



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procces of Iraq

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1. IRAQ

- **Scores killed in Iraq blasts**

Shia worshippers and security forces targeted in bombings that killed 48 and injured many more across four provinces.

A string of bombings in Iraq have killed at least 48 people and left more than 100 others wounded.

In the deadliest attack on Thursday, more than 33 people were killed and about 90 others injured in explosions in the southern city of Hilla, near tents set up for Shia pilgrims. A roadside bomb was followed by a car bomb targeting emergency response teams.

Twisted and charred vehicles were left outside damaged stores as shopkeepers collected their strewn merchandise from the bloodstained pavement in the Shia-majority city.

An eatery full of labourers and municipal workers having breakfast were hit by the explosions.

Hilla is on the route for Shia pilgrims to on their way to Karbala, one of the holiest cities in Shia Islam.

Karbala blast

Just hours earlier, a car bomb killed at least six people and left more than a dozen wounded near a shrine in Karbala.

A police spokesman said security forces closed off all roads leading to the old city, where Imam Hussein, Prophet Muhammad's grandson is buried, and were searching for a second car bomb.

Millions of pilgrims flock to Karbala each year to mark Hussein's death during Ashoura, which peaked on November 25 this year.

Pilgrims also walk from across Iraq to Karbala during the 40-day mourning period that follows Ashoura.

Thursday's attacks marked the second wave of bombings against Shias this week after three car bombs exploded near their places of worship in Baghdad on Tuesday, killing 12 people and wounding 50.

Elsewhere in the country, two bombs targeted security forces in Fallujah and near Mosul.

East of Mosul city, a car bomb killed two, including a police officer, near a police checkpoint. Another two civilians were wounded in the blast.

In central Fallujah, a suicide bomber walked up to a bank and killed three army soldiers when he detonated his explosive vest. Another eight were wounded in the line of soldiers queued up to receive their monthly salaries at the time of the attack.

An off-duty police officer was killed in Diyala province when a bomb attached to his car exploded Thursday morning.

In Baghdad, police sealed off the Green Zone and areas leading to it after dismantling a bomb, Al Jazeera's Jane Arraf, reporting from the city, said.

The "wide variety of targets" on Thursday, said our correspondent, were meant to be a sign "to show that Iraqi security cannot keep their people safe".

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/11/2012112972757383851.html>

2. IRAN

- **Iran president raps Israel expansionism, warmongering**

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has decried Israel's "expansionist and warmongering" policies, saying the occupation of Palestine has resulted in various regional crises over the past decades.



"The expansionist, warmongering and inhumane policies of the fake and occupying Zionist regime [of Israel] have led to the continuation of instability and unrest in the region," Ahmadinejad said in a message to the UN General Assembly on Thursday.

The impositions of five wars on regional nations, killing and imprisoning tens of thousands of people and displacing millions of others as well as the recent brutal assault on the Gaza Strip are clear indications of the nature and mission of the uncultured Zionists, he added.

The international community's inability to resolve the Palestinian issue due to discriminatory and unilateral policies of certain UN Security Council members has also intensified the crisis and endangered global peace and security, the Iranian chief executive pointed out.

Ahmadinejad voiced the Iranian nation's solidarity with the oppressed Palestinian people, saying Iranians would continue to provide them with spiritual support.

It is obvious that holding democratic elections with participation of all Palestinians, including Muslims, Christians and the Jews, would be the best solution to the Palestinian issue, he said.

The Iranian president urged the international community and the United Nations in particular to play a "leading, effective and legal" role in settling the Palestinian issue and putting an end to its occupation.

“The era of Zionism and occupation has undoubtedly come to an end. The future belongs to the great Palestinian nation and other free nations,” he concluded.

On Thursday, the United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to upgrade Palestine’s status at the UN from “observer entity” to “observer non-member state”, inflicting a major diplomatic defeat on the United States and Israel.

The 193-member assembly voted 138-9 with 41 abstentions at the UN headquarters in New York for a resolution approving the upgrade. Nine countries, including Canada, Israel, and the US, voted against it.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/30/275329/iran-raps-israel-warmongering-policies/>

- **NAM welcomes upcoming Iran-IAEA talks**

Vienna, Nov 30, IRNA – The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in a statement supported Iran's peaceful nuclear activities, and welcomed the upcoming talks between Islamic Republic of Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to be held in Tehran for achieving a new modality.



Iranian Ambassador and Permanent representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Ali Asghar Soltanieh as head of NAM-Vienna Branch read out the NAM statement at the IAEA's Board of Governors meeting on Thursday.

At IAEA Board of Governors meeting in Vienna on Thursday, IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano said that he expected Iran and IAEA would reach an agreement on the new modality plan proposed by Tehran to help resolve the nuclear dispute.

IAEA is fully determined to hold dialogue with Iran as grounds for resolving the issue through diplomatic means are well-prepared, Amano said.

All should seize the opportunity and help resolve the issue through diplomatic means, he added.

Next round of talks between Iran and IAEA will be held on December 13 in Tehran, Amano said.

It is necessary to mention that all should try to help in drawing up a new modality plan to help resolve nuclear issue between Iran and IAEA.

The Islamic Republic of Iran and IAEA have successfully resolved their previous disputes.

Iran believes that its modality plan proposed in the year 2007 is regarded as a good pattern for drawing up the new modality plan.

Tehran believes that the proposed modality should be pursued step by step.

Iran also believes that there should be limits to the questions posed by the IAEA and they should agree not to pose any new question upon Iran's response.

IAEA should explicitly announce that what incentive or privileges they will give Iran following the country's cooperation.

Next issue would be about Parchin where IAEA is willing to inspect. IAEA inspectors have inspected the site but since Parchin is not a nuclear facility, Iran cannot accept their request for keeping its door open for ever.

Based on a proposal made by Moscow Iran will answer to all questions regarding military activities on condition that the western states lift all types of sanctions against the country.

In fact Moscow's proposal urges the G5+1 to give move incentives to Iran upon Iran's cooperation.

The last meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors in the year 2012 kicked off in Vienna on Thursday.

Amano issued a 13 page document on Iran's peaceful nuclear activities to IAEA Board of Governor ten days ago.

In the report Amano once again underlined that Tehran is committed to resolving its dispute with IAEA.

The last round of talks between Iran and IAEA was held on August 24.

<http://old.irna.ir/News/Politic/NAM-welcomes-upcoming-Iran-IAEA-talks/80435082>

3. SYRIA

- **Internet services down across Syria**

Nationwide internet outage, and disruption of some mobile phone services, comes amid clashes near Damascus airport.

Internet services are down across Syria and mobile phone services have been disrupted in some areas, as rebels and government troops clashed near the capital's airport.

The length of Thursday's internet blackout, confirmed by US-based companies that monitor online connectivity, is unprecedented in Syria's 20-month-old uprising against President Bashar al-Assad.

Renesys, a US-based network security firm that studies internet disruptions, said Syria effectively disappeared from the internet at 12:26pm local time.

It said the main autonomous system responsible for the internet in the country is the Syrian Telecommunications Establishment, and that "all of their customer networks are currently unreachable".

Syrian state TV denied the blackout was nationwide. It said the outage was caused by a technical failure, only affected some provinces, and that technicians were trying to fix the problem.

The government has previously cut phone lines and internet access in areas where regime forces are about to conduct major military operations.

Syria's minister of information said "terrorists", not the state, were responsible for the outage, a pro-government TV station reported.

"It is not true that the state cut the internet. The terrorists targeted the internet lines, resulting in some regions being cut off," he was quoted by al-Ikhbariya as saying.

Damascus clashes

In parts of Damascus, mobile and land telephone lines were only working intermittently, as violence raged.

Fighting along the main road to Damascus International Airport, south of the city, temporarily forced the closure of the road.

Dubai-based Emirates airline and EgyptAir have cancelled flights to the Syrian capital due to the fighting.

State media later reported that the road had been "secured" after military intervention in the area.

"The road from the airport was secured after attacks by armed terrorist groups against cars and after a deployment of the competent forces," state television quoted the the information ministry as saying.

Elsewhere in the capital, warplanes bombed the neighbourhoods of Kafr Souseh and Daraya, opposition activists said.

'New Syria'

Meanwhile, the joint UN-Arab League special envoy said the old Syria ruled by Assad's family is finished and the "new Syria" will never be the same, in a strong hint that Assad will have to step down before a civil war can end.

Speaking to reporters after briefing the UN Security Council on what he said was the deteriorating situation in Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi did not mention Assad by name.

However, when asked whether a peace plan being considered by diplomats would require regime change, the envoy said: "I think it's very, very, very clear that the people of Syria want change, and real change, not cosmetic changes.

"The new Syria will not look like the Syria of today."

In an apparent reference to the chaotic wartime collapses of the long-entrenched regimes in Libya and Iraq, Brahimi stressed the importance of not allowing state institutions to "wither away".

Brahimi said Syria "very, very urgently" needed a ceasefire and a large peacekeeping force.

Rebel gains

Rebels who control large swathes of territory in northern Syria have made military gains in past days, including for the first time shooting down one of the regime's attack aircraft using a surface-to-air missile.

Several rebel brigades attacked the Wadi Deif base in Idlib province on Thursday, opposition sources said, while the army responded with shelling.

Wadi Deif is the main base for government forces in the area and the location of their main fuel depot.

Fighting was also reported outside the nearby rebel-held town of Maaret al-Numan.

In the country's commercial capital, Aleppo, an air strike on Thursday killed at least 15 civilians, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

"At least 15 people, among them five children and two women, were killed when a warplane dropped two bombs on the Ansari district of Aleppo," the group's head Rami Abdelrahman told the AFP news agency.

The opposition says more than 35,000 people have been killed since the uprising began in March last year. Hundreds of thousands of people have fled to neighbouring countries.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/11/2012112918529927773.html>

- **'Friends of Syria' meet in Tokyo to bolster sanctions on Assad regime**

An international meeting to coordinate sanctions on the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad is being held in Tokyo.



Japanese Foreign Minister Koichiro Gamba, told the "Friends of Syria" group the international community had to act together where the divided United Nations Security Council had failed.

“The violence has continued for more than 20 months and the number of casualties in Syria has surpassed 40,000 and counting today, causing a humanitarian crisis,” he told representatives from 67 countries.

“We are gravely concerned about the spillover of the crisis to the entire region.

“While the United Nations Security Council has been unable to assume its primary responsibility, it’s increasingly important for the international community to act as one in order to deal with” the continuing violence.

Host Japan says Friday’s talks will give participating countries a forum to review the effectiveness of sanctions already in place. They will also consider new measures to stop the violence that has erupted in Syria, resulting in a civil war that activists say has killed 36,000 people.

“Friends of Syria” coalition, including the U.S., the European Union and Arab League, last met in September. The group was established after the U.N. Security Council failed to agree on a resolution condemning the Syrian regime, due to opposition from Russia and China.

Current sanctions include a freeze on Assad’s assets and an embargo on oil and arms trade.

Meanwhile, the fifth “sanctions working group” meeting in Tokyo saw the first participation from four countries -- Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Indonesia and Bangladesh, Gemba said.

On Thursday Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Washington was weighing what further help it could give the Syrian opposition rebels.

But she stopped short of saying whether the United States would recognize the newly-formed Syrian National Coalition, which is seeking to oust Assad, as the sole representative of the Syrian people, as several European countries have done.

Privately, U.S. officials have said the Obama administration will likely go ahead and recognize the group at some point.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/30/252595.html?PHPSESSID=rbsu6910kc34jpo48eadm0to61>

- **Without Iran’s support, Assad regime will collapse: report**

Iran is increasingly worried about Syrian President Bashar al-Assad regime’s fate and is distraught that the regime is not taking recommendations from the Islamic republic to keep its power, an Iranian report obtained by a Western diplomatic source said.



Iranian forces in Syria are increasingly burdened due to the Syrian regime leaders not following their advices as the situation in the conflict-torn country becomes more chaotic, the report, which was obtained by an embassy of a Western country in Tehran, said.

The report, however, did not mention details explaining the Iranian recommendations given to the Syrian regime.

But the report revealed that Tehran was disappointed by the corruption within the Syrian armed forces as large amounts of Iranian funds were transferred to personal bank accounts of senior Syrian officers.

The report stated that Iran will continue its support for President Assad until Iran’s presidential elections on June 2013.

Tehran mulls the possibility of a civil war breaking out in Syria post-Assad regime collapse, which can later destabilize Iran itself before the presidential elections.

In conclusion, the report said Iran decided not to increase its support for Syria due to the deteriorating economic situation in the Islamic republic and Assad regime's unlikely survival in the long term.

"Iran is trying to find other solutions so that Hezbollah would be able to get Iran's support even after the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime," the report said, adding "Iran is now establishing some connections with Syrian opposition's figures without the knowledge of the Syrian regime as it doesn't want to give the impression that it has abandoned Assad regime."

The report says Iran believes the Syrian regime's collapse is inevitable without the Islamic republic's support.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/29/252465.html?PHPSESSID=rbsu6910kc34jpo48eadm0to61>

- **Syrian minister tells army recruits they are Assad's heroes**

Syrian Minister of Interior Lt. Gen. Mohammad al-Shaar described the Syrian forces engaged in conflict with rebels as "heroes" in video broadcast on Syrian state television on Wednesday.



Shaar is seen watching military drills and presiding over a graduation ceremony at a location near Damascus.

"We are optimistic that you joined the interior security forces with your braveness, strength, and training and will, which can make miracles. We are honored that you have joined the interior security forces. You have graduated from this department that makes heroes, led by President Bashar al-Assad," the minister told the troops.

The Syrian state news agency SANA said Shaar told the military graduates that the country would emerge stronger in its battle with the rebels.

He said the U.S. was protecting Israel's security and monopolizing Arab petroleum through the escalation of conflicts in the region, SANA said, Shaar apparently referring to the one in his own country.

Syrian rebels have made military gains during the past two weeks, storming and taking army bases across Syria.

The advances have exposed Assad's loss of control in northern and eastern regions, despite the deployment of devastating air power.

Two car bombs killed at least 34 people in a district of Damascus loyal to Assad on Wednesday, the deadliest attack in the Syrian capital in months.

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

The death toll in the conflict has reached 40,000, including soldiers civilians and rebels. Syria has been condemned for a majority of human rights abuses in the country by United Nations investigators and, on Tuesday (November 27), by a U.N. General Assembly committee. Damascus denies abuse, saying such charges are politically motivated.

International Syria mediator Lakhdar Brahimi is due to brief the 15-member council on Thursday and the U.N. 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://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/29/252431.html?PHPSESSID=rbsu6910kc34jpo48eadm0to61>

- **Syrian military retakes airport road: Information Ministry**

Syria says it has secured the road leading to Damascus International Airport, hours after heavy clashes between militants and government forces in the area led to the closure of the road.

"The road to Damascus International Airport is safe after attacks by armed terrorist groups on passing cars and the intervention of security forces," state television quoted the Syrian Information Ministry as saying on Thursday.

The fighting in the area wounded two Austrian soldiers from a United Nations peacekeeping force earlier in the day, the Austrian Defense Ministry said in a statement. One soldier was shot in the arm and the other in the shoulder. Neither soldier is in critical condition.

The soldiers were part of a UN force deployed in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

Syria has been the scene of unrest since March 2011, and many people, including large numbers of security forces, have lost their lives in the turmoil.

The Syrian government says that the chaos is being orchestrated from outside the country, and there are reports that a very large number of the militants are foreign nationals.

The Washington Post reported on Thursday that the militants in Syria had acquired "as many as 40 shoulder-fired missile systems in recent weeks," and "at least some" of the weaponry had been provided by Qatar.

On Wednesday, The New York Times said the US administration "is considering deeper intervention to help push [Syrian] President Bashar al-Assad from power."

On November 26, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said Paris had allocated 1.5 million dollars in emergency aid to the newly-formed Syrian opposition, the Syrian National Coalition.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/30/275295/syrian-military-retakes-airport-road/>

4. ISRAEL-PALESTINE

- **UN votes to upgrade Palestinian status**

Overwhelming majority of states vote to give Palestinians non-member observer status, despite Israel and US criticism.

The UN General Assembly has voted overwhelmingly to grant Palestine a non-member observer status at the world body.

The vote, which was taken at a meeting in New York on Thursday, represents a long-sought victory for the Palestinians but a diplomatic defeat for Israel and the US, two of the nine countries which voted against the upgrade.

In all, 138 countries voted in favour and 41 others abstained.

A Palestinian flag was quickly unfurled on the floor of the General Assembly, behind the Palestinian delegation.

The new status is an indirect recognition of the Palestinians' claims on statehood in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip. It allows them to join a number of UN agencies, as well as the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, addressed the General Assembly, saying that Palestinians were not seeking to "delegitimise" Israel, but to affirm the legitimacy of Palestine as a state.

Abbas referenced the recent Israeli assault on Gaza, saying that Palestine had come to the UN at a time when Palestinians were "still tending to [their] wounds and still burying [their] beloved martyrs of children, women and men who have fallen victim to the latest Israeli aggression".

"What permits the Israeli government to blatantly continue with its aggressive policies and the perpetration of war crimes stems from its conviction that it is above the law and that it has immunity from accountability and [the] consequences [...] The moment has arrived for the world to say clearly: Enough of aggression, settlements and occupation.

"The General Assembly is called upon today to issue a birth certificate of the reality of the State of Palestine. The moment has arrived for the world to say clearly: Enough of aggression, settlements and occupation."

US slams upgrade

Immediately after the results were announced, US ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice branded the move "counter-productive", and the state department warned the status change could lead to a reduction of US economic support for the Palestinians.

"Today's unfortunate and counter-productive resolution places further obstacles in the path to peace. That is why the United States voted against it," Rice said.

"The backers of today's resolution say they seek functioning, independent Palestinian state at peace with Israel so do we. But we have long been clear that the only way to establish such a Palestinian state and resolve all permanent status issues is through the crucial if painful work of direct negotiations between the parties.

"Long after the votes have been cast, long after the speeches have been forgotten, it is the Palestinians and the Israelis who must still talk to each other and listen to each other."

Other countries that voted against the upgrade include Canada, the Czech Republic, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau and Panama.

Meanwhile, Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary-general, renewed his call for the resumption of direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

"Today's vote underscores the urgency of the resumption of meaningful negotiations," Ban said.

"My position has been consistent all along. I believe that the Palestinians have a legitimate right to their own independent state. I believe that Israel has the right to live in peace and security with its neighbors. There is no substitute for negotiations to that end."

Dancing in the streets

As the votes were cast, there was silence among the thousands gathered in the West Bank city of Ramallah, which erupted with cheers of joy and chants of "God is greatest" when approval was announced.

"I'm happy they declared the state even though it's only a moral victory. There are a lot of sharks out there, but it feels good," 39-year-old Rashid al-Kor told the AFP news agency.

Nearby, Palestinian-American Laila Jaman was waving a handful of Palestinian flags and carrying a picture of Barack Obama, the US president, and Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority.

"I feel so good, I cannot describe my feelings, it's as if we reached the end of a dark tunnel. With a Palestinian state we are now united as a people and a leadership," she said breathlessly.

There were celebrations in cities across the West Bank, as well as in Gaza, where the Hamas government, which runs the enclave, offered tepid support for the bid and allowed backers to express their solidarity with the move.

In Bethlehem, fireworks were shot into the night sky, and churches rang their bells at midnight to mark the occasion.

Ali Abunimah, Palestinian-American activist and founder of Electronic Intifada, told Al Jazeera that the celebrations were uncalled for and that the UN was a "giant distraction".

"I wish that all this hype and dancing in the streets of Ramallah and self-delusion among the people were for a real achievement that actually returned rights to the Palestinian people.

"There is something incongruous and tasteless about the Palestinian Authority sponsoring a dance festival on the streets of Ramallah while families in Gaza are still mourning their children.

"This [vote] is a giant distraction; a cheap gesture, which allows people to celebrate as if they were in a football match."

'Distortion of history'

Israel reacted to the news of the upgrade, with Mark Regev, spokesman for Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, telling Al Jazeera that the comments made by Abbas "make it more difficult" for his country to negotiate with Palestine.

"Instead of speaking the language of reconciliation, we had libelous charge after libelous charge against the Israeli people," he said.

Regev called "a distortion of history" how Abbas characterised the UN resolution calling for a two-state solution exactly 65 years ago.

"The way he talked about it. He forgot the most important thing. It was the Israeli side, the Jewish side that accepted two states for two people."

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/11/20121129223421111270.html>

- **Cheers erupt among Palestinian crowds as U.N. bid approved**

Palestinians fired in the air, whistled and embraced each other in the West Bank and Gaza on Thursday after the General Assembly voted to recognize Palestine as a non-member state.



As the votes were cast, there was silence among the thousands gathered in the West Bank city of Ramallah, which erupted with cheers of joy and chants of "God is greatest" when the 138-9 approval was announced.

"I'm happy they declared the state even though it's only a moral victory. There are a lot of sharks out there, but it feels good," 39-year-old Rashid al-Kor told AFP.

Nearby, Palestinian-American Laila Jaman was waving a handful of Palestinian flags and carrying a picture of U.S. President Barack Obama and Palestinan president Mahmud Abbas.

"I feel so good, I cannot describe my feelings, it's as if we reached the end of a dark tunnel. With a Palestinian state we are now united as a people and a leadership," she said breathlessly.

There were celebrations in cities across the West Bank, as well as in Gaza, where the Hamas government offered tepid support for the bid and allowed backers to express their solidarity with the move.

In Bethlehem, fireworks were shot into the night sky, and churches rang their bells at midnight to mark the occasion.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/30/252559.html?PHPSESSID=rbsu69l0kc34jpo48eadm0to61>

- **NAM calls for Palestinians right to sovereignty, independence: Iran UN envoy**

The Non-Aligned Movement calls for the restoration of the rights of the Palestinians to sovereignty and independence, Iran's permanent ambassador to the UN says.

We call for the restoration of the right of the Palestinians to sovereignty and true independence, Mohammad Khazaei, speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), said at the UN's Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People on Thursday.

The Committee was meeting in its annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

NAM urges a just solution to the Palestinian issue and refugees and calls on the international community to take immediate and serious action to condemn Israeli aggressions, he said.

While supporting the efforts of the UN secretary general and the Committee, the Movement expresses regret over the Israeli occupying regime's violation of the UN resolutions, Khazaei added.

He pointed to different resolutions approved by the UN against Israel and said the regime seeks to demolish the identity of the Palestinian lands, particularly in al-Quds, and alter the demographic composition of the region through carrying out settlement activities and expelling Palestinians.

The Iranian envoy described the Tel Aviv regime's repeated trampling on the rights of Palestinians and the siege of Gaza as clear examples of Israel's blatant violation of the Palestinian rights and referred to the recent Israeli attack on Gaza that resulted in the killing of 160 Palestinians in contravention of all international rules and regulations.

Addressing the UN General Assembly meeting on the same day, the Iranian envoy called for the immediate and unconditional removal of the Gaza blockade and the opening of routes to the region based on international regulations.

He expressed NAM's grave concern about the suffering of the Palestinians caused by illegal policies and measures of the Israeli regime.

He called on the international community to redouble efforts to compel Israel to cease its illegal policies and abide by international law.

Khazaei stressed the importance of giving observer member state to Palestine and expressed hope that all UN resolutions on Palestine will be implemented.

The United Nations General Assembly on Thursday voted to upgrade Palestine's status at the UN from "non-member observer entity" to "non-member observer state" despite strong opposition from Israel and the US.

138 voted in favor of the measure, nine against and 41 abstained.

The upgrade allows the Palestinians to participate in debates at the UN General Assembly and improve their chances of joining UN agencies and the International Criminal Court (ICC) where they could file complaints against Israel.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/30/275327/nam-urges-palestine-rights-observation/>

- **'Palestine' wins historic upgrade at the United Nations**

138 vote in favor, 9 against, 41 abstentions in US General Assembly; US, Israel oppose Palestinian statehood bid; Abbas at the UN: The Palestinians are in desperate need of peace, but window of opportunity is closing.

Sixty-five years to the day after the UN voted for the partition of mandatory Palestine – a move the Jews accepted and the Arabs rejected – the same body overwhelmingly voted on Thursday to grant the Palestinian delegation the upgraded status of non-member observer state.

The vote was 138 in favor, nine against and 41 abstaining.

“The moment has arrived for the world to say clearly: Enough of aggression, settlements and occupation,” Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said to the packed UN General Assembly.

“We did not come here seeking to delegitimize a state established years ago, and that is Israel; rather we came to affirm the legitimacy of the state that must now achieve its independence, and that is Palestine,” he said.

“We did not come here to add further complications to the peace process, which Israel’s policies have thrown into the intensive care unit; rather we came to launch a final serious attempt to achieve peace,” Abbas continued.

“Our endeavor is not aimed at terminating what remains of the negotiations process, which has lost its objectivity and credibility, but rather aimed at trying to breathe new life into the negotiations and at setting a solid foundation for it based on the terms of reference of the relevant international resolutions in order for the negotiations to succeed.”

Abbas said that the Palestinians will accept no less than “the independence of the state of Palestine, with east Jerusalem as its capital, on all the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967, to live in peace and security alongside the State of Israel, and a solution for the refugee issue on the basis of Resolution 194.”

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu condemned Abbas’s strong critique of Israel as “hostile and poisonous,” and full of “false propaganda.”

“These are not the words of a man who wants peace,” he said in a statement.

The PA president said nothing about immediately resuming talks with Israel without preconditions, though he did pledge to “act responsibly and positively in our next steps, and... to

work to strengthen cooperation with the countries and peoples of the world for the sake of a just peace.”

The countries opposing the move were the US, Israel, Canada, the Czech Republic, Palau, Micronesia, Nauru, Panama and the Marshall Islands.

Abbas, who called the resolution a “birth certificate of the reality of the state of Palestine,” used the recent fighting in Gaza to frame his request for the statehood upgrade and painted both Israel and its birth in demonic colors.

“Palestine comes today to the United Nations General Assembly at a time when it is still tending to its wounds and still burying its beloved martyrs of children, women and men who have fallen victim to the latest Israeli aggression, still searching for remnants of life amid the ruins of homes destroyed by Israeli bombs on the Gaza Strip, wiping out entire families, their men, women and children murdered along with their dreams, their hopes, their future and their longing to live an ordinary life and to live in freedom and peace,” he said.

“The Israeli aggression against our people in the Gaza Strip has confirmed once again the urgent and pressing need to end the Israeli occupation and for our people to gain their freedom and independence,” Abbas continued, pointedly avoiding the mention of the rocket and missile bombardment of Israeli cities from Gaza.

“This aggression also confirms the Israeli government’s adherence to the policy of occupation, brute force and war, which in turn obliges the international community to shoulder its responsibilities toward the Palestinian people and toward peace.”

The Palestinian people, Abbas said, “miraculously recovered from the ashes of the nakba [the Arabic term meaning “catastrophe” that refers to Israel’s victory in the War of Independence] of 1948, which was intended to extinguish their being and to expel them in order to uproot and erase their presence, which was rooted in the depths of their land and depths of history.”

In Abbas's telling of history, "hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were torn from their homes and displaced within and outside of their homeland, thrown from their beautiful, embracing, prosperous country to refugee camps in one of the most dreadful campaigns of ethnic cleansing and dispossession in modern history."

Israeli Ambassador to the UN Ron Prosor dismissed the move as empty symbolic posturing that will change nothing tangible on the ground, but push the chances of securing a peace accord between Israel and the Palestinians into the distant future.

Prosor said that he has never heard Abbas say the phrase "two states for two peoples" because the Palestinians have never accepted that Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people.

"They have never been willing to accept what this very body recognized 65 years ago – Israel is the Jewish state."

Prosor said that the Palestinians were asking for recognition of a Palestinian state without themselves being willing to recognize the Jewish state. Beyond that, Prosor said, Abbas is trying to erase Jewish history by earlier in the year trying to wipe out a Jewish connection to Jerusalem.

"You said that Jews were trying to alter the historic character of Jerusalem, Prosor said. "President Abbas, the truth is that Jerusalem had a Jewish character long before most cities in the world had any character."

Instead of revising history, Prosor said, Abbas should start "making history by making peace with Israel. This resolution will not advance peace," he said. Nor will it change the fact that the Palestinian Authority has not control over Gaza, 40 percent of the territory they claim to represent.

"President Abbas, you can't even visit nearly half the territory you claim to represent. That territory is controlled by Hamas, an internationally recognized terrorist organization that rains missiles on Israeli civilians."

Prosor said the resolution sends a message that the international community is willing to turn a blind eye to peace agreements.

“For the people of Israel, it raises a simple question: Why continue to make painful sacrifices for peace, in exchange for pieces of paper that the other side will not honor? “There is only one route to Palestinian statehood. And that route does not run through this chamber in New York. That route runs through direct negotiations between Jerusalem and Ramallah that will lead to a secure and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians,” he said. “There are no shortcuts. No quick fixes. No instant solutions.”

The resolution was presented to the General Assembly by the representative of Sudan, who called this a victory for the “values of truth.”

Staunch European allies such as Germany and the Netherlands, who opposed Palestinian admission into UNESCO last year as a state, were among those who this time only abstained, while other friendly countries, such as Italy, voted for the move.

The vote took place on the annual “Observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.”

Senior diplomatic officials voiced deep disappointment over the European votes. Up until a few days ago, when France declared that it would support the move, senior officials held out hope that the EU might abstain as a bloc, something that would have deprived the Palestinian Authority of a moral victory.

One senior official said that the recent fighting in Gaza tipped the scales in Europe, with the Europeans worrying that if Abbas would not gain some kind of diplomatic victory, he would lose all stature and authority.

“Had the vote taken place before the Gaza operation, the EU would have voted differently,” one official said.

The Prime Minister’s Office has made clear in recent days that the vote would free Israel of its obligations under the Oslo Accords, since Jerusalem views the move as a blatant violation of the underlying principle of those agreements: that all outstanding issues be resolved through negotiations, not through unilateral actions.

Israel’s immediate reaction is expected to be the deduction from tax transfers it makes to the PA each month of some NIS 800 million that the PA owes to the Israel Electric Corporation.

Further steps are expected if the Palestinians use this new status and try to join other UN bodies or, as a result of their enhanced status, attempt to haul Israel or its citizens before the International Court of Justice or the International Criminal Court on war crime charges.

Hours before the vote, Netanyahu – realizing that Israel was facing a stinging diplomatic defeat – said that regardless of how many countries vote against Israel, “no force in the world will get me to compromise on Israel’s security.”

Netanyahu said that the decision will “not change anything on the ground. It will not further the establishment of a Palestinian state, but will make it more distant.”

Netanyahu’s comments came while touring an exhibit of recently declassified documents marking the upcoming 35th anniversary of Anwar Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem at the Begin Heritage Center in Jerusalem.

“Israel’s hand is always extended in peace, but a Palestinian state will not be established without recognition of the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people, without an end-of-conflict declaration and without true security arrangements that will protect Israel and its citizens.”

The prime minister, who said that none of the conditions he reiterated are even mentioned in the Palestinians' UN resolution, said that peace is only achieved through negotiations and not by unilateral declarations "which do not take into consideration Israel's vital security and national interests." He recommended not being impressed by the applause that he expected to be heard at the UN.

"I remember the international community's applause that the government of Israel received when it decided to unilaterally withdraw from Gaza," he said. "We got applause and then rocket fire. We left Gaza, and Iran entered, exactly like what happened in Lebanon."

Netanyahu said he would not enable another Iranian base to be established, this time in Judea and Samaria, a kilometer away from Jerusalem.

"It does not matter how many will vote against us, there is no force in the world that will cause me to compromise on Israeli security and there is no force in the world able to sever the thousands-year-old connection between the people of Israel and the Land of Israel," he said.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=294029>

- **UN welcomes State of Palestine**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- The UN General Assembly overwhelmingly approved a resolution on Thursday to upgrade Palestine to a "non-member state" at the United Nations, implicitly recognizing a Palestinian state.

There were 138 votes in favor, nine against and 41 abstentions.



Addressing the assembly in New York ahead of the vote, President Mahmoud Abbas said the UN bid was the last chance to save the two-state solution.

"Sixty-five years ago on this day, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 181, which partitioned the land of historic Palestine into two states and became the birth certificate for Israel," Abbas told the 193-nation assembly after receiving a standing ovation.

"The General Assembly is called upon today to issue a birth certificate of the reality of the State of Palestine," he said.

The president told the UN that Israel's war on Gaza highlighted the urgency of ending the Israeli occupation.

"It also reaffirmed the Israeli government's adherence to the policy of occupation, brute force and war," he said.

"We believe that the international community is standing before the last chance of the two-state solution."

Flood of threats

"We've listened for the last months to the incessant flood of threats in response to our peaceful, political and diplomatic request in the UN and have watched (Israel's) war on Gaza," Abbas said.

"We haven't heard one word from any Israeli official expressing sincere concern for the peace process."

At least 17 European nations voted in favor of the Palestinian resolution, including Austria, France, Italy, Norway and Spain. Abbas had focused his lobbying efforts on Europe, which supplies much of the aid the Palestinian Authority relies on. Britain, Germany and others chose to abstain.

The Czech Republic was unique in Europe, joining the United States, Israel, Canada, Panama and tiny Pacific Island states likes Nauru, Palau and Micronesia in voting against the move.

Israeli premier Benjamin Netanyahu immediately condemned Abbas' speech as "hostile and poisonous", and full of "false propaganda".

"These are not the words of a man who wants peace," Netanyahu also said in a statement released by his office after Abbas spoke.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called the vote "unfortunate and counterproductive," saying it puts more obstacles on the path to peace.

US Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice called for the immediate resumption of peace talks.

"The Palestinian people will wake up tomorrow and find that little about their lives has changed save that the prospects of a durable peace have only receded," she said.

"The United States calls upon both the parties to resume direct talks without preconditions on all the issues that divide them and we pledge that the United States will be there to support the parties vigorously in such efforts," Rice said.

She added that both parties should "avoid any further provocative actions in the region, in New York or elsewhere."

The move falls short of full UN membership which needs sanction by the Security Council, where the US wields a veto. But it allows Palestine access to the International Criminal Court and other international bodies.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=543512>

5. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Egypt assembly adopts draft constitution**

Constituent assembly approves articles of disputed new constitution, as opposition continue protests.

Egypt's constituent assembly has adopted a draft constitution after a marathon all-night session that began shortly afternoon on Thursday and ran through until Friday morning.

The assembly - boycotted by liberals and Christians - has been accused of rushing through approval of the document, which is at the centre of a political crisis pitting Mohamed Morsi, the Islamist president, against several opposition parties.

The articles approved include a unanimous decision to retain the principles of Islamic law as the main source of legislation.

However, a new article states that Al-Azhar, Egypt's most respected Islamic institution, must be consulted on any matters related to Islamic law, a measure critics fear will lead to oversight of legislation by clerics.

The text of the 234 articles will be sent to President Morsi, and should be put to a referendum within two weeks, said Hossam al-Gheriani, the head of the assembly.

The charter limits the president's term of office to two four-year terms, ending the system of unlimited tenure during the era of ousted president Hosni Mubarak, who ruled for 30 years.

"We want a constitution we agree on," said al-Gheriani, adding that the panel had been "awaiting" boycotting members even as it went to the vote.

The opposition, which has mobilised unprecedented rallies since Morsi assumed broad powers last week, accuses the president and his allies in the constituent assembly of railroading the charter through for a quick referendum.

The charter will replace the one suspended after Mubarak's overthrow in early 2011.

'Rushed manner'

The opposition has criticised the rushed manner in which the assembly was operating and opposes some of the draft charter's provisions on rights and freedoms.

Heba Morayef, a researcher for Human Rights Watch, said some of the draft article provisions freedom of expression and religion resemble a "penal code."

"You don't list all the things that you are not allowed to do, you're supposed to set up the rights and limitations," she said.

Particularly worrisome was the limitation of religious freedom to followers of Abrahamic religions, Morayef said, which would exclude minorities, such as Bahais, that have been persecuted in Egypt.

"They have added language that is problematic to freedom of expression, you cannot 'insult a human', which is very broad. It can be used to censor criticism of the president," she said.

Christians also objected to an article that appears to narrow the meaning of "the principles of Islamic law" to the tenets of Sunni Muslim jurisprudence.

'Dictatorial'

Morsi's decree last week, described by the opposition as dictatorial, stripped courts of the right to annul the controversial constituent assembly ahead of an expected court ruling on Sunday.

It granted sweeping new powers to the presidency, effectively shielding Morsi's decisions from review by the judiciary, which he and his movement believe retains Mubarak-era appointees who are inimical to Islamists.

The top Cassation Court has suspended work to protest against the decree, which will expire once the constitution is ratified.

Morsi and his supporters argue that delaying approval of the constitution, which would be followed by parliamentary elections to replace the Islamist-dominated house dissolved by a court earlier this year, would delay democratic transition.

The assembly, dominated by centre-right Islamists, had announced on Wednesday it would vote on the charter the following day, to the shock of opposition groups holding out hope that Morsi would try to negotiate after a massive rally on Tuesday.

Morsi allowed the assembly a further two months after its mid-December deadline to finish the charter, making the quick vote even more of a surprise to the opposition.

Friday march

Opposition groups said they would hold marches on Friday to Cairo's Tahrir Square, where dozens of protesters say they will remain camped out until Morsi reverses his decree.

Minor skirmishes persisted on Thursday between some protesters and police near the square.

At least three protesters have been killed in countrywide unrest since the decree.

The president said in a magazine interview on Wednesday that he would surrender his controversial new powers once a new constitution is in place, hoping to assuage the sense of popular anger which has been growing since Mubarak's ousting.

"If we had a constitution, then all of what I have said or done last week will stop," Morsi told the US Time magazine.

"I hope, when we have a constitution, what I have issued will stop immediately."

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/11/20121129182338884288.html>

- **Morsy on TV: Constitutional Declaration temporary, meets revolutionary goals**

The controversial 22 November Constitutional Declaration "meets the requirements of the current period" and will expire as soon as a new constitution is approved through a popular referendum, said President Mohamed Morsy in his state TV interview aired on Thursday night.



The decree made all of Morsy's decisions immune from judicial oversight until the new constitution is ratified and a new Parliament is elected. Since Morsy issued the declaration last Thursday, it has sparked mass protests by opposition forces and a strike by judges across the nation.

Morsy had "sensed a danger to the nation" and had to conduct "a very careful surgery" to address the situation, the president told his interviewers.

If the final constitutional draft is rejected by voters in the referendum, then a new Constituent Assembly would be formed to write a new draft, Morsy said.

The president added that the constitutional declaration has popular support and political forces only oppose certain parts of the decree, rather than the entire document. Only his so-called "sovereign" decisions have judicial immunity, he claimed, such as decisions like calling for a constitutional referendum.

Judges should not be parties to political disputes, Morsy continued, although he expressed his appreciation for the judicial authorities. "Judges give rulings based on the constitution and the law. It is not their job to determine the constitutionality of a legislation," the president asserted, adding that he had only assumed legislative powers due to the absence of an elected Parliament.

Morsy said he removed former Prosecutor General Abdel Meguid Mahmoud in response to revolutionary demands, and the action could not have been delayed any longer.

Recent protests against the constitutional declaration are a "healthy phenomenon," Morsy opined, then went on to urge protesters to demonstrate peacefully and abstain from assaulting security forces or facilities.

Morsy also explained that the retrials of former regime figures implicated in the deaths of protesters in the 25 January revolution, as stipulated by the constitutional decree, are contingent on the discovery of new evidence.

"Evidence was not sufficient in previous trials," the president said, but added that no exceptional measures would be taken for the tribunals.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/morsy-tv-constitutional-declaration-temporary-meets-revolutionary-goals>

6. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Lebanon's Arabic press digest - Nov. 30, 2012**

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

Al-Akhbar

Progressive Socialist Party in Rabieh today to discuss Jumblatt's initiative

While the crisis remains unchanged amid the trading of accusations in the media, the Progressive Socialist Party continues to work on the initiative proposed by its head, MP Walid Jumblatt.

However, Hezbollah says that the country cannot handle elections based on the "status-quo" electoral law nor on an authority that betrays the resistance.

Political action Thursday was limited to stances by the March 8 and the March 14 camps as the head of the Free Patriotic Movement prepared to meet a PSP delegation which will inform him of Jumblatt's initiative concerning National Dialogue.

Heads of Parliamentary committees and rapporteurs will gather Friday at MP Butros Harb's residence to evaluate the results of their boycott of legislative work attended by government ministers.

Meanwhile, the Future Movement praised President Michel Sleiman's efforts with regard to "primary national issues" and affirmed its position in terms of Dialogue that "protects Lebanon."

As-Safir

Sleiman to return any law to extend Parliament's mandate

Lebanon pursues Israel to agree to a cease-fire

In accordance with Israel's daily and repeated violations of Lebanon's sovereignty, Lebanon renewed its commitment to implementing Resolution 1701 by moving from a phase of a cessation of hostilities, as stipulated by the decision following the July-August 2006 war, to a permanent ceasefire fire between the Lebanese and Israeli sides.

The tripartite military meeting between Lebanon, Israel and the international peacekeepers in Naqoura represented an occasion to renew Lebanon's proposal to force Israel to agree to a complete cease-fire.

The Lebanese received a promise from the head of UNIFIL, Gen. Paolo Sierra, for talks on Lebanon's desire for a cease-fire at the United Nations, where the Security Council discussed Thursday U.N. Chief Ban Ki-moon's report on the implementation of Resolution 1701.

However, the report, which was presented by his personal representative in Lebanon Derek Plumbly, did not mention the cease-fire issue.

Politically, an official source told As-Safir that President Michel Sleiman is not thinking of extending the Parliament's mandate "even if all parties agreed to it." In that case, Sleiman would return the law.

An-Nahar

An attempt to neutralize discussion on an electoral law

At a time when there are no developments at the local level, Lebanon remain in a state of tension due to regional developments that could affect it, particularly Thursday's the vote at the U.N. that transformed Palestine into a non-member observe state at the international organization as well as the fast pace of developments at the military level in Syria.

High-ranking political sources said that the political deadlock could prolong as political parties await regional developments to produce something tangible.

This, according to the source, explains the reason why political parties insist on their stances and conditions.

They also said that the issue with the electoral law will surface via parliamentary committees on the basis that such an issue will be an exception to the March 14 coalition's boycott.

However, it is still early to see if that will happen, they added.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Nov-30/196650-lebanons-arabic-press-digest--nov-30-2012.ashx#ixzz2Dh26lr2U>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Qatar requested protective U.S. military presence: Egypt's Amr Moussa**

Former Arab league Secretary-General Amr Moussa spoke out in a recent interview about Qatar "paying" to have U.S. military presence on its lands in return for protection, said a London-based Arab newspaper.



Moussa said that Qatar's Prince Hamad Bin Khalifa told the United States he was going to fulfill all their military expenses in Qatar if they agree to establish bases in the Gulf state, according to an interview with Al-Hayat newspaper.

"Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa is Qatar's real power and Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim assists him. The prince managed the country's affairs well and took crucial decisions very easily," Moussa said.

"When he thought of protection and saw that Americans are the only ones willing to provide it, here he thought of the American military, which forming a base in Qatar was not among its priorities. But Sheikh Hamad told Americans that he will ensure their expenses are paid for, so now he enjoys security and has moved forward," he added.

Qatar, the major oil and gas producer Gulf-state, hosts the largest American military base in the Arab region.

There are several factors that make Qatar strong, including its leaders' good management of the country's domestic affairs, said Moussa.

The 21st century, in Moussa's opinion, does not only rely on countries with traditional powers or states with large land area, but countries willing to make use of modern world media and technological powers.

"Qatar became extremely strong because it owns their 'soft tools' unlike other countries," he added.

In addition to its small land size and little domestic challenges, Moussa said that Qatar enjoys political stability since "people are financially comfortable, and as long as people are comfortable there are no reasons to revolt" against the current rulers.

During the interview, Moussa also spoke about various topics concerning the Arab region, including Qatar's political role towards revolutions in the Arab world.

The Qatari government has backed the armed revolt in Syria, a successful NATO-backed armed uprising in Libya, and street protests that ousted rulers in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen.

When asked if Qatar backs a Muslim Brotherhood program in neighboring Arab-spring countries, Moussa said this "is not far" from Qatar's religious culture, saying this is evident through the country's "media coverage and money distribution."

"I do not know about the program, but what I do know is that there's a convergence with these Islamic movements. Those Islamic movements have their own programs and will work on implementing nothing but it. This message needs to be understood by everyone, including Qatar."

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/30/252596.html?PHPSESSID=rbsu69l0kc34jpo48eadm0to61>

- **Kuwaiti women hope to win seats in parliament**

Kuwaiti women are taking part in parliamentary elections both as candidates and voters for the fifth time since they won their political rights.

After failing to win seats in the 2012 parliament, which is currently dissolved, Kuwaiti female politicians are hoping this time to score political victory similar to 2009 when four women became MPS for the first time.



Female candidates in the upcoming elections include former MPs and political activists who won a large number of votes in the previous elections.

“I expect three or four women to make it to the parliament this time,” said Maasouma Mubarak, a former MP.

Candidate Zekra al-Rashidi, standing for the Fourth District, was also optimistic.

“I fully trust Kuwaiti female voters, because a woman’s vote is a free vote,” she said.

Rashidi said she was impressed by the support she received despite calls for boycotting the elections altogether.

Female candidates held a meeting to present their electoral platforms and explain their viewpoints on current political issues. The meeting was attended by a large number of women, including those who decided to boycott the elections.

“True I am boycotting,” said Rana Abdul Razzak, one of the boycotting attendees. “But my boycott is a positive one. I came here because I have to be updated on what is happening in the political scene.”

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/29/252480.html?PHPSESSID=rbsu69l0kc34ipo48eadm0to61>

- **Amnesty International urges Riyadh to free 15 protesters**

Amnesty International has called on Saudi authorities to either release the 15 men arrested during a protest in the capital Riyadh, or charge them with a ‘recognizable offense based on legitimate grounds’.



“Saudi authorities must release all those detained on Tuesday’s protest or charge them with recognizable criminal offenses if there are legitimate reasons for doing so,” Philip Luther, Amnesty International’s director for the Middle East and North Africa, said in a statement released on Wednesday.

He added, "Participating in a peaceful protest or appearing to criticize state authorities for the treatment of detained relatives would never be a legitimate reason for arrest and detention."

On Tuesday, dozens of Saudi protesters gathered in front of the country's human rights commission in Riyadh, demanding the release or immediate trial of their imprisoned relatives.

One woman, who took part in the rally, said the demonstrators were protesting the "prolonged detention of [their] detained relatives without charge or trial, the ill-treatment they are subjected to in detention, and the lack of medical attention they receive."

Police detained 15 men for their involvement in the protest. Witnesses said that 22 women and children were also arrested, but were later released.

Since February 2011, protesters have held demonstrations on an almost regular basis in Eastern Province, mainly in Qatif and the town of Awamiyah, calling for the release of all political prisoners, freedom of expression and assembly, and an end to widespread discrimination.

However, the demonstrations have turned into protests against the repressive Al Saud regime, especially since November 2011, when Saudi security forces killed five protesters and injured many others in the province.

Saudi forces have also arrested dozens of people including prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nemr al-Nemr.

The country's official warned in October that they would deal "firmly" with anti-regime demonstrations. Amnesty International slammed the warning, and urged the authorities to "withdraw their threat."

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/29/275244/amnesty-urges-al-saud-to-free-protesters/>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Afghan FM holds talks with FM Khar**

ISLAMABAD: Afghan Foreign Minister Zalmi Rassoul was holding talks with his Pakistani counterpart Hina Rabbani Khar and other Pakistani officials in Islamabad on Friday.



“We expect further concrete steps on the peace process and we see the recent release by Pakistan of a number of Taliban leaders as a positive first step,” said an Afghan official before the talks began.

“The foreign minister will ask for the release of further Taliban detainees in Pakistan and we have always asked for Mullah Baradar’s release,” he added.

Today’s was a second high-level Afghan delegation in weeks to Islamabad to press for the release of Taliban prisoners in a bid to kickstart peace efforts, officials said.

Talks this month between Pakistan and Afghanistan’s High Peace Council resulted in the release of at least eight Taliban prisoners, but not the militia’s former deputy leader, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, who was captured in 2010.

Afghan officials believe senior Taliban leaders held in Pakistan could help bring militants to the negotiating table, if released from jail, to end over a decade of war ahead of the 2014 pull-out of US-led Nato troops.

The Taliban, leading an 11-year insurgency since being toppled by the 2001 US-led invasion, has also welcomed the releases.

But they publicly refuse to negotiate directly with Kabul, calling the government of President Hamid Karzai a US puppet.

In Pakistan, a senior security official told AFP that “no decision” has so far been taken on whether to release Baradar.

“We have to ascertain how important he can be. Pakistan believes Baradar may not be enjoying the same clout which he used to have before being arrested in Karachi two years ago,” the official said.

Preliminary contacts between the US and the Taliban in Doha were broken off in March when the militants failed to secure the release of five of their comrades held at the Guantanamo Bay prison on the US base in Cuba.

Support from Pakistan, which backed the 1996-2001 Taliban regime in Kabul, is seen as crucial to peace in Afghanistan after the departure of Nato forces.

<http://dawn.com/2012/11/30/afghan-fm-holds-talks-with-fm-khar/>

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

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