



# MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

## GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

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## 1. IRAQ

- **UN official "dismayed" at terrorist attacks against worshippers in Iraq**

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 28 (KUNA) -- The UN Special Representative for Iraq Martin Kobler on Wednesday voiced his "dismay" following a series of attacks against innocent civilians, including worshippers, in the country. "These inhuman acts only add to the senseless suffering of innocent people and their families," Kobler said in a statement carried today by the website of the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI).

At least 19 people were reported killed in three separate bomb attacks in predominantly Shia Muslim areas of the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, on Tuesday. Dozens of others were wounded in the blasts near Shia mosques in the north and north-east of the city. Several explosions also reportedly took place yesterday in the northern city of Kirkuk, leading to a number of deaths and injuries. Kobler also expressed his "profound sympathy" to the families of the victims and wished a speedy recovery to the wounded.

KUNA

- **Kobler expresses concern on recent attacks**

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: The UN Representative to Iraq Martin Kobler expressed his concern with yesterday's bloody attacks against the Iraqi people that led to tens of casualties.

In a statement by his office, obtained by Aswat al-Iraq, Kobler described the attacks as "inhuman practices committed against the innocent people."

Aswat al-Iraq

- **Iraq, Kurdish war unlikely**

WASHINGTON, Nov. 28 (UPI) -- Washington is encouraged that Iraqi and Kurdish forces are moving in a direction that would prevent a military confrontation, a spokeswoman said.

Authorities in the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk told CNN that at least four people were killed and more than 40 others were injured there when three car bombs exploded Tuesday.

Control over the oil-rich city is a matter of contention between the Kurdish and central government of Iraq. CNN reported that clashes between Kurdish forces, called Peshmerga, and federal troops erupted last week in and around Kirkuk province and the so-called disputed territories, an area demarcated by a line from Sinjar in the northeast to Khanaqin near the Iranian border.

Victoria Nuland, a spokeswoman for the U.S. State Department, said Washington was encouraged by reports that both sides were sitting down to find a political solution to the crisis.

"We look forward to their continuing to work through these issues in a political manner so that we don't have any kind of a confrontation," she said.

U.S. military forces left Iraq in December under the terms of a status of forces agreement.

Joost Hiltermann, director of the International Crisis Group, told National Public Radio this week that Kurdish leaders may be bolstered by oil riches in

the area. Iraq, however, is unlikely to divide "at least, not now."

[http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/Special/2012/11/28/Iraq-Kurdish-war-unlikely/UPI-64631354129384/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2012/11/28/Iraq-Kurdish-war-unlikely/UPI-64631354129384/)

- **No voting on Amnesty Law this season, MP**

KARBALA/ Aswat al-Iraq: Sadrist Ahrar bloc MP disclosed here today that the General Amnesty Law will not be voted this parliamentary season, as well as postponing many laws to the coming parliamentary elections, due to political differences.

MP Jawad al-Hasnawi told Aswat al-Iraq that there are differences in visions among the political blocs.

He added that the "absence of political conciliation led to have difficult solutions which does not permit voting these laws".

Karbala, center of the province, lies 108 km south west of the capital, Baghdad.

Aswat al-Iraq

- **Shihristani denies "Dictatorship" concerns**

Baghdad (AIN) –The Deputy Premier for Energy Affairs, Hussien al-Shihristani, denied reports over his concerns of dictatorship and calling for replacing the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki."

A statement by Shihristani's office received by AIN cited "This report is fabricated and groundless."

"Shihristani did not launch such statements," the statement added, assuring that "He did not need an MP from the Kurdistan Alliance to express his own views."

A local newspaper from posted a news item on last Tuesday entitled "Even Shihristani concerned of dictatorship...Kurdistani Alliance calls for replacing Maliki."

AIN

- **MP criticizes officials' performance in addressing housing crisis**

Baghdad (AIN) -The Parliamentary Services Committee attributed the housing crisis in

Iraq to the lack of the financial allocations from the general budgets, noting that Iraq needs a large number of residential units where there are more than two millions Iraqi families do not have a suitable housing.

The head of the Committee, Vian Dakhil told AIN "A large part of the mud-based houses in Baghdad and most of the Iraqi provinces are based on squatter lands out of the original design of the cities."

"Moreover, the Government did not distribute land pieces on citizens whether employees or non-employees since 1982," she added.

AIN

- **Iraq Integrity Commission: We cannot convict any Central Bank employee before arresting everyone involved**

The Parliamentary Integrity Commission asserted on Tuesday that it was impossible to convict any of the Central Bank employees before arresting everyone involved, while it urged the Central Bank to take measures against the private banks that provided the falsified documents.

“The Central Bank’s file was transferred to the Integrity and Justice Commission”, said “Baha’ Al Aaraji” head of the commission in a statement to Alsumaria, mentioning that “26 of the bank’s employees have been arrested, except for the governor and his assistant, while three others haven’t been caught yet”.

“Certain measures should have been taken against these employees but a bail is not applicable by virtue of the article upon which they were arrested, thus we are waiting until the others are taken into custody or until a lawsuit is filed against them” added Al Aaraji. He also emphasized that “the investigative judge and the judicial committee ordered the external inquiry committee to examine the suspected bills 95% of which are falsified”.

Al Aaraji called the Central Bank to “take measures against the private banks that presented falsified documents or through which such documents have been provided”. He noted that “according to the latest directives from the Central Bank, such banks are fined 5% of the

transferred amount or the amount of the safe-haven currency taken”.

Al Aaraji considered that the “measures taken by the government and the parliament, before this judiciary system took over the case, were quite flawed with constitutional and legal violations” underlining that “the administrative court will issue a very surprising ruling in this regard”.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/news/67146/iraq-integrity-commission-we-cannot-convict-any-ce/en>

- **Maliki holds meeting to evaluate Iraqi relations with neighbouring countries**

Baghdad (AIN) –The Committee of Planning the Foreign Relations headed by the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki, held a meeting to evaluate the relations of Iraq with the neighboring countries, particularly Kuwait, due to the latest updates in the region.

A statement by Maliki's office received by AIN on Wednesday cited "Maliki headed the meeting of the Committee of Planning the Foreign Relations to discuss the

relations of Iraq with the neighboring countries, particularly Kuwait."

"The head of the negotiating delegation with Kuwait over the file of the Iraqi Airways presented his report over the latest updates of his visit to Kuwait to settle this issue," the statement added.

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=23541](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23541)

- **Maliki, Larijani discuss means to improve mutual relations**

Baghdad (AIN) –The Premier, Nouri al-Maliki, discussed with the Speaker of the Iranian Shura Council, Ali Larijani, the means of developing the commercial and economic cooperation by conducting cooperation pacts between the two sides."

A statement by Maliki's office received by AIN on Wednesday cited "Maliki received Larijani at his office in Baghdad where they discussed the bilateral relations."

"The two sides discussed the means of improving the commercial and economic cooperation by conducting cooperation

pacts in all the fields," the statement concluded.

Maliki, Italian official discuss political, economic cooperation (Alliraqnews)

Baghdad (AIN) –The Premier, Nouri al-Maliki, assured that the Italian experience in fighting terrorism can enrich the Iraqi experience.

A statement by Maliki's office received by AIN cited "Maliki received the Deputy Head of the Italian Supreme Judicial Council, Jessie Fitti, and the accompanied delegation at his office in Baghdad."

The statement quoted Maliki, as saying "The judicial cooperation between the two sides completes the political and economic cooperation," assuring that "The Italian experience in fighting the terrorism could enrich the Iraqi experience."

"The Iraqi Judicial Council has many martyrs due to fighting the terrorism where Iraq is working on developing this council," he added, noting that "Iraq is adherent to separate the authorities and

building a strong and stable with an advance judicial system."

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=23538:maliki-italian-official-discuss-political-economic-cooperation-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23538:maliki-italian-official-discuss-political-economic-cooperation-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2)

- **Senior Iranian, Iraqi Parliamentarians Discuss Regional Developments**

TEHRAN (FNA)- A high-ranking Iranian parliamentary delegation and senior Iraqi parliamentary officials reviewed the two countries' bilateral ties and discussed the latest regional and international developments in a meeting in Baghdad on Wednesday.

During the meeting presided by Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani and his Iraqi counterpart Osama al-Nujaifi, Chairman of the Iraqi Parliament's Foreign Relations Committee Humam Hamoudi welcomed Larijani's invitation to pay a visit Iran in a bid to have a joint meeting with the Iranian legislature's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission members.

Also Vice-Chairman of the Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Mansour Haqiqatpour, who accompanied Larijani in his visit to Iraq, said Iran and Iraq share common interests and are faced with common threats, thus they "should exchange views over important regional issues".

Haqiqatpour said Iran as the president of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and Iraq as the chairing country of the Arab League should use their potentials and capability for peace and stability in the region.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107122724>

- **Zebari, Larijani discuss Middle East situation**

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: Iraq's Foreign Minister Hoshiar Zebari discussed today with Iranian Chairman of Shura Council the situation in the Middle East, particularly the Syrian crisis.

A statement released by the Foreign Ministry and received by Aswat al-Iraq noted that Zebari and Larijani discussed bilateral relations and means of

consolidating them, as well as other topics related to the aspirations of the Syrian people.

Iraqi-Iranian relations were discussed on the basis of joint interests and respect.

Larijani and his accompanying delegation arrived in Najaf yesterday to meet senior clergymen.

Aswat al-Iraq

- **Muhamadi stresses enhancing relations with Arab countries**

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Waleed al-Muhamadi, of the Iraqiya Slate confirmed the necessity of enhancing Iraq's relations with the Arab countries especially the neighboring courtiers."

He stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "We hope our relations with the Arab countries especially the neighboring to be good in all aspects," noting tat "This is very important to ensure progress and development to reach consolidated relations."

He added "Saudi Arabia has a distinguished position among the Arabic

and Islamic Countries," stressing that "Both Iraq and Saudi Arabia are adherent to fight terrorism whether conducted by Iraqi or Saudi nationals."

"If the some Iraqis in Saudi Arabia or Saudi citizens in Iraq are convicted with minor cases, it is better to be disregarded to enhance the relations between the two countries," he concluded.

[http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=23520:muhamadi-stresses-enhancing-relations-with-arab-countries-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2](http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23520:muhamadi-stresses-enhancing-relations-with-arab-countries-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2)

- **Iraq, Kuwait reach "final agreement" on Iraqi Airways**

BAGHDAD, Nov 28 (KUNA) -- The Iraqi government announced Wednesday that its negotiators reached "a final agreement" with their Kuwaiti peers on settling the issue of the Iraqi Airways.

The announcement followed a meeting by the government committee on foreign affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki.

The meeting assessed the file of relations with Iraq's neighbors, notably Kuwait, as well as the latest developments of the bilateral ties, according to a statement by Al-Maliki's office received by KUNA here.

Iraqi chief negotiator with Kuwait on the Iraqi Airways briefed the meeting on the progress of the talks and the agreement to settle this issue "once and for all.

KUNA

- **Kuwait denies calling Iraq to pay compensations over Iraq Airways issue**

Baghdad (AIN) –Kuwait denied calling Iraq to directly pay the compensations over the Iraqi Airways issue.

The Kuwaiti Ambassador to Iraq, Ali al-Moumin, stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "Kuwait did not call Iraq to direly pay the compensations over its debts related to the Iraqi Airways and Kuwait is adherent to all the deals with Iraq regarding the compensations where the interest of Iraq will be one of our priorities."

Earlier, a source within the Iraqi Transportation Ministry stated to (AIN) that "A delegation of the Ministry headed by the head of the advisor of the Prime Minister, Fadhil Jawad, to Kuwait to discuss the pending issues in the Airways file where Kuwait hesitated in applying the latest deal with Iraq in this issue."

Alliraqnews

- **Iraq, Saudi Arabia begin talks on security cooperation, exchange of prisoners**

Wednesday, 28 November 2

By Al Arabiya

Iraq and Saudi Arabia on Wednesday resumed security cooperation talks, including discussion of a prisoners exchange deal.

Saudi Interior Minister Prince Mohammed bin Nayef and Iraq's Ministry of Interior senior undersecretary Adnan al-Assadi were scheduled to discuss a possible prisoner-exchange deal between the kingdom and Iraq.

Saudi daily newspaper Okaz reported that a deal had already been drafted and it was signed by Riyadh but that the Iraqi parliament rejected it.

Assadi had been working during the past few days with the Iraqi parliament to sort out the issue, according to the newspaper.

Saudi Arabia and Iraq have opened discussions on the issue of prisoners earlier in November, when a Saudi man was released from an Iraqi jail said he was tortured by Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

Abdullah al-Anzi spent eight years in detention in Iraq after he was arrested for illegal entry into the country. During his years of detention, he was transferred between several prisons, including the notorious Abu Ghraib west of the capital Baghdad.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/28/252346.html>

- **Zebari meets with ambassadors of Serbia and Greece**

Baghdad / NINA /--Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari met with Serbian Ambassador to Iraq Radisav Petrovaj and

discussed with him bilateral relations and means for enhancing them.

A statement by the Ministry, "said Zebari called during the meeting with Petrovaj on Serbian companies to invest in Iraq and contribute in the reconstruction of the country infrastructures.

The statement added that Zebari also received Greek Ambassador Mirkorius Karavothias and discussed with him the Iraqi - Greek relations and the contribution of Greek companies in the process of reconstruction and development in Iraq.

NINA

- **Russia condemns Baghdad terrorist attacks**

MOSCOW, Nov 28 (KUNA) -- Russia Wednesday condemned the terrorist attacks that rocked the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, yesterday, killing 20 people and injuring some 100 others.

Russia strongly condemns these inhumane crimes which cannot be justifies, the foreign ministry said in a statement.

The attackers want to trigger discord without paying attention to lives of people or their religious feelings, it added.

The ministry called for robust confrontation against terrorists and solving disputes via political dialogue.

KUNA

## 2. IRAN

### • Iran Equips Navy with New Hovercrafts

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran equipped its Navy fleets with two new hovercrafts Wednesday morning, one of which enjoys missile launching capabilities.

In a ceremony attended by Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari in Iran's Southern port city of Bandar Abbas, hovercrafts BH7 which had been overhauled by local experts and SRNX whose Iranian name is Tondar (Thunderbolt) and has been manufactured through indigenized technology joined the Navy's fleets in Iran's Southern waters.

Iran unveiled the highly advanced home-made Tondar which can launch missiles

and serve as launch pad for drones in a ceremony earlier this month.



Addressing a ceremony to unveil the hovercraft at the time, Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi said that the hovercraft has been designed and developed by Iranian experts in two models for combat and transportation missions, and that the combat model is called 'Tondar'.

Vahidi further announced that Tondar can be equipped with different types of weapons produced by the Iranian defense industries, including rockets, guns and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs).

The minister said that Tondar can be used for "coastal patrolling, as a command vessel, offensive reconnaissance operations, mid-range amphibious missions, asymmetric defense, as a personnel and equipment carrier for logistical support for islands and coastal

areas or as a sea ambulance for relief and rescue missions".

He further added that the new hovercraft will increase the combat and reconnaissance capabilities as well as the mobility of the Iranian Armed Forces.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107122578>

- **Iran Boosts Naval Power with New Missile-Launching Frigates, Light Submarines**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran boosted its naval power in Persian Gulf waters after a new missile launching vessel and two light submarines joined its Navy fleet on Wednesday.

The body of Sina-7 missile-launching frigate was launched in a ceremony in Iran's Southern port city of Bandar Abbas this morning on the occasion of the National Day of Navy.

During the ceremony attended by Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, two Qadir-class light submarines also joined the Iranian naval fleet.

All parts of the Qadir-class submarines, including the hull, radar equipment and advanced defense systems, have been made domestically.



The submarines are appropriate vessels for different naval missions, including reconnaissance and combat in territorial waters, specially in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz which are not wide enough for the maneuvering of large warships and submarines.

Earlier in June, Lieutenant Commander of the Navy for Technical Affairs Rear Admiral Abbas Zamini had told FNA that construction of three classes of Sina-class missile launching frigates is on Iran's agenda.

He also mentioned that the Iranian defense ministry and the Navy are working on four projects to build four

different classes of warships, and said the four projects are called Sina 4, 5, 6 and 7.

Iran's naval power has even been acknowledged by foes. In a Sep. 11, 2008 report, the Washington Institute for the Near East Policy also said that in the two decades since the Iraqi imposed war on Iran, the Islamic Republic has excelled in naval capabilities and is able to wage unique asymmetric warfare against larger naval forces.

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

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

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107122588>

- **Iran will strongly respond to any country that violates its airspace: official**

TEHRAN, Nov. 28 (MNA) – Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said on Tuesday that Iran rigorously protects its airspace and territorial waters and will strongly respond to any country that violates its airspace.

Mehmanparast also said that U.S. forces had violated Iranian airspace eight times in October, adding that Iran has notified the United Nations of the cases of violation and has strongly complained to the United States about the issue.

“In its strong complaints, the Islamic Republic of Iran has requested the United States to meet its international commitments to adhere to the principles of international law and respect the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of our country,” he said.

“In two separate letters to the United Nations secretary general (Ban Ki-moon) and the United Nations Security Council, Iran has mentioned the cases of violation of its airspace and has called on these international bodies to warn U.S. officials about this issue so that we will not witness the repetition of such incidents

and the violation of Iranian airspace in the future,” he stated.

In addition, Mehmanparast said, “Certain countries’ non-compliance with international principles and regulations can undermine international and regional stability and security.”

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1753272>

- **Doha determined to expand ties with Tehran: Qatari PM**

TEHRAN, Nov. 28 (MNA) – The Qatari prime minister, Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani, has expressed hope that Tehran-Doha relations would be expanded.

The Qatari prime minister made the remarks during a meeting with the Iranian ambassador to Doha, Mohammad Javad Asayesh Zarchi, in the Qatari capital, the Persian service of the Fars News Agency reported on Tuesday.

“Qatar has always had friendly relationship with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and we hope these relations will develop further”, the Qatari official said.

He also expressed hope that the latest visit by Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi to Qatar would open a new chapter in ties between the two countries.

The Iranian ambassador conveyed the warm greetings of Iranian First Vice President Mohammad Reza Rahimi to the Qatari prime minister and called for the removal of the obstacles in the way of the expansion of bilateral relations.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1753411>

- **‘Egypt has initially agreed to Iranian MPs’ visit to Gaza’**

TEHRAN, Nov. 28 (MNA) – Iranian MP Hossein Naqavi-Hosseini has said that the Egyptian government has given preliminary approval to Iranian parliamentarians’ request to visit Gaza.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry is now seeking to obtain visas for the MPs who intend to inspect the situation in Gaza Strip, Naqavi-Hosseini, who is the rapporteur of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, told the

Persian service of the Fars News Agency in an interview published on Monday.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1753397>

- **Iran will continue fuel plate production: AEOI head**

The production of fuel plates and their conversion into fuel complexes to be used in the Tehran [Research] Reactor currently continues in the Isfahan factory.”

Iran’s top nuclear official says the country has succeeded in delivering some four or five batches of fuel to the Tehran Research Reactor, stressing that the Islamic Republic will press on with fuel plate production.

“The production of fuel plates and their conversion into fuel complexes to be used in the Tehran [Research] Reactor currently continues in the Isfahan factory,” Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Fereydoun Abbasi told reporters on Tuesday.



He added that Iran currently has the capacity to produce some two nuclear fuel complexes per month but can increase it to three.

With some four or five batches of fuel produced and transferred to the Tehran Research Reactor, we have presently no problem in launching the reactor and producing radio-medicine, Abbasi said, adding that ‘we will gradually replace consumed fuel with new fuel.’

The AEOI head said all of Iran’s nuclear activities are carried out under the surveillance of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and their nuclear safety is ensured. No specific incident to hurt people has occurred so far.

On November 11, IAEA Director-General Yukiya Amano acknowledged that Iran’s nuclear energy facilities are used for peaceful purposes.

Amano confirmed that a large number of nuclear energy facilities in Iran are under IAEA supervision and are used for civilian purposes.

On February 15, Iran placed the first indigenously fuel rods into the heart of the Tehran Research Reactor. The fuel rods were produced at the Isfahan nuclear facility and transferred to the reactor under the IAEA supervision.

By placing nuclear plates into the reactor, Iran took the final step in completing the nuclear fuel cycle.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/29/275163/iran-will-continue-fuel-plate-production/>

- **Turkey rejects US, EU unilateral sanctions on Iran**

The US sanctions stand for the US. We have multilateral international agreements. These deals, which we are a party to, are binding for us. The statements by the EU are not binding since we are not a member [of the bloc].”

Turkish Economy Minister Zafer Caglayan has rejected the US and EU unilateral

sanctions against Iran, saying Ankara only abides by international agreements.

“The US sanctions stand for the US,” Caglayan said at a Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkey (TUSKON) meeting held in Istanbul on Wednesday.



“We have multilateral international agreements. These deals, which we are a party to, are binding for us. The statements by the EU are not binding since we are not a member [of the bloc],” Caglayan added.

He said that any fresh US move to cut gold trade with Iran would not affect Turkey.

The Turkish official’s remarks came after reports that the US Senate is considering new sanctions against Iran that would prevent Iran getting paid for its natural gas exports in gold bullion.

A senior US Senate aide said that the sanctions would end Turkey's sale of gold to Iran in payment for importing natural gas, referring to reports that Turkey has been paying for natural gas with gold due to the sanctions' rules.

The United States, Israel and some of their allies have repeatedly accused Iran of pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

Over the false allegation, Washington and the European Union have imposed unilateral illegal sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

Iran refutes the allegations and argues that as a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency, it is entitled to develop and acquire nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/29/275162/turkey-rejects-us-eu-bans-on-iran/>

- **Reforms in Syria not possible with weapons: Larijani**



Iran Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani says democratic reforms in Syria cannot be achieved with weapons, stressing the need for finding a political solution to the crisis in the Arab country.

In a joint press conference with Iraqi Parliament Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi after meeting him in Baghdad on Tuesday, Larijani emphasized that reforms in Syria cannot be achieved with tanks and RPG's, but the involved parties "must seek a democratic solution that highlights the people's role."

The Iranian Majlis speaker stated that Iraq is an important country in the region and can play a major role in future developments of the Middle East.

Al-Nujaifi, for his part, said Iraq is in favor of establishing a democratic system based on the will of Syrians, but it does

not approve of foreign interference and military intervention in Syria.

Iran's Majlis speaker is scheduled to hold talks with senior Iraqi officials including Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

Syria has been experiencing unrest since March 2011. Many people, including large numbers of security forces, have been killed in the turmoil.

The Syrian government has repeatedly said that foreign-backed "terrorists" are responsible for the unrest in the country, and that certain Arab and Western states are fueling the turmoil.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/28/275056/syria-reforms-not-possible-with-arms/>

- **Turkey's missile deployment undermines Muslim unity: Iranian lawmaker**

An Iranian lawmaker says Turkey's move to deploy NATO's Patriot missiles on its border with Syria will fuel tensions in the region and sow division among Muslim nations.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran expects Turkey, as a powerful Muslim country, to avoid acts that could harm the foundation of Islam and lead the Muslim world into an internal confrontation instead of aligning against Israel," Mehr news agency quoted Nozar Shafi'i as saying on Wednesday.



Shafi'i, a member of the Majlis (parliament) committee for National Security and Foreign Policy, acknowledged Ankara's right to secure its borders.

The parliamentarian, however, warned that the NATO member state might find it inevitable to use the missiles against its Arab neighbor if the Western military alliance agreed on an armed intervention in Syria.

Shafi'i made it clear that Iran is not opposed to Turkey's moves to tighten

security at its borders, but that Turkey and Syria are both Muslim countries and Turkey is morally not expected to interfere in Syria's internal affairs.

Turkey has officially requested NATO for the deployment of Patriot systems along its border with Syria, claiming that the move would only be defensive and that it would not "support a no-fly zone or any offensive operation" in Syria.

Patriot is a long-range, all-altitude and all-weather system employed to counter tactical ballistic and cruise missiles as well as advanced aircraft.

Russia has warned that the deployment of the missiles by Turkey could tempt Ankara to use the weapons and spark a "very serious armed conflict" involving NATO.

Damascus blames Turkey along with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and a number of Western countries for fueling a deadly unrest that has plagued the country since March 2011.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/28/275110/turkey-missiles-will-divide-muslims-mp/>

- **'Reformist Front will participate in presidential election'**



TEHRAN – The spokesperson for the Reformist Front has said that the members of the front will actively participate in the presidential election, which will be held on June 14, 2013, dismissing remarks made by certain reformist figures that the reformists should not take part in the election.

In an interview with the Persian service of the Fars News Agency on Wednesday, Majid Mohtashami also said that political issues cannot be resolved through going into a sulk.

He added that those who believe in the Islamic system do not set conditions to participate in the election.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/103642-reformist-front-will-participate-in-presidential-election->

### 3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **With Palestinians near certain to win UN recognition, Israel increasingly isolated**

At least 150 countries expected to vote in favor of recognizing Palestine as nonmember observer state at General Assembly; U.S., Canada to vote with Israel against resolution, Germany to abstain.

The UN General Assembly is expected on Thursday to pass a historic resolution recognizing Palestine within the 1967 borders as a nonmember observer state.

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/with-palestinians-near-certain-to-win-un-recognition-israel-increasingly-isolated.premium-1.481242>

- **Tibi: UN bid will change future negotiations**

NEW YORK (Ma'an) -- Knesset member Ahmad Tibi said Wednesday that the PLO's bid to upgrade its UN status will be

successful, and will change future negotiations.



"It is still a long and hard way, but it is becoming shorter and the world will witness the birth of the state of Palestine in the United Nations," Tibi told Ma'an in New York, where he joined a Palestinian delegation at the UN.

"The future political situation will be completely different for (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu, and even if there will be rounds of negotiations, Netanyahu will not meet with President Abu Mazen (Abbas) to take photos only," Tibi added.

Tibi said the UN vote would be a defining moment in the history of the Palestinian people.

President Mahmoud Abbas invited the Israeli MK to join the Palestinian delegation at the UN in New York.

The delegation also includes PLO Secretary-General Yasser Abed Rabbo, negotiator Saeb Erekat and Fatah Central Committee Member Nabil Shaath.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=543093>

- **Official: Egypt to crack down on Gaza tunnels**

EL-ARISH, Egypt (Ma'an) -- Egyptian security services are planning an "extraordinary" crackdown on smuggling tunnels under the Gaza border, a security source said Wednesday.



The Egyptian security official said tunnels were operating at 5 percent of previous

levels, and were mostly smuggling construction material to Gaza.

Israel bombarded the tunnels area in the southern Gaza Strip during its eight-day war which ended with a ceasefire on Nov. 24.

The official said Egypt's planned campaign to end smuggling was part of the truce agreement brokered by Cairo.

Israel bans the import of construction materials for the private sector in Gaza, so residents seeking to rebuild their destroyed homes and businesses are reliant on building materials smuggled through tunnels.

According to Israeli NGO Gisha, around 47 percent of civilian goods entering Gaza arrive through the tunnels, including cement, snack foods, spare parts, electronic equipment and fuel.

Since 2007, Israel has closed three out of four crossings to deliver goods to Gaza, leaving only Kerem Shalom open.

"Despite the fact that the capacity of this crossing has been increased, it cannot

meet the needs that would arise if the tunnels were to close and Rafah Crossing were to remain closed for the transport of commercial goods and fuel," Gisha says.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=543063>

- **Over 100 British Parliament Members Support UN Recognition of Palestine**

LONDON, November 28, 2012 (WAFA) - Over 100 British Parliament members (MPs) from across seven political parties signed a parliamentary motion supporting UN recognition of Palestine, Wednesday said a MPs press release.

The motion, tabled by Richard Burden MP, was signed by 102 MPs including former Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and other former ministers from both Labor and Conservative governments.

The motion adds to the growing support within the UK for the Government to vote in favor of the Palestinian request to become a non-member observer state at the UN General Assembly this week, said the release.

It said that labor and most UK opposition parties already support UN recognition of Palestine; this weekend it was reported that the Deputy Prime Minister and the Liberal Democrats support it too.

An opinion poll by YouGov and Avaaz published last week found that a significant majority of the British public think the Government should vote in favor of the UN resolution supporting recognition of a Palestinian state alongside Israel – with 58% in favor and only 8% against.

The UK Government has not yet confirmed how it will vote at the UN General Assembly. The Foreign Secretary will make a statement in the House of Commons today about the Palestinian resolution and is expected to outline the Government's position, it said.

Richard Burden MP, Chair of the Britain-Palestine All Party Parliamentary Group, said that, "Proper recognition of Palestine by the UN General Assembly is not the same as peace in the Middle East, but it is a step on the road. Voting in favor is one way of trying to move the situation in the Middle East forward and rekindle hopes

that there is a credible route to a negotiated two state solution.”

“Given the recent Gaza crisis, it is also a way of showing that there are non-violent options for the Palestinians to achieve freedom and statehood and that the international community will support these options,” he added.

“It is time to help level the playing field; an independent and recognized state of Israel alongside an independent and recognized state of Palestine. Both people realizing their legitimate right to self-determination,” he concluded.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21196>

- **Ashrawi: Voting for Palestine, is Voting for Justice and Peace**

RAMALLAH, November 28, 2012 (WAFA) – PLO Executive Committee member Hanan Ashrawi said on Wednesday, in a press conference on UN bid, that there is an overwhelming positive response to Palestinian UN bid and “We are extremely encouraged and believe that there will be positive majority in favor of peace, justice,

human rights, and in favor of global rule of law.”

She stressed that the text of the resolution will not be modified even though there are really intensive efforts to change it, including from the UK and other countries.

She said “the reasons we are going to the UN have not changed; we want first of all to insure the Palestinian right to self determination to insure that our land is defined as it is, and to insure that Israel knows its occupied territory, including East Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza, in addition, to insure that the Palestinians have the right to their own freedom and dignity and independence on their own land.”

She said this will also insure Israel as an occupying power and has to be subjected to the international law and international humanitarian law.

“We are very pleased that we will get support for that, it will also be a step for the empowerment of the Palestinian people; we will have access to international agencies, organizations and

venues and we will be under occupation but an equal nation among equals. We will no longer be the non-people, years ago we were always given unofficial papers because we said we were a non-people, but we are a people with a national identity, land, territory and government and with a commitment to peace and our ability to interact equally with other countries.”

“If Israel is not guilty of war crimes or crimes against humanity it has no reason to worry and to fear the International Criminal Court and International Court for Justice,” she said.

She added: “This is a corrected deal because it tries to rectify the flaws of the so called peace process that has become an instrument for the Israeli impunity and for continued Israeli unilateralism, such as building of settlements, the annexation of Jerusalem, the destruction of the two-state solution systematically through stealing the land and resources of the other state, the state of Palestine, and prejudging the outcome of the so called negotiations.”

“It is a last bit of effort because we believe that the two-state solution is in jeopardy as a result of these Israeli actions and we would like to insure that the world is still committed to the establishment of a sovereign viable democratic free Palestinian state to interact as an equal,” Ashrawi said.

She said: “Yesterday we saw the move to begin serious scientific criminal forensic investigation into the death of late leader Yasser Arafat; somehow it signaled that it is also the beginning of a new phase as we are approaching the UN general assembly in order to get our status upgraded to an observer non-member state status.”

She said that “the attack on Gaza indicates that finally we do need to deal with the real causes; we need a real solution, we don’t need ceasefires and we don’t need bandage treatments.” “It is time that the Palestinians gain their freedom and their right to self-determination.”

Ashrawi also said “we do not believe that this move in anyway can be misconstrued as being unilateral, it is not, it is a commitment to international law and to responsibility as an equal player on the

international arena and if there are to be negotiations then this would form the basis of this negotiations because international law should be the basis of negotiations,” “something Israel has rejected and Netanyahu has refused to acknowledge and that means that Israel will be a neighbor negotiating with a state, and will occupying another state rather than pretending that our territory is up for grasp or is only disputed.”

“We don’t have unrealistic expectations, we know the occupation will not disappear, we know that there might be certain consequences because Israel or US feel that they have to punish us,” she said.

She added, “Lately Canada feels like it has to outdo Israel in terms of its positions, they are also threatening to cut aids and relations.”

“As we are moving ahead, Israel and the US and handful of countries will find themselves on the wrong side of morality, justice and on the wrong side of the law and we are very pleased to say that by tomorrow u will see a vote that will begin a process of hysterical redemption and healing in Palestine,” she said.

“So far the US hasn’t lived up to any expectations, as they should be on the side of genuine peace and human rights, everything we have seen from US have been fully supportive to Israel and the Israeli violence and occupation against Palestinians,” Ashrawi said. “Hopefully they will grasp the opportunity quickly to show that they can rectify their position and undo a serious mistake that has undermined the American standing and interest through the region, and that they can demonstrate that they really are for those principles that they say they support in the Arab spring and yet they deny us as Palestinians those principles and rights.”

Ahrawi said she would like US to vote in favor of Palestine, “this is a real test and challenge for the US to show that they can elaborate itself from the influence of the pro Israeli lobby. If they can’t get themselves to do the right thing at least they can prevent themselves from doing the wrong thing by refraining from giving a negative vote. They have to understand Palestinians can’t be blackmailed all the time through money.”

Ashrawi thanked France and all the countries that will vote in favor of Palestine at UN.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21195>

- **France, Spain, Denmark, Austria to Vote in Favor of Palestine at UN**

EUROPE, November 28, 2012 (Wafa) - Spain and Denmark announced on Wednesday that they will vote in favor of the Palestinian bid at the United Nations, in addition, France and Austria said on Tuesday that they will vote for Palestine.

The resolution, asking to upgrade status of Palestine to be a non-member state in UN, will be presented Thursday by President Mahmoud Abbas in New York at the UN to be discussed and voted on.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21194>

- **UN Ambassador to Abbas: Forego UN 'march of folly'**

Ambassador to the United Nations Ron Prosor made a last-ditch appeal to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud

Abbas to forego his "destructive march of folly at the UN" and instead "forge constructive solutions at the negotiating table" with Israel, in an oped published Thursday in the Wall Street Journal.

Prosor urged the international community to consider the consequences before rubber-stamping Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' bid to upgrade the PA's status to non-member state, arguing the initiative was premature for four reasons:

First, the territories over which the Palestinians seek to declare sovereignty are divided between warring factions in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, Prosor noted, evidenced by the fact that Abbas has not stepped foot in the coastal enclave since his party was ousted by Hamas in a civil war in 2007;

Second, states recognized by the UN must pledge to be "peace-loving;" however, Prosor pointed out that Gaza is ruled by the Hamas terrorist organization, which earlier this month fired more than 1,200 rockets into Israeli civilian centers.

In Prosor's words, "The family of nations does not need another member whose

primary import is deadly weapons and whose chief exports are extremism, hatred and terror."

Third, neither Gaza nor the West Bank are democratic in nature, Prosor contended. Hamas, he highlighted, "has imposed brutal tyranny in Gaza," whereas "President Abbas's mandate to rule expired three years ago."

Fourth, the Palestinian economy is non-viable, according to Prosor, completely dependent on foreign aid. Despite this, Prosor wrote, "this year, as the PA threatened to delay payroll for many employees, it tripled payments to convicted terrorists. Today the PA devotes 6% of its annual budget to payments for imprisoned terrorists and the families of suicide bombers, and less than 1% to higher education."

Prosor concluded by reiterating that "The foundations for real Palestinian statehood and real peace can only be laid through hard work on the ground and direct talks with Israel.

"When the foundations for lasting peace are in place, Israel will not be the last

nation to welcome Palestinians to the UN. We will be the first."

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=293904>

- **Morsi: Israel, Palestinians must discuss parallels**

Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi said Wednesday that he is working with US President Barack Obama to get Israel and the Palestinians to talk about the similarities between them, rather than the differences.

In an interview with TIME Magazine, Morsi praised Obama, saying he had "been very helpful, very helpful. And I can say, really, that his deeds coincide with his intentions."

Morsi said that he had been speaking to Obama about efforts to cement the cease-fire that ended eight days of hostilities between Israel and Gaza terror groups last week.



"We've been talking together about the cease-fire. That's very important. Then we can talk about differences between Palestinians and Israelis. It's not easy. It's very difficult. Both sides are talking about differences. We want them to talk about similarities...We are now doing this job as much as we can," Morsi told TIME.

Morsi was scheduled to address the Egyptian people on Thursday, calling for unity as he pushes through a new constitution he hopes will defuse a crisis prompted by his decision to grant himself sweeping powers.

The assembly tasked with writing the constitution ended its session in the early hours on Thursday, wrapping the final draft it will put to vote later in the day.

But as Morsi's opponents pressed on with their week-old protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square, critics said the Islamist-dominated

assembly's bid to finish the constitution quickly could make matters worse.

Two people have been killed and hundreds injured in countrywide protests set off by Morsi's decree since it was issued last week.

Speaking to TIME on Wednesday, Morsi defended his decree, saying "around 90%" of the people in Egypt support it.

"What I can see now is, the Egyptians are free. They are raising their voices when they are opposing the president and when they are opposing what's going on. And this is very important. It's their right to express and to raise their voices and express their feelings and attitudes," he stated.

<http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=293884>

- **Settlers: Annex Area C in response to PA's UN bid**

Mks Eldad, Ben-Ari to burn Palestinian flag at east J'lem protest; Left-wing groups to hold rally in support of statehood effort.

MK Arie Eldad Photo: Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post

Settlers and right-wing activists called on Israel to annex Area C and threatened to burn the Palestinian flag, in response to Palestinian plans to Thursday to ask the UN General Assembly to grant it the status of non-member state.

Left-wing Israelis, in turn, planned to rally in Tel Aviv in support of the Palestinian move, which constitutes a de facto UN recognition of Palestinian statehood.

Settlers argued that now was the moment to strengthen Israel's hold on the West Bank, particularly since the Palestinian bid was an abrogation of the 1993 Oslo Accord.

"We're concerned by Israel's lack of response to this provocative Palestinian step that is akin to a declaration of diplomatic warfare," said Dani Dayan, who heads the Council of Jewish Communities of Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip.

He added that if the Palestinians knew Israel's reaction in advance, they would be deterred from turning to the UN.

On Wednesday, Dayan sent Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu a letter in which he urged him to annex Area C of the West Bank and to prevent any Palestinian Authority action in that area.

Dayan also called on Netanyahu to authorize the Levi Report, which advocates transforming West Bank outposts into legal settlements and states that Israeli building in Area C is legal under international law.

Samaria Citizens Committee head Benny Katzover and Binyamin Citizens Committee head Itzik Shadmi wrote letters to parliamentarians in the Likud and Yisrael Beytenu.

Katzover and Shadmi called for creating new settlements, authorizing frozen zoning plans for existing ones and approving new public housing in West Bank Jewish communities.

But in Tel Aviv, a coalition of peace groups said that they supported the Palestinian initiative as an important step toward a two-state solution.

Groups such as Peace Now, Gush Shalom, Machsom Watch, Ir Amim and Combatants for Peace plan to hold a rally at 6 p.m. on Thursday outside Independence Hall on Rothchild Boulevard in Tel Aviv.

Peace Now wrote a letter to Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman and Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs Minister Yuli Edelstein in support of the Palestinian bid.

It urged the two ministers to turn the Palestinian bid from diplomatic defeat into victory, by supporting it and claiming it as an Israeli achievement.

In its letter, the group said that a careful reading of the text shows that it supports the Israeli position of a negotiated two-state solution, in which all the core issues would be decided during those talks.

It added that Israel should have particularly highlighted the fact that in the document the Palestinian Liberation Organization appears to recognize that Jerusalem would be a shared capital by both states.

Uri Avnery of Gush Shalom said that the UN vote was a reason to celebrate.

“The occupation is a heavy weight around Israel’s neck, dragging us into the depths of brutality, extremism and racism, and utterly corrupting our society. Liberating the Palestinians from the yoke of occupation will liberate the State of Israel from being an occupying and oppressive state,” Avnery said.

Alon Liel, a former Foreign Ministry director-general, said he supported the Palestinian initiative and planned to speak in its favor at the Tel Aviv rally.

He said he would have preferred a two-state solution born out of negotiations, rather than a unilateral UN declaration.

But, in light of the frozen peace process, it was better to have a Palestinian state, Liel said. He added that he hoped it would reignite the peace process and lead to a final resolution of the conflict.

Liel said he was not afraid of a Palestinian state born outside of the peace process that was hostile to Israel.

When Israel was created in 1948, all the neighboring states were hostile, and now again, they are still hostile, he said.

As an Israeli, he said, he does not want to control the lives of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

Liel added that a Palestinian state was the best way to ensure that Israel remained a Jewish and democratic state.

But right-wing parliamentarians Arieh Eldad and Michael Ben-Ari, who are part of the National Union in the current Knesset but have found a breakaway party called Strong Israel, said they believed that a Palestinian state and the UN measure were dangerous for Israel.

The two parliamentarians, along with Strong Israel activists, plan to hold a small rally at 4 p.m. on Thursday in front of the east Jerusalem UN offices, where they will burn a Palestinian flag.

Eldad accused Netanyahu of crumpling like a rag in the face of the Palestinian UN bid, rather than taking a strong stand.

Israel should announce that this step cancels the 1993 Oslo Accord, he said.

It is not enough to oppose the bid, he said, adding that “the PA should now also be declared illegal and their flags should be burned.”

“Burning the Palestinian flag sends an unequivocal message. There never was a Palestinian state and there never will be,” Eldad continued.

“The Palestinian flag is a tool to eliminate the State of Israel, and therefore the flag needs to be burned, and what it stands for must be destroyed. Without any hesitations, instead of faltering, the State of Israel has to send a clear message.”

He added that he hoped the next government, would create a situation by which the PA ceased to exist.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=293859>

#### 4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Clashes continue in Cairo's Simon Bolivar Square**



Security forces arresting a protester during clashes in Simon Bolivar Square, near US embassy and Tahrir Square, 28 November 2012. Clashes continue between security forces and protesters, which left injuries, as security forces using teargas massively to disperse protesters away off US embassy.

Mahmoud Khaled

Clashes between protesters and security forces broke out again Wednesday evening in Simon Bolivar Square, near the US Embassy in Cairo and Tahrir Square.

The demonstrators hurled stones and Molotov cocktails at security personnel, who responded by firing teargas canisters, eyewitnesses told Al-Masry Al-Youm.

State-run Al-Ahram newspaper quoted a doctor in a field hospital near the Mugamma in Tahrir as saying he

performed first aid on a female protester whose legs were injured after she was run over by a vehicle.

Her relatives then took her to a hospital, and the number of protesters increased amid rumors that she had passed away, the doctor told Al-Ahram.

The privately-owned Sada al-Balad news website reported that protesters set ablaze one police vehicle, and that police forces extinguished the fire before it spread.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/clashes-continue-cairo-s-simon-bolivar-square>

- **Morsy to urge unity in face of political crisis**

President Mohamed Morsy will address the nation on Thursday, calling for unity as he pushes through a new constitution he hopes will defuse a crisis prompted by his decision to grant himself sweeping powers.

The assembly tasked with writing the constitution ended its session in the early

hours on Thursday, wrapping the final draft it will put to vote later in the day.

But as Morsy's opponents pressed on with their week-old protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square, critics said the Islamist-dominated assembly's bid to finish the constitution quickly could make matters worse.

Two people have been killed and hundreds injured in countrywide protests set off by Morsy's decree since it was issued last week.

The Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamist group which was behind Morsy's election in June, hopes to end the crisis by replacing the decree with an entirely new constitution to be approved in a popular referendum, a Brotherhood official told Reuters.

It is a gamble based on the Islamists' belief that they can mobilize enough voters to win the referendum. They have won all elections held since Hosni Mubarak was toppled from power.

But the move seemed likely to deepen divisions that are being exposed in the street.

In his speech, Morsy was expected to explain why he had issued his decree and to outline what he saw as conspiracies being planned by his non-Islamist political opponents, officials said. He would also call for national unity.

The Muslim Brotherhood and its Islamist allies have called for protests on Saturday in Tahrir Square, setting the stage for more confrontation with their opponents, who staged a mass rally there on Tuesday.

The constitution is one of the main reasons Morsy is at loggerheads with non-Islamist opponents. They are boycotting the 100-member constitutional assembly, saying the Islamists have tried to impose their vision for Egypt's future.

The assembly's legitimacy has been called into question by a series of court cases demanding its dissolution. Its standing has also been hit by the withdrawal of members including church representatives and liberals.

But shortly after the assembly ended its last session, state TV reported that some of the 14 members who had walked out to

protest the Islamist dominated makeup of the panel, now returned to it to take part in the vote. It did not state how many.

One of the articles to be voted on prevents leading figures of Mubarak's now banned National Democratic Party from running for office or entering any elections, parliamentary or otherwise, for at least 10 years.

#### Riot police

Just down the road from the constitutional assembly meeting, protesters were clashing with riot police in Tahrir Square. Members of the assembly watched on television as they waited to go into session on Wednesday.

"The constitution is in its last phases and will be put to a referendum soon and God willing it will solve a lot of the problems in the street," said Talaat Marzouk, an assembly member from the Salafi Nour Party, as he watched the images.

But various activists, whose online blogging helped ignite the anti-Mubarak uprising, have said a constitution passed in

such circumstances would only entrench authoritarianism.

The constitution is supposed to be the cornerstone of a new, democratic Egypt following Mubarak's three decades of autocratic rule. The assembly has been at work for six months. Morsy had extended its 12 December deadline by two months — extra time that the assembly speaker said was not needed.

The constitution will determine the powers of the president and Parliament and define the roles of the judiciary and a military establishment that had been at the heart of power for decades until Mubarak was toppled. It will also set out the role of Islamic law, or Sharia.



The effort to conclude the text quickly could mean trouble, said Nathan Brown, a professor of political science at George

Washington University in the United States.

"It may be regarded with hostility by a lot of state actors too, including the judiciary," he said.

Leading opposition and former Arab League chief figure Amr Moussa slammed the move. He walked out of the assembly earlier this month. "This is nonsensical and one of the steps that shouldn't be taken, given the background of anger and resentment to the current constitutional assembly," he told Reuters.

Once drafted, the constitution will go to Morsy for approval, and he must then put it to a referendum within 15 days, which could mean the vote would be held by mid-December.

The assembly said that legislative powers assumed by Morsy in August would be handed to the Shura Council, or upper house of Parliament, once the constitution is ratified at the weekend. Morsy is expected to call for a referendum on the constitution early next week.

A constitution must be in place before a new Parliament can be elected, and until that time Morsy holds both executive and legislative powers. An election could take place in early 2013.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/morsy-urge-unity-face-political-crisis>

## 5. JORDAN and LEBANON

### • **Cash crisis, Arab ferment threaten Jordan's stability**

AMMAN: Violent protests that shocked Jordan this month have mostly subsided, but unprecedented chants for the "fall of the regime" suggested a deeper malaise in a kingdom so far spared the revolts reshaping the Arab world.

Anger over fuel subsidy cuts undoubtedly drove the unrest, in which police shot dead one man during a confrontation at a police station. The government's planned electricity price rises starting next year may well ignite more popular fury.

King Abdullah has made some constitutional reforms and his counsellors say turnout at a parliamentary poll in January will test public support for the

pace of political change amid an acute financial crisis that has forced Jordan to go to the IMF.

However, the model that has kept Jordan relatively stable for decades is cracking, nowhere more so than in the tribal East Bank provinces long seen as the bedrock of support for the Hashemite monarchy installed here by Britain in 1921.

The formula reinforced after the 1970 civil war between the army and Palestinian guerrillas - a defining national trauma now airbrushed from public discourse - broadly gives East Bankers jobs in the army, police, security services and bureaucracy.

Jordan's Palestinian-origin majority dominates private enterprise, but does not play a commensurate political role, in part because electoral gerrymandering curbs its voting power.

Although the fissure between the two communities is blurred by inter-marriage, long co-existence and, at least among the elite, business ties, it is likely to haunt Jordan as long as the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains unresolved.

Jordanians of all stripes are fearful of the insecurity that stalks their neighbours, but the money that kept discontent in check across a fragmented society is simply no longer there.

An influx of 240,000 refugees from the Syrian conflict next door has further strained the resources of a country of seven million that has almost no oil and precious little water.

"Reform is genuinely difficult because you need to change the economic as well as the political rules," said a European diplomat. "In the past the tribes gave their support in return for jobs and money. Now that this is no longer affordable, they are shouting things like 'We won't pay for your corruption'."

Palestinians, while also hard hit by the austerity measures, have mostly laid low to avoid political flak.

#### DISGRUNTLED TRIBESMEN

In Kerak, a tribal hilltop town caught up in price protests earlier this month, morose shopkeepers await customers in the

narrow market streets below the imposing Crusader citadel.

"Everyone who feels the pinch should go out in the street to express his views peacefully," said Hani Herzallah, 41, a barber with four children. He said he had joined the protests against fuel price rises that included a 54 percent increase in the cost of gas cylinders most Jordanians use for cooking and heating.

At a shop selling live chickens from wire cages, Tahseen al-Tanashat, 64, said he had just drawn his 200 dinar (\$280) pension, but only had 50 dinars left after paying his bills.

Tanashat, on a state pension since he retired as a guard 31 years ago, said two of his three sons were soldiers. "I just want my 19-year-old still at home to get a job in the army."

For all their complaints, Kerak, 90 km (56 miles) south of Amman, has been lavished with state funds, thanks perhaps to powerful Majali and Tarawneh tribal figures who have occupied top positions in the government and military for decades.

An illuminated four-lane highway leads to the town of 65,000, passing a power station and an industrial zone that is far from bustling. Kerak boasts a major university, a new public hospital along with training colleges, and a palace of justice.

But jobs are scarce. A government hiring freeze is meant to alleviate the public sector pay and pension burden on a state treasury long reliant on aid from Gulf Arab and Western donors.

A U.S. diplomatic cable published by WikiLeaks said Jordan's "bloated civil service and military patronage system" soaked up 83 percent of the 2010 budget, despite planned spending cuts.

The economy has hit even stormier seas since then. Egypt's new rulers have sharply reduced cheap gas supplies to Jordan, which imports 97 percent of its energy and which has suddenly had to pay an extra \$2.5 billion a year for fuel.

This month's protests were the most violent of several bouts of unrest in Jordan since Arab uprisings erupted nearly two

years ago and toppled autocrats in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya.

Those in Kerak and other East Bank towns were organised by local opposition movements known collectively as Hirak, whose grievances focus on corruption, poor services and unemployment. They also resent privatisation and other market reforms intended to reduce state spending - from which they benefit.

"Hirak is not driven by democracy, but by a sense of entitlement," said Mustafa Hamarneh, a social scientist running for parliament in the provincial town of Madaba. "It has not developed from spontaneous mobilisation into a national political movement. It is parochial, with personalised demands."

#### EMBOLDENED ISLAMISTS

Jordan lacks credible political parties, with the exception of the Muslim Brotherhood's Islamic Action Front, whose power base is mostly, but not exclusively, urban and Palestinian. In some cities Islamists have developed tentative links with Hirak.

The Brotherhood, which has a track record of moderation since its Jordan branch was licenced in 1946, plans to boycott the January election, citing rules it says are meant to keep it from securing the biggest bloc in the 150-seat assembly.

The authorities accuse the Islamists, emboldened by Arab uprisings that led to election wins for their counterparts in Egypt and Tunisia, of fomenting unrest and of refusing to join a reform dialogue launched by King Abdullah in early 2011.

"Apparently the Muslim Brotherhood decided they stood to get more gains if they stayed in the streets," said a senior official source, speaking on condition of anonymity.

He acknowledged that the timing of the subsidy cuts, just as winter and an election were approaching, was far from ideal, but said there was no choice because Jordan risked "insolvency".

In return for a \$2 billion standby arrangement agreed in August, the International Monetary Fund wants public sector reform and action on subsidies, including electricity tariffs.

Gulf donors such as Saudi Arabia, which rescued Jordan from an earlier crunch point with \$1.4 billion a year ago, have held off from giving direct budget support so far this year, though Riyadh and Kuwait have sent \$250 million each for projects.

Speculation about the reasons ranges from heavy spending by Gulf nations to stave off disaffection at home, concern about corruption in Jordan, and more pressing regional priorities - or even irritation that Amman had factored assumptions about Gulf aid into its IMF presentation without asking the donors first.

Saudi Arabia and Qatar may also want Jordan to be more active in the Syria crisis. "They would essentially like to see Jordan becoming the southern equivalent of Turkey in supporting the Syrian opposition," said Amman-based analyst Moin Rabbani.

"The Jordanians however ... prefer to play a less visible role and exercise it more covertly."

The survival of a vengeful Bashar al-Assad or a triumph for his Islamist-dominated foes would both pose dangers for Amman.

Jordan, valued by the West for its peace treaty with Israel and for its role as a stable buffer in a volatile region, still has an ambassador in Damascus, in line with its usual policy of walking a careful line between its more powerful neighbours.

#### TOP-DOWN REFORM

When Arab revolts began last year, the king, reigning since his father Hussein died in 1999, renewed a political reform drive opposed by conservatives which he had set aside to focus on economic liberalisation aimed at expanding the middle class.

"The results remain disappointing," wrote Julien Barnes-Dacey in a paper for the European Council on Foreign Relations. "Despite changes to the constitution, few restrictions have been placed on the king's direct political authority."

King Abdullah, who has replaced his cabinet five times in the past two years, can still appoint and dismiss governments,

although he has promised to consult parliament on choosing the next prime minister, who must then win a confidence vote.

"Parliament must become its own master and not get dissolved by the king in two words," said Wisam al-Majali, a HIRAK activist in Kerak. "Now if even the best parliament digs deeper on corruption, it is dissolved the next day."

Another Kerak activist, Moaz al-Batoush, said an empowered parliament would obviate the need for street protests against "stupid" decisions that risked igniting revolutionary demands.

"Some people angered by the price rises reacted by calling for the downfall of the regime," he said, adding that this had never been a HIRAK demand. "There is a crisis of confidence."

The official source defended the reforms, which include creation of an independent electoral commission, saying an overwhelming majority of Jordanians opposed removing powers from a monarch seen as a safeguard amid competing interests.

He said re-drawing electoral boundaries was not easy, given resistance from now over-represented East Bankers - Amman gets only a fifth of seats in parliament, despite being home to roughly half Jordan's population, many of them Palestinians.

The mood is sour among Palestinians in the Hussein refugee camp, now a scruffy built-up neighbourhood of the capital.

"These price rises have slapped people in the face," said Abdul-Moneim Abu Aisha, 52, a butcher dragging on a cigarette as he sold small gobbets of meat in a tiny neon-lit shop.

In a market street where stalls piled high with vegetables jut out into the snarled traffic, people said only minor fuel price protests had occurred in the camp. Some voiced suspicion that even these were the work of outside provocateurs.

"The Palestinian camps will move only when the Jordanian tribal cities move and when the whole country rises up. If the camps rise up on their own they will be

put down brutally," said a carpenter, who gave his name only as Abu Omar.

"We are targeted as Palestinians," he said, while having his hair cut. "The first thing they ask when you enter a police station is about your original hometown. But I'm a Jordanian who served in the army, and if anything happens to the country I will be the first to defend it, so why ask where I come from?"

With East Bankers and Palestinians alike feeling aggrieved, tensions might calm if the January election produced a new-look parliament and a government with the popular legitimacy to take tough decisions, but the electoral rules and the planned boycott of the vote by Islamists and others make this unlikely.

While the 50-year-old king seems confident his roadmap is the best route for a divided society, not everyone is so sure.

"Jordan needs an inclusive political reform to cope with the horrendous economic challenges," the European diplomat said.

"What we have is a baby step. The democratic deficit remains and has not been narrowed at a time when you need public confidence to deal with the challenges and the corruption."

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Nov-29/196523-cash-crisis-arab-ferment-threaten-jordan-stability.ashx#ixzz2DbPc6qKm>

- **Lebanon's Arabic press digest - Nov. 29, 2012**

Following are summaries of some of the main stories in a selection of Lebanese newspapers Thursday. The Daily Star cannot vouch for the accuracy of these reports.

An-Nahar

Dialogue [postponed] until next year in pending [state of] 'emergency'

Parliamentary meeting of March 14 at Harb's residence to discuss 'legal violations'

While Free Patriotic Movement Leader MP Michel Aoun launched a fierce attack against the March 14 Christian groups,

especially the Lebanese Forces and the Kataeb party, concerning the electoral draft law, the opposition's boycott spilled over the national dialogue, and the country's political scene was governed by a negative balance of powers.

Sources said that a meeting for the opposition lawmakers will soon take place at MP Boutros Harb's residence to discuss the sessions of parliamentary committees that March 8 are holding in the absence of these committees' heads.

The sources said that the opposition lawmakers will declare their stance regarding these violations and will set a work mechanism to address the Parliament crisis after the March 14's boycott decision.

As-Safir

'Union Coordination [Committee]' paralyzes public sector for the second day... and threatens more

'Victims' of the lost time: '[salary] scale', dialogue and electoral law

This is the stage of lost time, the stage of betting on the Syrian crisis' developments. The dialogue session, scheduled today, was postponed until Jan. 7 of next year. A Cabinet session to discuss the salary scale will take place on Dec. 10, and the fate of the new electoral law hinges on the "March 14 forces'" decision to back off their boycott of parliamentary activities.

A senior Future Movement source said that the March 14 coalition still insists on the resignation of Prime Minister Najib Mikati before backing off their decision to boycott dialogue and parliamentary committees.

The source said that if the Cabinet doesn't resign by Jan. 7, the "March 14 forces" will not take part in the scheduled dialogue session and will keep up its comprehensive boycott. The source said "let the other team bear responsibility for disrupting the country's political life by insisting on keeping this government and monopolizing power."

If the situation remains as it is, according to the source, the parliamentary elections will ultimately be held on the basis of the 1960s electoral law. "Whoever wants a

new law should push toward the resignation of the Cabinet, as the government remaining in power is what disrupts the Parliament work, and prevents the opposition lawmakers from taking part in the sub-parliamentary committee meetings.”

Al-Akhbar

Sleiman walks in the patriarch’s footsteps  
... regarding elections

After postponing the dialogue session until next year, the president called for preparations for the coming parliamentary elections to be made on the basis of the 1960s law, while Free Patriotic Movement leader MP Michel Aoun said he totally rejects such idea and will not allow Patriarch Beshara Rai to be pushed to the “abyss.”

Bkirki sources said that Rai did not back off his rejection of the 1960s law, but his statements [that the elections will be based on the 1960 law if political parties fail to reach an agreement over a new law] aimed at stressing the necessity of adhering to constitutional deadlines and

encouraging politicians to reach a consensus over the elections.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Nov-29/196517-lebanons-arabic-press-digest---nov-29-2012.ashx#axzz2DbPX1teo>

## 6. SYRIA

Iran wants diplomatic solution to Syrian issue: Larijani

TEHRAN -- Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani has expressed opposition to foreign intervention in Syria and has called for a diplomatic solution to the Syrian issue.

Larijani made the remarks on Wednesday in Baghdad during a joint press conference with Iraqi Parliament Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi.



Larijani said he and al-Nujaifi are of the opinion that democratic processes needed to resolve the Syrian crisis but some countries are seeking to do reforms in Syria through using “RPGs and tanks” and Iran is opposed to it. “We look for popular reforms.”

The Iranian Majlis speaker also said, “Iraq is an important country in the region that has a democratic system, and we would like to expand our parliamentary relations with our Iraqi brothers so that we would have a more effective role in resolving regional issues.”

Iran and Iraq have established good political, economic and parliamentary relationship “which we hope to be extended further,” he added.

Larijani also said Iran has clearly stated that it takes pride in supporting the people of Gaza.

Iranian Majlis speaker also met with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/103646-iran-wants-diplomatic-solution-to-syrian-issue-larijani>

- **Iran will hold talks with Syrian opposition groups: Salehi**

TEHRAN -- Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi says Tehran plans to host another meeting between Syrian opposition groups in Tehran in the coming weeks.

“We will hold a meeting with some of the Syrian groups in the coming weeks, and time and place of the meeting will be announced soon,” Salehi told reporters on Wednesday.



The first Syrian national dialogue meeting was held on November 18 in the Iranian capital Tehran in which about 200 Syrian citizens, including religious leaders, party chiefs, political figures, tribal leaders, and representatives of Syrian opposition

groups, as well as representatives from Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, and a number of other countries attended.

At the end of the two-day meeting it was agreed to establish a joint committee to promote national dialogue in Syria.

On his plan to visit the Gaza Strip, the Iranian foreign minister said he had contacted Egyptian Prime Minister Hesham Qandil on the issue and also held talks with Qandil on his intention to visit Gaza on the sidelines of the Developing Eight (D8) conference in Islamabad last week.

“We will visit (the Gaza Strip) as soon as we receive a positive response from the Egyptian Foreign Ministry,” Salehi added.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/103641-iran-will-hold-talks-with-syrian-opposition-groups-salehi>

- **Car bombs kill 34 in Damascus suburb**

Two car bombs killed at least 34 people in a district of Damascus loyal to President Bashar al-Assad on Wednesday in the

deadliest attack on the Syrian capital in months.

The explosions struck the eastern neighborhood of Jaramana, home to many of Syria's Druze minority as well as Christians who have fled violence elsewhere, ripping through shops and bringing debris crashing down on cars.

Once a bastion of security in Assad's 20-month campaign to crush an uprising against his rule, Damascus has been hit with increasing regularity as the rebels grow bolder.

State media said a bomb also detonated in the southern town of Bosra al-Sham, near Deraa, where the revolt began with peaceful street protests in March 2011. It also said eight "terrorists" were killed near Damascus while they tried to booby-trap a car with a bomb.

Authorities severely limit independent media in Syria and it was not immediately possible to verify reports. The government said 34 people were killed in Damascus but did not give a casualty count for the Bosra al-Sham bombing.

The attacks followed two weeks of military gains by rebels who have stormed and taken army bases across Syria, exposing Assad's loss of control in northern and eastern regions despite the devastating air power which he has used to bombard opposition strongholds.

A resident of Jaramana said that rebels had been repeatedly forbidden by local Druze elders to operate in the district, which borders the capital's center where government offices are located.

"Tension have risen between Druze elders and rebels and now there are three or four small explosions a week," she told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

Underlining the growing military muscle of the rebels, bolstered by weapons captured during raids on army facilities as well as supplies from abroad, fighters shot down a war plane in northern Syria on Wednesday using an anti-aircraft missile, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Opposition groups subsequently posted a video clip on the Internet that showed a man in a green jumpsuit being carried

through fields. He was bleeding heavily from his head and appeared unconscious. "This is the pilot that attacked the houses of civilians," said a voice off camera.

Another video showed doctors treating the limp body of apparently the same pilot, who activists said ejected from his MiG 23 fighter jet before it crashed near Darat Ezza, about 30 km (20 miles) from Aleppo.

The bloodshed came as Syria's new opposition coalition held its first full meeting on Wednesday to discuss forming a transitional government crucial to win effective Arab and Western support for the revolt against Assad.

"The objective is to name the prime minister for a transitional government, or at least have a list of candidates," said Suhair al-Atassi, one of the coalition's two vice-presidents.

The two-day meeting in Cairo will also select committees to manage aid and communications, a process that is becoming a power struggle between the Muslim Brotherhood and secular members.



Rivalries have also intensified between the opposition in exile and rebels on the ground in Syria, where the death toll has reached 40,000, including soldiers, civilians and rebels.

#### 'Terrorist' bombs

The Syrian state news agency, SANA, described Wednesday's blasts as "terrorist bombings," a label it reserves for attacks by mainly Sunni Muslim fighters battling to overthrow Assad, a member of Syria's Alawi minority linked to Shia Islam.

Two smaller bombs also exploded in Jaramana at about the same time as the car bombs, around 7 am (0500 GMT). In total at least 47 people were killed, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said, giving a higher toll than the government. Eighty three people were seriously

wounded, the British-based Observatory said.

"Who benefits from this? Tell me who benefits from this? America, Israel, Qatar?" a man at the bomb site said to Syrian television, which broadcast footage of firefighters hosing down the blackened hulks of two vehicles and several cars crushed by debris from neighboring buildings.

Pools of blood could be seen on the road.

Most foreign powers have condemned Assad. Britain, France and Gulf countries have recognized the umbrella opposition group meeting in Cairo, the Syrian National Coalition, as the sole representative of the Syrian people.

But Assad has been able to rely on his allies, especially regional powerhouse Iran, which is believed to be bank-rolling him and supplying military support despite US and European sanctions. Russia, Syria's main arms supplier, says it has only sent weapons already agreed to in previous deals.

International Syria mediator Lakhdar Brahimi is due to brief the 15-member council on Thursday and the UN General Assembly on Friday. There is diplomatic deadlock between Western powers, who broadly support the opposition and Assad's supporters Russia and China which have blocked Security Council action.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/car-bombs-kill-34-damascus-suburb>

- **Syrian opposition holds first meeting in Cairo**

The National Coalition of Syrian Opposition and Revolutionary Forces, which was formally announced in Doha on 11 November, held its first meeting in Cairo on Wednesday.

The closed meeting discussed the formation of a transitional government.

The coalition, headed by Sheikh Moaz al-Khatib, has been recognized by numerous Arab and European countries as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people.

A source within the Syrian opposition told the state-run MENA news agency that

more meetings would be held in Cairo to coordinate efforts to achieve greater international recognition of the coalition.

Though he remained optimistic, the source added that forming a transitional government is difficult due to differences in views among the coalition members on developments inside Syria.

The meeting was held a day after a conference in Cairo organized by donor countries, humanitarian organizations and the European Union on humanitarian aid and support of local groups inside Syria.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/syrian-opposition-holds-first-meeting-cairo>

## 7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Bahrain opposition leader vows to defy march ban**

The government has banned all rallies to battle increasing violence

Manama: The head of Bahrain's main opposition group says backers will resume

street protests in a direct challenge to a government ban on political gatherings.

Shaikh Ali Salman, who is head of Al Wefaq, told thousands of supporters on Saturday that peaceful marches will take place despite an order last month outlawing rallies.

The government decision brought criticism from the US and others, but Bahrain's leaders said it was needed to battle increasing violence.

More than 55 people have died in Bahrain's unrest since February 2011 when the opposition revived demands for a greater political voice in the kingdom.

Protest marches have eased for more than a week, as Shiites participate in ceremonies for annual religious commemorations known as Ashura.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-opposition-leader-vows-to-defy-march-ban-1.1109622>

- **UN sending human rights team to assess Bahrain**

US says it is concerned about rising violence

Geneva/Washington: The UN human rights office says it is sending four staff to Bahrain next month to assess progress toward its promised political and security reforms.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights says the team will visit Bahrain from December 2-6.

The Geneva-based agency's spokesman Rupert Colville told reporters on Friday in Geneva that the visit is a follow-up to a similar mission a year ago in the wake of the kingdom's anti-government protests.

He says UN officials plan to meet with government ministers, rights groups and others regarding Bahrain's judicial system and "accountability for present and past human rights violations and abuses".

Meanwhile, the United States on Friday said it was concerned about rising violence in its Arab ally Bahrain, and urged the government to exercise "restraint" in responding to protests.

State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland expressed concern that “police, protesters, and bystanders have been killed” in clashes between demonstrators and Bahraini authorities over the past month.

There is tension in Bahrain — home port on the Gulf of the US Fifth Fleet — between supporters of the monarchy and members of the Shiite majority, tension that has led to recent protests and crackdowns on dissent.

Nuland said: “We continue to urge all Bahrainis to pursue their political objectives peacefully and the government of Bahrain to exercise restraint in responding to peaceful protests.”

Nuland, issuing the statement on the one-year anniversary of a Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) report into the violence, said the country needed to put more of its recommendations into effect.

“Since the unrest began last year, the United States has urged the government of Bahrain to implement reforms and to

address ongoing human rights concerns,” she said.

“We will continue to encourage the Bahraini government and all segments of Bahraini society to create an environment conducive to political dialogue and reconciliation.”

She added: “The Bahraini government can only achieve the more prosperous, stable, and secure Bahrain it seeks through the continuation of the reform efforts it has initiated and must now fully implement.”

Nuland said Bahrain had taken “important steps” to implement the panel’s findings, including allowing the visits by the International Red Cross to the country’s prisons and issuing a new police code of conduct.

But she said there have been delays in ending “limits on freedom of expression and assembly” and in reforming “a political environment that has become increasingly inhospitable to reconciliation”.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/un-sending-human-rights-team-to-assess-bahrain-1.1109332>

- **US gives nod to Qatar over Gaza visit**

US backing for Emir's 'humanitarian mission'

United Nations: Qatar's growing clout and its alliance with the United States has won it diplomatic leeway from Washington.

When Turkey's prime minister announced plans to visit the Gaza Strip recently, American officials made clear they opposed any engagement with Hamas, the Palestinian group that controls the strip.

When Qatar's emir visited Gaza last month, pledging hundreds of millions in reconstruction aid, the State Department was understanding. "The Qataris have described this as a humanitarian mission," spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said. "We share Qatar's deep concern for the welfare of the Palestinian people, including those residing in Gaza."

Qatar has long sought to cultivate a reputation as a country interested in serving the public good. Qatar's cultivation of African Islamists, principally Somalia's Al Shabab insurgents, has similarly troubled the United States, which has accused the movement of providing a haven for Al Qaida militants involved in attacks against Americans.

In 2009, Somalia's then-president, Sharif Ahmed, told a top US diplomat that Qatar was channelling financial assistance to Al Shabab via Eritrea, according to a US diplomatic cable disclosed by WikiLeaks.

Several weeks later, Susan Rice, the US ambassador to the United Nations, urged Turkey to press Qatar to end its support for Somali insurgents.

Qatar denied the accusation. "They understand they're walking a tight rope and they have been able to get away with it because they have tended to the relationship and have tried to be useful when interests converge," said Michael Hanna, an expert on the Middle East at the Century Foundation.

Although the Qataris are committed to backing secular academic institutions, there is “clearly an Islamist bent to their foreign policy,” said Gregory Gause, an expert on the Gulf region at the University of Vermont who served as a non-resident senior fellow at Brookings Doha Centre.



“They have made a decision: ‘If we are going to play, we are going to be with the people on the rise and that is the Islamists,” he said. At the same time, the Qataris know they remain key to U.S. military efforts in the region. “That is their ultimate security guarantee and their entryway into the highest levels of American policymaking, which is why they can be so aggressive,” Gause said.

Sana'a: A Saudi diplomat and his bodyguard were killed when their car was fired upon by unidentified assailants in the Yemeni capital on Wednesday, a diplomatic source said.

"Gunmen dressed in the central security forces' uniforms opened fire heavily at the car of the Saudi diplomat in Sana'a, causing it to flip over and killing him and his bodyguard," the source told AFP on condition of anonymity.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/qatar/us-gives-nod-to-qatar-over-gaza-visit-1.1111859>

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/yemen/gunmen-kill-saudi-diplomat-guard-in-yemen-capital-1.1111404>

- **Gunmen kill Saudi diplomat, guard in Yemen capital**

## 8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Recklessness, Lack of Oversight Blamed for Kabul Bank Crisis**

VOA News

November 28, 2012

An independent panel probing Afghanistan's failed Kabul Bank says a few individuals acted with "reckless disregard" in defrauding the bank, while a lack of oversight and enforcement contributed to the loss of hundreds of millions of dollars.

A new report issued Wednesday says \$861 million in illicit loans were made to 19 individuals and businesses, including \$270 million to the bank's former chairman.

The committee says senior bank officials told employees to make loans based on fabricated records, and used two sets of accounting books to carry out a "sophisticated operation of fraudulent lending and embezzlement."

The 87-page report says the scheme utilized new loans to give the impression that money was being repaid, but that true repayments of principal or interest were "extremely rare."

The committee was created in 2010 to monitor and evaluate anti-corruption efforts, and includes three Afghans and three international appointees.

It says Afghan citizens will bear the cost of the bank's failure with money that could have been used for education, healthcare, infrastructure or security.

Major bank failure

Kabul Bank was once Afghanistan's largest private lender and nearly collapsed in 2010. Afghanistan's central bank stepped in and took control of the bank, which was later split into two.

Wednesday's report calls Kabul Bank one of the biggest banking failures in the world, and says it will undermine not only public trust in financial and government institutions, but also efforts to rebuild Afghanistan.

The report says bank management gave out \$66 million in bank funds used to benefit businesses they controlled. The money bought properties, hundreds of cars and paid salaries to Pamir Airways employees described as "pilots for cash delivery."

Almost \$6 million went to travel expenses that were explained with few details and often no supporting documents.

As of August, \$128 million in cash and another \$190 million in assets had been recovered.

21 indicted

Afghanistan's attorney general has indicted 21 people and named several others as persons of interest in connection with criminal activity at Kabul Bank. The report says five people are in custody, but that many of those indicted and considered persons of interest have fled the country.

The Afghan government has called for the United States to extradite the former head of the Afghan central bank, Abdul Qadir Fitrat, who fled to the U.S. last year. Fitrat said he feared for his life after trying to prosecute those who stole from Kabul Bank. Afghan officials say Fitrat played a role in the scandal and want him brought back to Afghanistan to face charges.

The new report criticizes outside political influence on the attorney general's

independent ability to determine what charges should be brought. It cites a committee set up by President Hamid Karzai in 2011 to report on the crisis, which immediately announced the Afghan leader would himself decide whom to prosecute.

Karzai also issued a decree absolving those who paid back the principal of outstanding loans from having to pay interest or face criminal charges.

The panel said there is "great concern" about delays and the manner of the attorney general's own investigation. The report says "reasonable grounds" for an investigation existed as early as September 2010, but that a formal investigation did not begin until April 2011.

Political ramifications

The panel says some of the bank's money went toward financing the campaigns of at least one presidential candidate and between 30 and 40 parliamentarians. It recommended Afghanistan adopt political financing regulations that include open

reports of who makes political contributions.

The panel also says the attorney general's office should document its investigations in writing, including "clear rationale" for why it decided to issue or not issue any charges.

The report also calls on a special tribunal set up by Karzai to hear the case to focus its efforts on processing the charges of those already indicted, instead of other activities including those related to recovering funds.

The panel, officially known as the Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, asked the Afghan government, the country's central bank and other affected institutions to respond in 60 days with their intentions to implement the committee's recommendations.

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

- **Special US Envoy to Afghanistan, Pakistan Steps Down**

VOA News

November 28, 2012

The U.S. special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan is stepping down.

The State Department says Marc Grossman will leave next month to return to private life, and will be replaced by his deputy, David Pearce.

Grossman came out of retirement to take the job early last year, following the sudden death of former envoy Richard Holbrooke.

His tenure has included tense relations between the United States and Pakistan over the issues of drone strikes on Pakistani soil, an American airstrike that mistakenly killed 24 Pakistani soldiers and the U.S. raid in Abbottabad that killed al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden. Grossman has also worked to support Afghanistan's peace process and stressed the need for Pakistan to be a part of the reconciliation.

In a statement late Tuesday, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton thanked Grossman for his efforts to lead a diplomatic campaign that she says has led to a network of regional and international support for Afghanistan after 2014.

Prior to becoming the special envoy, Grossman was a veteran senior diplomat who served in Pakistan and was U.S. ambassador to Turkey. He retired in 2005 as undersecretary of state for political affairs, which is traditionally the highest post for a career foreign service officer.

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

- **Two Arrested After Teenage Girl Beheaded In Afghanistan**

By RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan

November 28, 2012

KONDUZ, Afghanistan -- Two men have been arrested in Afghanistan's northern province of Konduz in connection with the beheading of a 14-year-old girl.

Local police officer Nizamuddin Hakimi told RFE/RL that the girl's body was found late on November 27 in the province's Imam Sahib District.

Hakimi said that a preliminary investigation revealed that the two suspects had asked the girl's parents if one of them could marry her.

Both the girl and her parents reportedly rejected the proposal.

Hakimi gave no further details regarding the men's possible connection to the killing.

Last month, a 20-year-old Afghan woman was beheaded in Herat Province, reportedly for refusing to work as a prostitute.

Four suspects, including the victim's husband and in-laws, were arrested for that killing.

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

- **Afghan skirmishes claim 36 lives in 2 days**

KABUL, Nov. 28 (Xinhua) -- Taliban-linked insurgency and conflicts have claimed the lives of 36 people including nine civilians over the past two days in the conflict-ridden Afghanistan, officials said Wednesday.

In the latest string of violent incidents, a roadside bomb struck a civilian vehicle in Taliban hotbed the southern Helmand

province Wednesday morning leaving all the commuters, the four non-combatants dead.

Four Afghan civilians were killed as a roadside bomb struck a car in Helmand province 555 km south of Afghan capital Kabul on Wednesday, Interior ministry said in a statement released here.

"The tragic incident happened in Alizai area of Nawzad district at 08:30 a.m. local time killing all the four travelers on the spot," the statement added.

It also blamed Taliban militants for planting the mine, saying all those killed in the blast were civilians.

In a related violent event, Taliban militants after kidnapping five civilians in Kunar province 185 km east of Afghan capital Kabul, shot them dead and handed their bodies over to the villagers on Wednesday morning, provincial police spokesman, Shir Wali Samim said.

"Taliban rebels abducted five members of local development council in Watapur district couple of days ago and after shooting them dead last night, handed

their bodies over to the villagers this morning," Samim told Xinhua.

The local development council is a government-back body working with local administration on reconstruction field in rural areas.

Taliban militants, who fight the government and target any individual serving the administration and NATO-led troops, have yet to make comment.

Meantime, the Afghan Interior Ministry in a statement released here Wednesday reported killing 27 Taliban fighters over the past two days.

"Afghan National Police backed by the army and NATO-led coalition forces have killed 27 Taliban militants during series of operations conducted in Kabul, Laghman, Kunduz, Sar-e-Pul, Kandahar, Zabul, Uruzgan and Nangarhar provinces over the past 24 hours," the Interior Ministry statement added.

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

- **Taliban kill 5 civilians in eastern Afghan province: official**

ASSADABAD, Afghanistan, Nov. 28 (Xinhua) -- Taliban militants after kidnapping five civilians in Kunar province, shot them dead and handed their bodies to villagers on Wednesday, provincial police spokesman, Shir Wali Samim said.

"Taliban rebels abducted five members of local development council in Watapur district couple of days ago and shot them dead last night," Samim told Xinhua. The local development council is a government-back body working with local administration on reconstruction field in rural areas.

He also said that the militants handed over the bodies including a tribal leader Malik Arsala to the villagers Wednesday morning.

Taliban militants fighting the government and target any individual serving the administration have yet to make comment.

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

*\*This media summary is prepared by **ORSAM Middle East Research Assistant Nebahat Tanriverdi 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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