood bid had failed.

Abu Yusef said that Washington, which had expressed opposition to the statehood bid, “has begun dealing realistically with the Palestinians’ effort to upgrade their status at the UN.”

He said the PA was expecting the international community to work toward ending Israeli “occupation” after the UN vote.

“This requires the implementation of all previous UN resolutions, including [that] concerning Israeli settlements, which are a war crime and must be stopped,” the PLO official said.

He said that Israeli financial sanctions against the PA would be ineffective, "particularly after US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asked [Prime Minister Binyamin] Netanyahu during her recent visit to the region to avoid measures that could undermine the Palestinian Authority."

<http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=293707>

- **PA says will take Israel to ICC if tests prove Arafat assassinated**

The Palestinian Authority will start legal proceedings against Israel at the International Criminal Court if forensic tests prove that President Yasser Arafat was murdered, chief investigator Tawfiq Tirawi said Tuesday.

"We have evidence and indications that (Arafat) was killed, including remarks by Israeli leaders that they must get rid of Arafat, but we need evidence to submit to the International Criminal Court," Tirawi told reporters at a news conference in Ramallah.

Forensic experts took samples from Arafat's uncovered corpse in Ramallah on Tuesday, trying to determine if he was murdered by Israeli agents using the hard-to-trace radioactive poison Polonium.

Tirawi, who heads the committee investigating Arafat's death, told reporters that samples taken by Russian, Swiss and French experts would leave Ramallah on Tuesday.

He added that the Palestinian general prosecution supervised all the legal and medical procedures which took place over the past few days.

"The corpse of the late Palestinian leader was touched only by Palestinian hands. The Palestinian medical team took the samples and gave them to other teams as requested," Tirawi said.

Arafat died as a martyr for the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, Tirawi said, noting that the exhumation happened to coincide with Palestine's submission of a resolution seeking "observer state" status at the UN.

"(A Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital) is what Yasser Arafat always said and today he repeated it from his grave," added Tirawi.

In Gaza City, Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said he backed the PA's efforts.

Haniyeh told reporters that "the case of Yasser Arafat is a distinguished national case because he was an iconic revolutionary and leader of the Palestinian people."

Palestinians witnessed the funeral of their hero and longtime leader eight years ago, but conspiracy theories surrounding his death have never been laid to rest.

Many are convinced their icon was the victim of a cowardly assassination, and may stay convinced whatever the outcome of this autopsy. But some in the city of Ramallah where he lies deplored the uncovering of his body Tuesday.

"This is wrong. After all this time, today they suddenly want to find out the truth?" said construction worker Ahmad Yousef, 31. "They should have done it eight years ago," he said.

Arafat's body was uncovered in its grave and samples were removed without having to lift the corpse from the ground. As a result, the planned reburial ceremony with full military honors was called off.

The tomb was resealed in hours and wreaths were placed by Palestinian leaders including PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad.

"The state of the body was exactly what you would expect to find for someone who has been buried for eight years. There was nothing out of the ordinary," Health Minister Hani Abdeen told a news conference.

French magistrates in August opened a murder inquiry into Arafat's death in Paris in 2004 after a Swiss institute said it had discovered high levels of polonium on clothing of his which was supplied by his widow, Suha, for a television documentary.

Results in spring 2013

Jordanian doctor Abdullah al Bashir, head of the Palestinian medical committee, said about 20 samples were taken and analysis would take at least three months.

"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," said Darcy Christen, spokesman for Lausanne University Hospital in Switzerland that carried out the original tests on Arafat's clothes.

Arafat led the bid for a Palestinian state through years of war and peacemaking, then died in a French hospital aged 75 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 surfaced immediately, and many Palestinians pointed the finger at Israel, which confined Arafat to his headquarters in Ramallah for the final two and a half years of his life after a Palestinian uprising erupted.

Israel denies murdering him. Its leader at the time, Ariel Sharon, now lies in a coma from which he is expected never to awake. Israel invited the Palestinian leadership to release all Arafat's medical records, which were never made public following his death and still have not been opened.

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 Lausanne hospital questioned in August if it would be worth seeking any samples, if access to Arafat's body was delayed as late as "October or November."

Not all of Arafat's family agreed to the exhumation.

Arafat's widow watched her husband's exhumation on television from her house in Malta.

"This will bring closure, we will know the truth about why he died. I owe this answer to the Palestinian people, to the new generation, and to his daughter," a tearful Suha told the Times of Malta.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=542616>

- **Gaza factions to join rally supporting UN bid**

Representatives of all Palestinian factions on Tuesday held a meeting in Gaza City during which all factions agreed to organize a joint rally raising Palestinian flags only to show support to the Palestinian statehood bid.



Member of the politburo of the Palestinian People's Party Walid al-Awad told Ma'an that factions would submit a memo to the government in Gaza about the rally, planned for Thursday.

The rally, he added, will kick off at the Unknown Soldier Square in Gaza City at noon.

The announcement came amid renewed efforts to demonstrate Palestinian unity in the aftermath of Israel's deadly assault on the Gaza Strip a week earlier.

A Fatah delegation on Tuesday joined premier of the Hamas-run government in Gaza Ismail Haniyeh in a ceremony to honor families bereaved in the latest Israeli military offensive.

Earlier, Haniyeh told reporters in Gaza City that his government supported the UN bid.

Haniyeh said “nobody is against statehood, and (my government) supports any political movement to establish a Palestinian state on the occupied Palestinian territory.”

“Our vision is to have a state based on inalienable Palestinian principles, and a state on the pre-1967 borders does not mean ceding the rest of Palestinian land.”

PLO leader Hanan Ashrawi told Ma'an the final resolution was submitted Monday to the UN in New York, requesting an upgrade of Palestine's UN status to an "observer state."

The UN General Assembly is expected to pass the resolution Thursday.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=542690>

- **Yasser Arafat's body exhumed in Ramallah**

Remains returned to mausoleum after 10-hour process conducted by international experts to test for radioactive polonium.

Scientists have exhumed the remains of the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and gathered samples that will now be shipped overseas to test for radioactive polonium.

Workers began digging through Arafat's concrete mausoleum around midnight on Tuesday at the muqataa , the Palestinian Authority headquarters, where Arafat is buried, in Ramallah, in the West Bank.

Three teams of international investigators arrived before dawn and collected samples from his body and the surrounding soil.

A planned military funeral was cancelled, and Arafat's remains were quietly returned to his tomb later on Tuesday morning. The whole process took about 10 hours.

A nine-month investigation, the results of which were broadcast earlier this year, found elevated levels of polonium on Arafat's final personal effects, raising new questions about what killed the longtime Palestinian leader.

French legal experts have also begun to gather evidence on the case in preparation for a possible trial, including testimony from people in the West Bank, according to Palestinian officials.

At a press conference in Ramallah, Tawfiq al-Tirawi, the head of the Palestinian committee investigating Arafat's death, said the exhumation went according to plan. "Only Palestinian hands touched the remains of [Arafat]," he said.

Abdullah Bashir, a Jordanian doctor who was one of Arafat's physicians, said Palestinian scientists collected around 20 samples for the international teams. "We have asked them to test for all poisons, not only for polonium," he said.

The teams are operating under a near-media blackout imposed by the Palestinian Authority (PA), which had promised a transparent and open investigation.

None of the investigators contacted over the past few days were willing to speak on the record. And late on Monday, the PA said it would not allow lawyers representing Arafat's widow, Suha, to attend the exhumation, without offering any reason for its decision.

The French team includes three scientists - a toxicologist, a pathologist, and a generalist who works on legal medicine.

The Swiss team, from the Institut de Radiophysique in Lausanne, conducted the forensic analysis in the initial investigation.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) also asked experts from Russia to conduct their own independent analysis.

“One of them is from an organisation dealing with judicial medical experts, and the others are specialists connected to radiation,” a source familiar with the Russian team said.

Few officials present

Only a handful of officials from the PA and Fatah were on hand for the exhumation.

Arafat’s family was not present, according to Palestinian officials.

Hanan Ashrawi, a legislator and member of the Palestine Liberation Organisation's executive committee, served with Arafat for years. She said the investigation is necessary.

Al Jazeera Investigates - What Killed Arafat?

"At the human level it's very painful," Ashrawi told Al Jazeera. "Still, it's a requirement. We need to get closure. We need to find the truth. But to all the Palestinian people, it's very painful."

Al Jazeera’s investigation studied the items Arafat had with him when he died: his comb, his toothbrush, even his iconic kaffiyeh, all of which were variously stained with his blood, sweat, saliva and urine.

The items were provided by Arafat’s widow, Suha.

His belongings were analysed by the Institut de Radiophysique in Lausanne, Switzerland, which discovered high levels of polonium-210.

Further tests found that most of the polonium was “unsupported,” which means that it did not come from natural sources.

But, even if it is present on Arafat’s body, very little of the radioactive element will remain at this point. Polonium-210, the isotope found on Arafat’s personal effects, has a half-life of 138 days, meaning that half of the substance will decay every four-and-a-half months.

Scientists say that eight years is about the limit for recovering a useful sample, and a longer delay would have made it impossible to recover a workable sample.

It will take months for the scientists to finish analysing the samples they collect.

Decay to be studied

Researchers will have to wait through at least one half-life to study the decay in their samples: Natural polonium replenishes itself after decaying, while unsupported polonium does not.

Once they finish their work, the French courts will determine how to proceed. Arafat died in a French military hospital, giving the French legal system jurisdiction over the case.

Suha Arafat asked a French court to open a murder investigation earlier this year, and the court granted that request in August.

The group interviewed Arafat’s widow, Suha, earlier this month. Tirawi also said that the investigators have gathered testimony in the West Bank from “certain people, in certain positions,” but declined to offer any detail about their identities.

A team of French judges has already begun collecting Arafat’s medical records and other evidence.

The French team has refused to speak to the press, and a team of Palestinian and French security agents prevented reporters from approaching them in their hotel.

Even members of the Swiss team, which worked with Al Jazeera on the initial investigation earlier this year, were unwilling to comment on the exhumation, citing PA restrictions.

Palestinian security officers have tailed Al Jazeera reporters in cars and on foot, and at one point broke into the network's hotel rooms.

"They publicly praise Al Jazeera for the investigative breakthrough that breathed life into what was otherwise a very cold case, while at the same time they chase us around Ramallah to keep us from doing our jobs," said Al Jazeera's Clayton Swisher, who produced the investigation .

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/11/2012112795443645353.html>

## 5. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Anti-Morsi protesters clash with police in Egypt**

Thousands of protesters around nation raise pressure on Islamist leader to scrap decree they say threatens Egypt with autocracy.

Protests against Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi's plan to widen the scope of

his powers beyond the reach of the country's judicial system continued overnight Tuesday and early Wednesday morning.



Egyptian riot police continued firing a large number of teargas canisters into Tahrir Square in Cairo early on Wednesday morning, Egyptian paper Ahram reported.

In the late hours of Tuesday evening, clashes between Morsi opponents and Muslim Brotherhood members broke out in several cities across the country, including Mahallah, Port Said and Mansoura, Aharam reported.

Clashes between demonstrators and Cairo police left at least two dead and hundreds injured in the past nine days of protests, according to Ahram.

Morsi's administration has defended his decree as an effort to speed up reforms and complete a democratic transformation. Opponents say it shows he has dictatorial instincts.

On Tuesday, police fired tear gas at stone-throwing youths in streets off the capital's Tahrir Square, heart of the uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak last year. Protesters also turned out in Alexandria, Suez, Minya and cities in the Nile Delta.

Protesters tore down the Muslim Brotherhood sign at the party's headquarters and threw rocks at a police van.

Tuesday's protest called by leftists, liberals and other groups deepened the worst crisis since the Muslim Brotherhood politician was elected in June, and exposed a divide between the newly empowered Islamists and their opponents.

"The people want to bring down the regime," protesters in Tahrir chanted, echoing slogans used in the anti-Mubarak revolt.

Morsi's move provoked a rebellion by judges and battered confidence in an economy struggling after two years of turmoil.

Opponents have accused Morsi of behaving like a modern-day pharaoh, a jibe long leveled at Mubarak. The United States, a benefactor to Egypt's military, has expressed concern about more turbulence in a country that has a peace treaty with Israel.

"We don't want a dictatorship again. The Mubarak regime was a dictatorship. We had a revolution to have justice and freedom," 32-year-old Ahmed Husseini said in Cairo.

Some protesters have been camped out since Friday in Tahrir, and violence has flared around the country, including in a town north of Cairo where a Muslim Brotherhood youth was killed in clashes on Sunday.

Supporters and opponents of Morsi threw stones at each other and some hurled petrol bombs in the Delta city of el-Mahalla el-Kubra. A doctor said nine people were brought to hospital, but he expected numbers to rise to dozens.

Non-Islamist forces coming together against Morsi

The protest was a show of strength by the non-Islamist opposition, whose fractious ranks have been brought together by the crisis. Well-organized Islamists have consistently beaten more secular-minded parties at the ballot box in elections held since Mubarak was ousted in February, 2011.

"The main demand is to withdraw the constitutional declaration (decree). This is the point," said Amr Moussa, former Arab League chief and presidential candidate who has joined the opposition coalition, the National Salvation Front.

Some scholars from the prestigious al-Azhar mosque and university joined Tuesday's protest, showing that Morsi and his Brotherhood have alienated some more moderate Muslims. Members of Egypt's large Christian minority also joined in.

Morsi formally quit the Brotherhood on taking office, saying he would be a president for all Egyptians, but he is still a member of its Freedom and Justice Party.

The decree issued on Thursday expanded his powers and protected his decisions from judicial review until the election of a new parliament expected in the first half of 2013.

New York-based Human Rights Watch said it gives Morsi more power than the interim military junta from which he took over.

Trying to ease tensions with judges outraged at the step, Morsi has assured Egypt's highest judicial authority that elements of the decree giving his decisions immunity would apply only to matters of "sovereign" importance. Although that should limit it to issues such as a declaration of war, experts said there was room for much broader interpretation.

In another step to avoid more confrontation, the Muslim Brotherhood cancelled plans for a rival mass rally in Cairo on Tuesday to support the decree. Violence has flared in the past when both sides have taken to the streets.

But there has been no retreat on other elements of the decree, including a stipulation that the Islamist-dominated body writing a new constitution be protected from legal challenge.

<http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=293739>

- **Teargas hits Tahrir as conflicting reports of injuries emerge**

Teargas canisters landed in Tahrir Square as fighting raged around the perimeter between police and protesters, according to AFP, as conflicting reports of the number of casualties begin to come in from the Health Ministry.

The Health Ministry released a statement Wednesday that 116 people were injured nationwide during protests Tuesday, including 77 in clashes in the Delta city of Mahalla and 25 in Tahrir Square.

However, a source from the ministry reportedly told state-run news agency MENA that 36 protesters were injured in Port Said alone as clashes flared between Brotherhood members and the group's opponents.

Tuesday's injuries came as thousands in Tahrir and around the country protested against President Mohamed Morsy's recent constitutional declaration, issued Thursday, granting himself sweeping powers beyond judicial review and protecting the embattled Constituent Assembly and Shura Council from dissolution.

Earlier reports had put the number of injured in Mahalla as high as 300. Morsy supporters and opponents threw Molotov cocktails and stones at each other, and the Freedom and Justice Party's media spokesperson in Mahalla, Mamdouh Mounir, claimed that 200 Muslim Brotherhood members were injured there.

Mounir further alleged that anti-Brotherhood protesters had prevented ambulances from reaching injured group members.

In Port Said, Morsy opponents and Brotherhood members pelted each other with stones. The Health Ministry source also told MENA that some sustained gunshot wounds, while eyewitnesses said that masked gunmen fired live rounds and birdshot at protesters and that three football fans from the Ultras Green Eagles group, supporting the local team Al-Masry, were injured near the Brotherhood's headquarters.

In Cairo, AFP reported that ongoing clashes off of Tahrir spilled into the square Wednesday morning. Teargas canisters fell into the crowd, with television images showing protesters running for cover and clouds of teargas spreading over tents erected for a sit-in.

Clashes between protesters and the police in the streets surrounding the square have entered their ninth day, stemming from a commemoration march last year to mark the one-year anniversary of the Mohamed Mahmoud Street clashes in the same area.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/teargas-hits-tahrir-conflicting-reports-injuries-emerge>

- **Mass anti-Morsi rally in Egyptian capital**

Protests in Cairo against President Mohamed Morsi's decision to grant himself sweeping powers continue.

One person has been killed and hundreds injured after after an estimated 200,000 people crammed into Tahrir Square in the Egyptian capital to protest against President Mohamed Morsi, who last week granted himself sweeping powers.

In the biggest protest against Egypt's new president thus far, people demanded an end to Morsi's new powers on Tuesday and into the early hours of Wednesday morning.

One person died of a heart attack after inhaling tear gas as protesters and riot police clashed in Cairo near Tahrir Square, the focal point of the uprising that toppled former President Hosni Mubarak nearly two years ago.

"The people want the regime to fall," the crowds chanted.

In the Mediterranean city of Alexandria protesters attacked the local office of Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood movement, while In Mahalla, north of Cairo, anti-Morsi protesters held a large rally.

Al Jazeera's Hoda Abel-Hamid, reporting from Cairo on Tuesday night, said there were no indications that Morsi was going to rescind the decree extending his powers.

"We are hearing reports of different influential Egyptians who are trying to come up with a solution, some sort of common ground that would be acceptable," she said.

'Emergency session'

A rival rally in Cairo by the Muslim Brotherhood in support of the president was called off to "avoid potential unrest" but that has done little to heal the division among supporters and foes of Morsi.

"The Muslim Brotherhood stole the revolution" read one banner in Tahrir.

Another said the president was "pushing the people to civil disobedience".

"The Muslim Brotherhood are liars," read another.

The demonstrations come a day after Morsi met the country's senior judges in a bid to defuse the crisis over the decree, which has sparked deadly clashes and prompted judges and journalists to call for strike.

On Monday, Morsi met with the nation's top judges and tried to win their acceptance of his decrees. But the move was dismissed by many in the opposition and the judiciary as providing no real concessions.

The senior judges who met Morsi were in an "emergency session" on Tuesday night, according to our correspondent, "trying to come up with one united stance".

Presidential spokesperson Yasser Ali said Morsi told the judges that he acted within his rights as the nation's sole source of legislation, assuring them that the decrees were temporary and did not in any way infringe on the judiciary.

He underlined repeatedly that the president had no plans to change or amend his decrees.

'Assault on independence'

According to a presidential statement late on Monday, Morsi told the judges that his decree meant that any decisions he makes on "issues of sovereignty" are immune from judicial review.

The decree has sparked violent protests in Cairo and across the country. The vaguely worded statement did not define those issues, but they were widely interpreted to cover declaration of

war, imposition of martial law, breaking diplomatic relations with a foreign nation or dismissing a cabinet.

Morsi's original edict, however, explicitly gives immunity to all his decisions and there was no sign it had been changed.

The statement on Monday did not affect the immunity that Morsi gave the constitutional assembly or the upper chamber of parliament, known as the Shura Council.

It also did not affect the edict that the president can take any measures he sees as necessary to stop threats to the revolution, stability or public institutions. Many see that edict as granting Morsi unlimited emergency powers.

Morsi, who has been in power since June, has said the decrees are necessary to protect the "revolution" and the nation's transition to democratic rule.

The judiciary, the main target of Morsi's edicts, called the decrees a power grab and an "assault" on the branch's independence.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/11/20121127142656380571.html>

## 6. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Sleiman to postpone dialogue to early next year**

President Michel Sleiman is expected to reschedule Thursday's Dialogue session to a later date, probably early next year after the March 14's decision to boycott this week's talks, political sources told The Daily Star.

Sleiman had earlier said the country's rival parties seemed to have no intention of taking part in the Nov. 29 Dialogue session aimed at resolving the ongoing government crisis.



The sources told The Daily Star the decision to push the session to early next year was made because both Sleiman and Prime Minister Najib Mikati would be traveling abroad in December.

Sleiman will be on an official visit to Greece from Dec. 6-8 and will be on vacation around the New Year.

The prime minister is leaving Beirut to Italy Wednesday for an official three-day visit.

Sleiman, however, said he was sure the March 8 and March 14 leaders would end up engaging in dialogue sooner or later.

“It seems the concerned parties have no intention of take part in the next round of dialogue ... but I am sure they will eventually participate in dialogue,” the president told his visitors at Baabda Palace.

“I feel sorry that some have decided to boycott dialogue,” Sleiman said.

“I acknowledge their right to make that choice, but the right to boycott must only be used in exceptional circumstances,” he added.

Sleiman called on the March 14 coalition to come to the Dialogue table and request a government change.

“If they want a new government, let them make this request at the Dialogue table and see what the other party’s reaction would be,” he said, adding that the fate of the current Cabinet should not be a precondition to attending National Dialogue.

“There are three ideas on what the next Cabinet should look like. We can either have a national unity government, a majority one or a neutral one,” added Sleiman.

“What should be discussed at the Dialogue table is changing the current government in principle, without getting into details as it is left for the president and the prime minister to decide on the shape of the new Cabinet after consulting the different parliamentary blocs, as stipulated by the Constitution,” the president said.

The opposition is pressuring Mikati to resign over the Oct. 19 assassination of Brigadier General Wissam al-Hasan in a car blast that rocked Beirut’s Ashrafieh district. It has called for the resignation of Mikati and the formation of a neutral salvation Cabinet that would supervise the 2013 parliamentary elections.

To increase pressure on Mikati, the opposition launched a boycott of the government and all legislative activity and set Cabinet resignation as a precondition to resuming National Dialogue.

Meanwhile, Speaker Nabih Berri said Lebanese rivals should resume dialogue to reach a consensus over their disagreements. “We should reach consensus over disputed matters as we can’t eliminate each other,” Berri said during a lunch banquet in Ain al-Tineh to honor Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan.

Addressing Lebanese political figures who attended the speaker’s lunch, Berri said reaching a breakthrough on Lebanon’s deadlock should not hinge on developments in the Syrian crisis.

“We should reach an understanding without waiting to see what will happen in Syria,” Berri said.

The speaker also stressed that dialogue participants should come to the table knowing that discussion of arms should be directed at the sole aim of protecting Lebanon against Israel.

Sleiman-sponsored Dialogue sessions first kicked off with the aim of agreeing on a national defense strategy for Lebanon amid calls by the March 14 coalition to disarm Hezbollah, which insists it would not lay down arms or transfer its arsenal to state possession as long as Israel poses a threat to Lebanon.

Also, Maronite Patriarch Beshara Rai urged rival parties to put Lebanon’s interest above all others and attend National Dialogue without preconditions.

Speaking at the airport after returning from the Vatican, Cardinal Rai reiterated his support to Sleiman’s efforts to bring the March 8 and March 14 coalition to the dialogue table. “I want to emphasize the importance of what President Sleiman said in Rome a few days ago. All conditions and reservations become irrelevant when national interests are at stake and when the country is in danger,” Rai said.

Separately, Mikati met U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon Maura Connelly Tuesday for discussions over the Cabinet formation bid, a statement from Connelly’s press office said. “Ambassador Connelly welcomed the prime minister’s efforts to move forward with dialogue on government formation.”

Following an official three-day visit to France last week, Mikati said he was willing to step down and allow the formation of a new Cabinet provided that a prior consensus was reached among Lebanese rivals.

According to the statement, forming a new Cabinet in the aftermath of Hasan’s assassination would strengthen internal security and Lebanon’s sovereignty and independence. “The ambassador and the prime minister discussed recent proposals by several Lebanese leaders on how to move forward with establishing a government that reflects the aspirations of the Lebanese people.”

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Nov-28/196364-sleiman-to-postpone-dialogue-to-early-next-year.ashx#axzz2DVddw8Vr>

- **Sargsyan pledges to stand by Lebanon**

Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan said his country would stand by Lebanon amid the ongoing unrest in the Middle East and expressed concern for the Syrian Armenians caught in that country’s conflict.

Denouncing last month's assassination of senior security chief Brig. Gen. Wissam al-Hasan, Sargsyan said that Lebanese leaders should unify their ranks and stand together to prevent a new wave of attacks against Lebanon.

"We regret and denounce the terrorist attack of Oct. 19 and we express our condolences to the families of the victims. Armenia hopes that the attack will fail to shake Lebanon's stability," Sargsyan said.

Speaking during a lunch banquet in his honor at Speaker Nabih Berri's Ain al-Tineh residence, Sargsyan said Armenia was confident that Lebanese leaders can take the necessary steps to build confidence among the Lebanese and protect the country from violence.

"Armenian authorities are ready for their role to stand by Lebanon and the Lebanese to solve the present conflicts," he added.

In a rare showing amid the ongoing political deadlock in the country, MPs from across the political divide met for lunch at Ain al-Tineh. A number of diplomats and senior state officials also attended the gathering at Berri's residence.

Sargsyan also said his country was worried by the ongoing violence in Syria and expressed concern over the fate of at least 80,000 Syrian Armenians in the war-torn country.

"The continuing violence and the terrorist activities in Syria are completely unacceptable ... Thousands of Syrian Armenians are also living under these difficult circumstances. Armenia's stance toward this crisis is clear: We ask our brothers and sisters in Syria to rally behind restoring peace as quickly as possible in Syria," said Sargsyan, who arrived in Beirut Monday for a three-day official visit.

"The main challenge is to spread peace and stability in the world."

He added that Lebanon was the first country in the region to endorse democratic values but it paid a high price for those principles because “the region surrounding it was not ready for them.”

Earlier Tuesday, Sargsyan visited Armenian Patriarch Aram I at the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia in Antelias and praised the role the church played for the community.

Before heading to the lunch in Ain al-Tineh, Sargsyan visited Haigazian University in Beirut, during which he was welcomed by a crowd of students and administration officials.

Students from the American University of Beirut, Lebanese American University and the Saint Joseph University gathered at Haigazian along with the university’s president, the Rev. Paul Haidostian, to welcome the Armenian official.

“You are tasked to build stronger relations between Armenia and Lebanon,” Sargsyan told the students in a speech.

Also Tuesday, Sargsyan visited the Armenian Catholic monastery in Bzommar and met with Armenian Catholic Patriarch Nerses Bedros XIX. The Armenian president will hold a farewell meeting with President Michel Sleiman Wednesday morning before ending his three-day visit to Lebanon.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Nov-28/196356-sargsyan-pledges-to-stand-by-lebanon.ashx#ixzz2DVemP8rA>

## 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Saudis Protest for Release of Political Prisoners**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Saudi security forces dispersed and detained dozens of protesters, including women and children, who on Tuesday were urging the government to release political prisoners, according to activists.

Mohammed Al-Qahtani, human rights activist and board member of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association, told CNN the demonstration took place in front of the offices of the Human Rights Commission on King Fahd Road in Riyadh, the country's capital.

"These are ongoing protests about political prisoners," said Al-Qahtani, who explained that many of the demonstrators were family members of prisoners who had for years been "languishing in jail cells without due process."

"The government is not willing to take them to court and issue verdicts," added Al-Qahtani, a prominent Saudi activist who is currently on trial in Saudi Arabia accused of, among other things, breaking allegiance to the country's ruler and setting up an unlicensed organization. His case has brought about widespread criticism of the Saudi government by human rights groups.

"These men, women and children were appearing before the Human Rights Commission because no authority (in Saudi Arabia) will listen to their claim and try to provide a solution. That's the root of the problem."

"The response of the authorities was an exaggerated one," he said. "They also shut down one of the major arteries in the city."

At least one video on YouTube showed an argument between demonstrators and police in front of the Human Rights Commission in Riyadh.

Various pictures posted on Twitter also showed the demonstrators, some holding signs demanding the release of their relatives. Other pictures appeared to show the small number of protesters surrounded by police.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107122554>

## 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **US envoy to leave Afghanistan-Pakistan post**

Marc Grossman, who took over after the death of Richard Holbrooke in 2010, will step down in December.

The US special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan is set to step down from his post in December, his spokeswoman said in statement.

Laura Lucas told the AFP news agency on Wednesday Marc Grossman, who has been in the job for two years, would return to private life.

Grossman was appointed by Hillary Clinton, the outgoing secretary of state, after the sudden death of veteran diplomat Richard Holbrooke in December 2010.

"After almost two years in the position, and with Secretary Clinton's agreement, he will return to private life," the statement said.

Clinton thanked Grossman for building "a diplomatic surge" and an intense global focus which "have put in place a network of regional and international support for Afghanistan post 2014 and into the next decade," the statement added.

"His work also helped set the conditions for an Afghan peace process that will enable Afghans to talk with other Afghans in pursuit of a negotiated settlement to end decades of conflict."

Grossman, 61, is credited with the behind-the-scenes efforts that helped persuade Pakistan to reopen its border crossings with Afghanistan to NATO convoys earlier this year after a row over the killing of 24 Pakistani troops in a US air strike.

His work over the past two years had also supported Obama's "objectives to disrupt and defeat al-Qaeda and ensure that Afghanistan can no longer become a safe haven for terrorists", according to the statement.

Ambassador David Pearce, currently principal deputy special representative, will serve as the acting special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Grossman served at the US embassy in Pakistan from 1977 to 1979.

He also assisted his predecessor, Holbrooke, in the Dayton peace talks that ended the Bosnian war.

From 2001 to 2005, he served as undersecretary of state for political affairs - the top position for a career diplomat - when he worked to mend US relationships overseas during the Iraq war.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2012/11/2012112844436498663.html>

*\*This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Sercan DOĞAN**. 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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