



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procces of Iraq

Irak'ın Yeniden Yapılanma Süreci

Energy Security

Enerji Güvenliđi

Economy News

Ekonomi Haberleri

Peace Process

Barış Süreci

Ethnic and Secterian Groups

Etnik ve Mezhepsel Gruplar

Non State Actors

Devlet-dış Aktörler

Relations with the West

Batı'yla İlişkiler



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

13 DECEMBER 2012

NO: 1509

1. IRAQ.....	3
• Findings launched of major survey of children and women in Iraq (UNICEF.org)	3
• UNICEF survey finds 32% of children in Iraq deprived of many basic services (Aswat al-Iraq) ...	4
• MPs' signatures collected to support Talabani's initiative, says Shubar (alliraqnews)	5
• Araji: "Development of crisis between CG, KRG to end democracy in Iraq" (alliraqnews).....	6
• Asadi expects revealing investigation results over Russian armament contracts soon (alliraqnews).....	6
• Sadr thanks Basra and Sadr City (Shafaq News).....	7
• Talabani holds talks with US ambassador (Aswat al-Iraq).....	8
• Iranian president to visit Iraq after 21 December (ISNA).....	8
• Iraq postpones Libyan executions (Magharebia.com)	9
• Iraq stays execution of man allegedly held at 16 (AP)	10
• Source: Iraqi families threatened in Jordan but not killed (Shafaq News).....	11
• Russia, Iraq mull arms deal (Trend News Agency)	11
• Diyala discovers a route used by Al Qaeda to transfer explosives in Iraq (alsumaria tv)	12
• Official urges expansion of trade between Iranian, Iraqi border provinces (IRNA)	13
2. IRAN	13
• IAEA Delegation Arrives in Iran	13
• President: Iran to Lower Budget Dependence on Oil Revenues	15
• Participants of intl. Islamic awakening conference meet Salehi	16
• Iran seeks establishment of justice-based world order: Spokesman.....	16
• Iran ready to reach conditional agreement with IAEA: ambassador	17
• Elham reappointed government spokesman	18
3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE	18
• 5 injured in clashes after Israel kills teenager in Hebron	18
• Abbas phones Mashaal to discuss reconciliation	19
• Gaza government to rebuild ministries, headquarters	19
• Britain Announces New Aid to Gaza.....	20
• Israeli Forces Demolish Part of House near Ramallah.....	22
• Abbas: Israel Must Choose Between Occupation or Peace	22
• 'Abbas criticizes Mashaal for refusing to recognize Israel'.....	23
• Justice Ministry set to close Liberman case	24
4. AFRICA and EGYPT	26
• FM: 20,000 expats voted in first day of referendum	26
• Rights groups warn of referendum fraud.....	27
• Africa condemns army interference in Mali.....	28
• In opposition to Morsy, Mahalla declares autonomy	30
• Libya bomb wounds 2 policemen: security	35
• Tunisia arrests 11 after deadly border attack	35
5. JORDAN and LEBANON.....	36



ORSAM

ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES
مركز الشرق الأوسط للدراسات الاستراتيجية

STRATEJİK BİLGİ YÖNETİMİ
ÖZGÜR DÜŞÜNCE ÜRETİMİ

STRATEGIC INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
AND INDEPENDENT THOUGHT PRODUCTION

• Hariri calls Assad ‘monster,’ rejects warrants	36
• Lebanese Army receives six U.S. helicopters	39
• Syrian Army destroys home in Lebanon border town	40
6. SYRIA.....	41
• Three bombs target Syrian Interior Ministry.....	41
• Syria minister wounded in bombing: security source	42
7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA.....	42
• Manama inches towards much-anticipated dialogue	42
• Bahrain minister pledges ‘transparent’ dialogue	45
• Oman court upholds sentence against 22.....	47
• Gulf states, opposition urge arms for rebels.....	49
8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN	51
• Panetta in Afghanistan to Discuss Troop Drawdown.....	51
• Panetta traveled to Afghanistan from Kuwait.....	52
• 11 Afghan Cabinet Ministers Face Impeachment	52
• Afghanistan may have direct military support from India: US.....	53

1. IRAQ

- **Findings launched of major survey of children and women in Iraq (UNICEF.org)**

Survey finds 32 per cent of children in Iraq - 5.3 million - are deprived of many basic services and rights

BAGHDAD, Dec12 – The Government of Iraq and UNICEF today launched the results of the most comprehensive survey on the situation of children and women in Iraq. It found that 32 per cent of children under 18 years of age are deprived of many basic services and rights.

“This survey provides extensive data on the situation of children and women in Iraq,” said Dr. Ali Yousif Al-Shukri, Iraq’s Minister of Planning. “With these findings, we clearly see where we need to focus our investment in the new development plan to further improve the well-being of Iraqi children, who, representing half of Iraq’s population today, represent Iraq’s future tomorrow.”

A key finding of the survey is that major disparities exist between Iraq’s 16.6 million children under 18 years of age over

their access to health care and nutrition, education, water and sanitation, protection, shelter and information services.

Using an innovative methodology to determine issues each child experiences in different stages of life, 10 per cent of Iraq’s children – 1.7 million - were found to have access to all basic services and rights, while 32 per cent – 5.3 million – were found to be deprived of several at the same time.

“Not only do we now know that there are 5.3 million children deprived of many services but we know exactly which services they are,” said Iraqi Deputy Minister of Planning and Head of Iraq’s Central Statistics Organization, Dr. Mehdi Al-Allak. “We can make a dramatic improvement in nearly all aspects of children’s well-being, and thus children’s lives, by ensuring they benefit from policies that provide access to a comprehensive package of services they currently need.”

Other findings include: 99 per cent of children are currently registered at birth; the mortality rate of children dying in the

first year of life is 32 deaths for every 1,000 live births, which translates into around 35,000 infant deaths every year; one in four children have stunted physical and intellectual development due to under-nutrition; while about nine out of 10 children enroll in and attend primary school, only four complete primary school on time; and 1 in 3 children – 3.3 million – are subjected to severe violent discipline methods.

“With this clear evidence on where progress for Iraqi children can be made, UNICEF looks forward to supporting the Government to develop national social policies, plans and interventions that concretely meet the needs of all of Iraq’s children, especially the 5.3 million most deprived and marginalized,” said Dr. Marzio Babilie, UNICEF’s Representative to Iraq.

“In line with international commitments and accountabilities, our ambitious goal going forward is for an Iraq that is fit for all children.”

The survey – the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 4 - was developed over the past three years and is the fourth such survey

in Iraq with previous rounds completed in 2006, 2000 and 1996. More than 800 people from the Government of Iraq's Central Statistics Organization and the Kurdistan Region's Statistics Office interviewed 55,000 women from around 36,000 households in all of Iraq’s 118 districts.

UNICEF provided technical support to ensure the highest quality survey results, including the development of the methodology that enabled a deeper understanding of children’s disparities and deprivations across Iraq.

http://www.unicef.org/media/media_66724.html

- **UNICEF survey finds 32% of children in Iraq deprived of many basic services (Aswat al-Iraq)**

BAGHDAD, Dec12 / Aswat al-Iraq: The Government of Iraq and UNICEF today launched the results of the most comprehensive survey on the situation of children and women in Iraq.

It found that 32 per cent of children under 18years of age are deprived of many basic services and rights.

“This survey provides extensive data on the situation of children and women in Iraq,” said Dr. Ali Yousif Al-Shukri, Iraq’s Minister of Planning. “With these findings, we clearly see where we need to focus our investment in the new development plan to further improve the well-being of Iraqi children, who, representing half of Iraq’s population today, represent Iraq’s future tomorrow.”

A key finding of the survey is that major disparities exist between Iraq’s 16.6 million children under 18 years of age over their access to healthcare and nutrition, education, water and sanitation, protection, shelter and information services.

Using an innovative methodology to determine issues each child experiences in different stages of life, 10 per cent of Iraq’s children – 1.7million - were found to have access to all basic services and rights, while 32per cent – 5.3 million – were found to be deprived of several at the same time.

“Not only do we now know that there are 5.3 million children deprived of many services but we know exactly which

services they are,” said Iraqi Deputy Minister of Planning and Head of Iraq’s Central Statistics Organization, Dr. Mehdi Al-Allak.

“We can make a dramatic improvement in nearly all aspects of children’s well-being, and thus children’s lives, by ensuring they benefit from policies that provide access to a comprehensive package of services they currently need.”

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28snolqwmw0xvf2p55i1zpqdia%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=151728&l=1

- **MPs' signatures collected to support Talabani's initiative, says Shubar (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad, Dec12 (AIN) –MP, Ali Shubar, of the Citizen bloc pointed out that "A number of MPs' signatures were collected to support the initiative of the President, Jalal Talabani that aims at settling the crisis between the Central Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government."

He stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "Some MPs' signatures were collected to support Talabani's efforts to settle the crisis because he is a moderate figure and

has balanced relations with the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki, and the President of Kurdistan Region, Masoud Barzani."

"The crisis could be solved if there are efforts exerted to solve it yet it will be more complicated like the situation in Egypt if there is no intention to settle it," he concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=24483

- **Araji: "Development of crisis between CG, KRG to end democracy in Iraq" (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad, Dec12 (AIN) -The head of Ahrar bloc within the Sadr Trend, Baha al-Araji described the developments of the crisis between the Iraqi Central Government and Kurdistan Regional Government as "The end of democracy in Iraq especially when the language of the dialogue between the two sides turned into a language of weapons."

Araji said "The escalation of the disputes between the CG and KRG is something regrettable since the dialogue between both sides shifted into a military nature

after the deployment of the federal military forces and the movement of the Peshmerga forces in Kirkuk province."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=24454

- **Asadi expects revealing investigation results over Russian armament contracts soon (alliraqnews)**

Baghdad, Dec12 (AIN) –The member of the Integrity Committee, Hussein al-Asadi, confirmed "We are serious concerning collecting evidences and investigating the corruption related to armament deals conducted with Russia.

He stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "We reached results that will be announced soon through the media outlets," noting that "The parliament took a decision of forming a committee to investigate this contract."

"The committee hosted, summoned and investigated all the figures who are concerned wit this contract including the former Spokesman of the Government, Ali al-Dabbagh, Acting Minister of Defense,

Sadoun al-Dulaimi, and other key security officials," he mentioned.

"Till now, we did not get any proofs over corruption in this contract which was not concluded with Russia," he continued.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=24433:

- **Sadr thanks Basra and Sadr City (Shafaq News)**

Shafaq News, Dec12 / Moqtada al-Sadr thanked on Wednesday, the protesters that marched in all the provinces, especially Basra province and Baghdad to denounce the last position of Prime Minister , Nuri al-Maliki towards al-Sadr , demanding them to stay away from the "verbal abuse, insults and raise of shameful images".

Sadr said in a statement issued by his office in which "Shafaq News" received a copy of it that , "I can't thank the protesters enough in Basra and Sadr city in Baghdad," noting that "these protesters have demonstrated their love and loyalty for us and I do not I have but love , respect and sincerity to them. "

Sadr pointed out that "at the same time I remind the demonstrators to be persons of high moral character and rise above their demonstrations form insults, curses and raising shameful images and express their love, pride and honor sincerely."

Basra province and Sadr City (Thowra) in eastern Baghdad witnessed on Tuesday demonstrations on the background of the recent statement issued by Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki waving in it to prosecute Moqtada al-Sadr.

Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki has refused earlier Moqtada al-Sadr statements on arming the Iraqi army, threatening to sue those who stir up such accusations if not proved.

Moqtada al-Sadr announced last Tuesday, in a statement in which "Shafaq News" received a copy of it that he supports arming the Iraqi army, on condition that the reinforcement must be "for Iraq not to other countries", not to be to lead by Dijla operations and not be armed by the Baathist. "

<http://www.shafaaq.com/en/news/4334-sadr-thanks-basra-and-saders-city-.html>

- **Talabani holds talks with US ambassador (Aswat al-Iraq)**

BAGHDAD, Dec12 / Aswat al-Iraq: Iraqi President Jalal Talabani discussed on Wednesday with US Ambassador in Baghdad Stephen Beecroft how to work to end the current tension between Baghdad and Erbil.

“The US official expressed Washington’s keenness to stabilize Iraq and to strengthen its democratic experience,” said a presidential statement received by Aswat al-Iraq news agency.

The weeks-old tensions were ignited after Maliki deployed his newly-formed and controversial Dijla forces into disputed northern territories that are also claimed by the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government, which dispatched thousands of its own Peshmerga fighters into the areas.

Talabani returned to Baghdad last week, after quitting the capital and spending two weeks at his headquarters in Sulaimaniya in protest to Maliki’s actions and his

refusal to engage in a proposed national dialogue.

Maliki has reportedly called on the ministries of defense and interior to draw a plan to resolve the tensions in the disputed territories.

The premier’s office issued a statement, saying: “Maliki has requested to meet with the defense and interior ministries in order to resolve the issue of the disputed territories.”

Also, last week the Iraqi premier suggested two points to end the military stand-off. He said that first the Iraqi army and Peshmerga forces must form joint checkpoints in the disputed territories, and second that the regions must be run by their own people.

http://en.aswatiraq.info/%28S%28snolqwmw0xvf2p55i1zpqdia%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=151729&l=1

- **Iranian president to visit Iraq after 21 December (ISNA)**

ISNA website, Tehran, in Persian 12 Dec 12 Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinezhad will visit Iraq after 21 December, Iranian

Students News Agency (ISNA) reported on 12 December.

Ahmadinezhad is scheduled to have bilateral meetings with Iraqi officials, the report added.

ISNA

- **Iraq postpones Libyan executions (Magharebia.com)**

Dec12

Libyan jihadists held captive in Iraq were spared the death penalty for now, but questions remain over the future of other detainees.

By Essam Mohamed for Magharebia in Tripoli – 12/12/12

Iraqi judicial authorities on Sunday (December 9th) postponed the execution of two Libyan nationals held on terror charges, according to the Libyan foreign ministry website.

The ministry said the death penalty was put off after a telephone conversation between Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zidan and his Iraqi counterpart Nouri al-Maliki.

One of those set to be executed was Derna native Adel al-Shaalani. He stood accused of entering Iraq illegally and participating in violent crimes.

Former Libyan Foreign Minister Ashour Bin Khayal said Sunday that four prisoners were released from Iraqi jails and that there were errors in data related to four other Libyan detainees.

Bin Khayal added that there were number of other Libyan prisoners in Iraq to be released. The cases are being studied and followed up at all levels by government agencies and civil society organisations, according to the minister.

Iraq still holds 30 Libyan prisoners, including four sentenced to death, according to Al Jazeera.

The latest stay of execution follows intense pressure from Libyan government officials. Interim Justice Minister Salah al-Mirghani appealed to the Iraqi government, international human rights organisations, the Arab League and the United Nations to halt the implementation of the death sentence.

The minister said in a telephone interview with Magharebia that he directly appealed to Iraqi authorities, particularly the justice minister, to intervene to stop the execution. He asked the Iraqi minister to "stop for the sake of human rights, our Islamic faith and the brotherhood between the people of Libya and Iraq".

http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2012/12/12/feature-03

- **Iraq stays execution of man allegedly held at 16 (AP)**

By ADAM SCHRECK Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Dec12 (AP) -- Iraq has suspended the execution of a Yemeni prisoner whose family says he was 16 years old when he was taken into custody, an Iraqi official and human rights advocates said Wednesday. Iraqi officials dispute that he was a minor at the time of his arrest.

Human Rights Watch earlier this week urged authorities in Baghdad to stay the execution of Saleh Moussa Ahmed al-Baidany. The group said his execution would have been Iraq's first in 25 years of

someone who was a minor when detained.

Al-Baidany was picked up by the U.S. military in August 2009 along the Iraq-Syria border, his father told the advocacy group. He was later handed over to Iraqi authorities, found guilty of terrorist activities and sentenced to death.

The advocacy group's Iraq researcher, Erin Evers, said the sentence has now been postponed, although al-Baidany remains detained on death row and his fate is uncertain.

"We're still extremely concerned about his position," she said. "Nobody's made any promises."

Iraqi Deputy Justice Minister Busho Ibrahim confirmed that al-Baidany's execution has been halted until further notice following an intervention by Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari. Ibrahim disputed claims by the Yemeni's family that he was a minor at the time of his arrest.

http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_IRAQ?SITE=FLPET&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT

- **Source: Iraqi families threatened in Jordan but not killed (Shafaq News)**

Shafaq News, Dec12 / A diplomatic source said on Tuesday that the Iraqi families living in the Jordanian capital Amman were not exposed to any killing accident until now.

Local reports said that Iraqi families were exposed to killings during the past two days by unidentified extremists.

The source, who asked not to be named, said, in an interview with "Shafaq News" that "the threat is hovering the truth about the Iraqi families in Jordan and specifically Shiite, because of harassment practiced by unknown people, but the harassment did not reach killings as has been promoted by some people."

The source added that "the problem is that most of the families under threat and harassment refuse to return to Iraq because they are threatened there also and cannot move to another country

because of the obstacles to obtain visas or the lack of accessing to it."

A diplomatic source has revealed, for "Shafaq News" recently that Iraqi families of the Shiite community in Jordan are receiving death threats if didn't leave the country, noting that the wave of threats accompanied the outbreak of demonstrations in Jordan.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/4333-source-iraqi-families-threatened-in-jordan-but-not-killed-.html>

- **Russia, Iraq mull arms deal (Trend News Agency)**

13 December 2012

In a telephone linkup on Wednesday Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Maliki the implementation of agreements reached during the Iraqi Premier's visit to Moscow on October, The Voice of Russia reported.

Mr. Maliki then said his country planned to buy defensive and counterterrorism weapons from Russia, but reports circulated a month later alleged that Baghdad had annulled the deal.

During his Tuesday's visit to Moscow the head of the Iraqi parliament's foreign affairs committee Humam Hamoude told the Voice of Russia that the deal had simply been put on ice for the time being.

<http://en.trend.az/regions/met/iraq/2098385.html>

- **Diyala discovers a route used by Al Qaeda to transfer explosives in Iraq (alsumaria tv)**

Dec12

Iraqi Security Forces managed to discover one of the main routes used for weapon reinforcements by Al Qaeda, in an operation labeled as “qualitative” north east of Baqubah, the security committee in Diyala province council announced on Tuesday December 11. It mentioned that Al Qaeda members use this route to transport weapons and explosives to Iraqi cities.

“Troops from the 20th brigade affiliated with the fifth division of the Iraqi army succeeded in discovering one of the main routes used for weapon reinforcements by Al-Qaeda in a qualitative operation led near Himrin Lake (45 km north east of

Baqubah)”, said head of the committee Dalir Hassan in a statement to Alsumaria.

“This support route was used to transfer weapons and explosives across the banks of Himrin Lake. Afterwards, the weapons are gathered in one place near the lake, then prepared to be transferred to the center of main cities and used to fuel acts of violence”, explained Hassan.

“Companies from the 20th brigade found 3 important hideouts for weapons and explosives near Himrin Lake during an operation they carried out”, pointed out the deputy head of the security committee in Diyala. He highlighted that “the caches were going to be transferred to the center of the cities to kill more innocent people”.

The security committee of Diyala provincial council, warned in many occasions against the dangers of the activity of armed cells affiliated with Al-Qaeda near Himrin Lake and the possibility of transferring weapons and equipment to cities using boats.

Himrin Lake (545 km north east of the city of Baqubah the center of the province and

55 km north east of Baghdad) is the strategic water reserve of Diyala and it can contain a capacity of 4 billion cubic meters of water. The lake has a fill-able earth dam called Himrin Dam which sends the collected water to a group of rivers and streams that cross a great distance to carry water to most of the administrative units of the province.

<http://www.alsumaria.tv/news/68064/diy-ala-discovers-a-route-used-by-al-qaeda-to-trans/en>

- **Official urges expansion of trade between Iranian, Iraqi border provinces (IRNA)**

Kermanshah, Dec 12, IRNA – Kermanshah Governor General Seyyed Dadvash Hashemi said Wednesday that efforts should be made to promote economic ties with all Iraqi provinces.

In a meeting head of the Babel province's Chamber of Commerce in Kermanshah, he added that the officials and businessmen of the province should use the capacities and facilities of Kermanshah province in a bid to boost their economic prosperity.

Based on the orders of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei to develop ties with neighboring state, Kermanshah province has done its best in this respect. Currently, more than 50 percent of Iran's exports to Iraq belong to the province.

Kermanshah's exported goods to Iraq are among the goods European states want to purchase and this indicates the high quality of the commodities, Hashemi said.

Referring to the economic capacities of Kermanshah, he further noted that the province boasts of special capacities in the fields of agriculture, industry and services and it is ready to export services and facilities to the Iraqi border provinces.

<http://old.irna.ir/News/Economic/Official-urges-expansion-of-trade-between-Iranian,-Iraqi-border-provinces/80453659>

2. IRAN

- **IAEA Delegation Arrives in Iran**

TEHRAN (FNA)- A delegation of the International Atomic Energy Agency headed by IAEA Deputy Director-General

Herman Nackaerts arrived in Iran on Thursday morning.

Nackaerts, heading a seven-member delegation, is in Tehran to hold a new round of talks with Iranian officials on the country's peaceful nuclear program.

Drawing up a new Modality Plan to help resolve the remaining issues between the two sides will top the agenda of bilateral talks between Iran and the IAEA.



Prior to his departure to Tehran, he told reporters at Vienna airport that he was hopeful of visiting Parchin.

Inspection from Parchin had been requested by the IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano during recent Board of Governors meeting in Vienna.

Earlier in May, Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Fereidoun Abbasi announced that the IAEA could not

convince Tehran to allow the agency's inspectors to visit the Parchin military site.

Abbasi said that Iran has not been convinced and "no documents or reason has been presented to us" to persuade us to arrange a visit to Parchin military site.

"The agency is interested in visiting Parchin due to pressure from countries that want the agency to investigate the issue," he added.

Also in April, Iran's Envoy to the IAEA Ali Asqar Soltaniyeh underlined Tehran's continued and maximum cooperation with the UN nuclear watchdog agency, but said this did not mean that Iran would allow foreign parties to have easy and everyday access to its military sites.

Speaking in an interview with Fox News television channel, Soltaniyeh noted the Iran-IAEA "politicized" debate about access to the Parchin site, and stressed that while Tehran is willing to cooperate with the IAEA on its nuclear program and allows certain visits to its military sites, it will not accede to demands to visit its military facilities every day.

"We cannot permit each time any country wants to knock at the door and wants to go to our military sites," he said.

Early March, Iran's Representative Office at the IAEA and Soltaniyeh himself announced that Tehran would be ready to provide the UN nuclear agency with one-time access to its Parchin military test facility once modalities of Iran-IAEA cooperation have been agreed on, reminding that the facility is a highly sensitive military site already visited by inspectors twice in January and November 2005.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107126707>

- **President: Iran to Lower Budget Dependence on Oil Revenues**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iran plans to decrease the share of oil revenues in its next year state budget, the Iranian president announced on Wednesday.

"As regards the next year budget, we are moving to decrease the share of oil revenues to the minimum as much as possible. An oil-based budget is not reasonable since we are a great and

advanced country and will decrease our spending," Ahmadinejad told reporters on Wednesday.

He added that the government has cut a large amount of unnecessary spending and focused on key and necessary spending.

Many Iranian officials believe that the West's ban on Iranian oil supplies will help Iranian economy end its dependence on oil revenues.

Earlier this month, a senior Iranian legislator had said that officials plan to decrease reliance on oil revenues in the next year state budget to one million barrels a day, adding that the country will try to increase its income in the non-oil export sector, instead.

"Apparently, the government wants to decrease the 1392 (the next Iranian year starting on March 21) state budget's reliance on oil exports to one million barrels a day," member of the parliament's Budget Planning Commission Gholamreza Mesbahi Moqaddam told FNA.

In March 2011, a senior Iranian economic official announced that the country plans to boost its non-oil exports to \$301 billion within the next five years.

Iranian Deputy Commerce Minister Hamid Safdel stated at the time that Iran's non-oil exports, excluding gas condensates, will reach \$301 billion in a five-year period.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107126631>

- **Participants of intl. Islamic awakening conference meet Salehi**



TEHRAN, Dec. 12 (MNA) -- Participants of the international conference on university professors and the Islamic awakening meet with Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi on Wednesday. The conference was held on the theme of "Promotion of Justice and Islamic

Democracy" in Tehran on December 10-11, 2012, with the participation of 250 foreign professors across the globe.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1764923>

- **Iran seeks establishment of justice-based world order: Spokesman**

"One of the main priorities of Iran's foreign policy is to change and direct the international structures toward justice to prevent injustice and oppression."

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast says the Islamic Republic follows a foreign policy that seeks to bring about the establishment of a justice-based global order.

"One of the main priorities of Iran's foreign policy is to change and direct the international structures toward justice to prevent injustice and oppression," Mehmanparast said Wednesday.

He said that the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the world's second largest international body after the UN General

Assembly, can provide an opportunity to establish a just system, in which the rights of the independent nations are respected.



He said that a group of Western countries that possess nuclear weapons and continue to threaten other countries cannot present themselves as the representatives of the whole world.

The Iranian official said that the NAM with 120 member states and 17 observer ones can represent the world community since the majority of countries are the members of the organization.

Stressing that the organization can play a role in resolving regional and international issues, Mehmanparast added that Iran will do its utmost during its presidency of the organization to help the implementation of the NAM resolutions.

Iran took the three-year rotating presidency of the NAM from Egypt during

the 16th summit of the organization held in the Iranian capital Tehran in late August.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/13/277772/iran-seeks-justicebased-world-order/>

- **Iran ready to reach conditional agreement with IAEA: ambassador**



TEHRAN – The Iranian ambassador to France has said that Iran is ready to reach an agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency if it would provide assurances for both sides, the Persian service of the Mehr News Agency reported on Wednesday.

Ambassador Ali Ahani also reiterated that Iran's nuclear program is only meant for peaceful purposes.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/104012-iran-ready-to-reach-conditional-agreement-with-iaea-ambassador->

- **Elham reappointed government spokesman**

TEHRAN - President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Tuesday reappointed Gholam Hossein Elham as spokesman of the Iranian government.

Elham formerly served as government spokesman from August 10, 2005 to July 30, 2009 in Ahmadinejad's cabinet.

He also served as a member of the Guardian Council and minister of justice.

<http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/104011-elham-appointed-government-spokesman>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **5 injured in clashes after Israel kills teenager in Hebron**

HEBRON (Ma'an) -- Clashes erupted in Hebron early Thursday with Israeli soldiers in the southern area of the city, injuring five Palestinians, medics reported.



Israeli forces fired tear gas directly at Palestinians and five were hospitalized.

An army spokesman confirmed the clashes since early Thursday.

The angry confrontations began overnight between residents and Israeli soldiers, who deployed to the area in large numbers after killing a Palestinian teenager.

An Israeli border guard officer on Wednesday shot dead a Palestinian teenager, 16-year-old Muhammad Ziad Awad Salaymah, in Hebron's Old City.

Israeli police said the victim appeared to be carrying a fake pistol.

"Initial findings are that he had a fake pistol that he pointed at the officers at the time of the incident," police spokesman

Micky Rosenfeld told Ma'an late Wednesday.

Two other Palestinians have been killed in Hebron in clashes with Israelis in the past month.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=547505>

- **Abbas phones Mashaal to discuss reconciliation**

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- President Mahmoud Abbas phoned Hamas chief Khalid Mashaal on Wednesday to discuss end the division according to prior agreements, a Fatah official said.

Azzam al-Ahmad said Abbas phoned Mashaal to accelerate implementing national reconciliation. Abbas talked with him about his first visit to Gaza, and about Hamas' anniversary celebrations.



Al-Ahmad said that he met Mashaal on Wednesday and a member in Fatah's central committee as part of new efforts to see if a reconciliation deal could finally be implemented.

The Fatah official said he was pleased that Mashaal was able to enter the Gaza Strip after decades away from Palestine, and also happy for Mashaal's participation in Hamas' anniversary events. He said the celebrations aimed to end the division in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Al-Ahmad said it was too soon to say when a meeting in Cairo with all the factions would take place, as Hamas officials are still in Gaza for the anniversary and Egypt is holding a constitutional referendum.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=547502>

- **Gaza government to rebuild ministries, headquarters**

GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- The government in Gaza will start rebuilding ministries and headquarters destroyed in Israel's 8-day

bombardment of the Gaza Strip, the cabinet said Wednesday.

A ministerial committee has been appointed to survey the damage and assess reconstruction needs, cabinet secretary-general Abdul-Salam Siyam said.

Offices of ministries destroyed in the war have been moved to apartments and other buildings to continue providing services to citizens, Siyam said in a statement.

Building material is expected to arrive in Gaza in the coming days, Siyam said, adding that Qatar-funded projects to reconstruct Gaza following Israel's 2008 war would resume.

Israel said it bombed over 1,500 sites in the tiny enclave in the 8-day war, which ended with a ceasefire on Nov. 21. It claims its targets were affiliated to Hamas, which governs the Gaza Strip.



The week-long bombardment severely damaged civilian and government infrastructure, including water facilities, police stations, a bank, an athletics club, a football stadium, mosques, health centers and educational institutions, as well as hundreds of homes.

The civil affairs department of the Ministry of Interior was flattened by Israeli shelling, destroying 70 years of civil registry records.

Siyam said the government would issue new documents free of charge to all those whose papers were lost in the war.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=547374>

- **Britain Announces New Aid to Gaza**

GENEVA, December 12, 2012 (Wafa) – The United Kingdom International

Development Minister Alan Duncan announced a £1.25 million of new support of UK medical aid and shelter for 85,000 Palestinians affected by Gaza conflict, Wednesday said a press release by the minister.

The UK funding will provide medical aid, temporary shelter and help with rebuilding damaged homes for around 85,000 people affected by the recent violence in Gaza, said the release.

It said that the UK aid, which will be channeled through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and among other vital activities, helps the ICRC to provide medical support to eight hospitals serving 1.6 million people, deliver eight trucks of medicines to treat 2,000 wounded and other emergency cases, provide shelter kits including blankets, tarpaulins and hygiene kits for up to 3,000 people and tents, jerry cans and cooking stoves for those made homeless.

The aid will also help ICRC to provide distribute material for repairs to nearly 5,000 damaged houses, facilitate the delivery of hundreds of thousands of litres

of fuel to Gaza's power station to ensure continuing electricity and to Shawa Hospital in the north of Gaza, and make emergency repairs to the Gaza water authority's bomb-damaged infrastructure.

Duncan said, "Ordinary people in Gaza and in Israel have had their lives turned upside down by the recent conflict. We were deeply saddened by the lives lost on both sides. While the violence continued, existing UK funding helped trusted partners such as UNRWA and the World Food Program provide health and educations services and distribute food in the face of incredibly challenging conditions.'

"This new funding will help meet the most immediate needs of those injured, made homeless or otherwise affected by the conflict," he said.

He added "we welcome the ongoing talks in Cairo and urge all parties to take this important opportunity to resolve the fundamental problems of Gaza which means tackling weapons smuggling and the illicit tunnel economy into Gaza."

“It also means lifting the Israeli restrictions on movement of goods and people which, as I have seen again on this visit, make the economic and humanitarian situation in Gaza unsustainable.” he concluded.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21307>

- **Israeli Forces Demolish Part of House near Ramallah**

RAMALLAH, December 12, 2012 (Wafa) – Israeli forces Wednesday demolished part of a Palestinian house owned by Shareef al-Qadi, 33, in the village of Beit Nuba, west of Ramallah, according to the owner.

He told Wafa that forces along with bulldozers entered the village at dawn and informed him that he needs to evacuate the house in order to demolish the 50-square-meter part of it, which he added on the original house, under the pretext that this part was built without permit.

He said that demolishing of that part caused severe damage to the rest of the house, which became in need of urgent maintenance, stressing that he is worried about the safety of his family.

He said forces also destroyed the water network during the demolition, cutting off water supply to residents’ houses.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21306>

- **Abbas: Israel Must Choose Between Occupation or Peace**

ANKARA, December 11, 2012 (Wafa) – President Mahmoud Abbas Tuesday said that the Israeli government must choose between settlement activities and occupation or a peace based on international resolutions.

He affirmed, during a press conference with his Turkish counterpart Abdullah Gul, that “if Israel chooses peace we will be ready to cooperate. However, if Israel chooses settlement activities especially in E1, we will adopt a different approach.”

Abbas said that the Israeli government’s recent announcement to build new settlement neighborhoods in the West Bank in particular in the Jerusalem region is a hostile act and a red line that Palestinians will not tolerate.

He affirmed the Palestinian Authority's ongoing efforts to gain a full membership at the United Nations. "We are certain of the Turkish government's support of the Palestinian bid. It is time to end the injustice that Palestinians have been suffering from for 65 years."

"We want to achieve reconciliation, end blockade on Gaza and support the Egyptian efforts to implement ceasefire, until we get rid of the occupation," he said.

He expressed appreciation to Gul's political and financial support of the Palestinian people and reiterated the importance to strengthen the bilateral relations between the two countries.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21300>

- **'Abbas criticizes Mashaal for refusing to recognize Israel'**

At tail-end of visit to Turkey, PA president says he disagrees with Hamas leader's statement, stresses that an agreement between Fatah and Hamas stipulates a two-state vision, Turkish media reports.

Turkey's President Gul and PA President Abbas Photo: Reuters/Stringer

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas on Thursday criticized Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal's statement that his group would never recognize the state of Israel, Turkish daily The Hurriyet reported.

"I don't agree with Khaled Mashaal's statement on the non-recognition of Israel because we, in fact, recognized it in 1993," Abbas told reporters in Ankara following a two-day visit to the country.

"A four-article agreement between [Fatah and Hamas] stipulates a two-state vision. And Mashaal approved of this agreement," he added, according to the report.

Mashaal on Saturday reiterated his movement's refusal to "give up one inch of the land of Palestine."

The exiled Hamas leader arrived in the Gaza Strip for the first time ever on Friday, and said: "Palestine from the river to the sea, from the north to the south, is our

land and we will never give up one inch or any part of it.”



He was speaking to hundreds of thousands of Hamas supporters during a rally in Gaza City marking the 25th anniversary of the movement’s founding.

During Abbas's trip to Turkey he also addressed the Israeli government's recent decision to build 3,000 housing units in Jerusalem and the West Bank, saying that the PA may file charges against Israel with the UN’s International Criminal Court.

“We are not very inclined to resort to this path, but if Israel insists on its unacceptable plan, then we will use other methods,” Abbas said during a joint press conference with Turkish President Abdullah Gul in Ankara. “If Israel continues in this way, we will respond with all means – of course peaceful ones – including the possibility of going to this court.”

Abbas said that if Israel chooses peace, it will find the Palestinians fully prepared. “But if Israel chooses settlements, especially in E1 [between Jerusalem and Ma’aleh Adumim], then we will act differently,” he said without elaborating.

Abbas denounced the Israeli plan as an “act of aggression and a red line.”

Khaled Abu Toameh contributed to this report

<http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=295757>

- **Justice Ministry set to close Liberman case**

In fateful decision, ministry expected to remove cloud over foreign minister, indict him for breach of public trust.

Liberman at Knesset Photo: Marc Israel Sellem

The Justice Ministry is expected to close the main case against Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman on Thursday afternoon, while indicting him for breach of public trust in a separate 2008 case involving

obstruction of justice by former ambassador to Belarus Ze'ev Ben-Aryeh.

The ministry confirmed the timing of the decision.

The decision would be a fateful one for a case that goes back years, and could also move toward lifting a cloud from one of the most powerful politicians in Israel and end speculation of any premature end to Liberman's career. Liberman has maintained his innocence on all matters throughout.

According to an earlier draft indictment in the main case, Liberman is suspected of receiving millions of dollars from private business people through straw companies between the years 2001 and 2008, while he was a member of Knesset and a cabinet minister.

The foreign minister has already undergone an unusual three pre-indictment hearing with the state attorney, and many times Attorney-General Yehuda Weinstein has said he would decide whether to submit an indictment against him.

But on November 8, the State Attorney's Office responded to a petition to the High Court of Justice demanding a decision on the case, stating that Weinstein would decide within about a month and before the January 22 election.

Since then, speculation has been rampant in the media about what would happen and whether the coalition would fall if Liberman was indicted in the main case.

Liberman is not fully out of the woods even if the main case is dropped, if he gets indicted for breach of public trust in the Ben-Aryeh case.

There are scenarios where Liberman might still need to resign as foreign minister.

Ben-Aryeh was convicted last May of showing Liberman investigative material in 1998 against Liberman that Ben-Aryeh received in his capacity as an ambassador.

Liberman could still have problems if he is convicted and if there is a finding of moral turpitude, but most cases with findings of moral turpitude have involved much more severe charges than breach of public trust.

If Liberman did have to resign, but there was no eventual finding of moral turpitude, there would likely be no legal bar to him coming back as a minister.

<http://www.ipost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=295702>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **FM: 20,000 expats voted in first day of referendum**

Egyptian expatriates voted in the referendum on the constitution draft for the second day in a row on Thursday.

At least 20,000 Egyptian expatriate cast their ballots in the first day of voting, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Amr Roshdy said.

Egyptian expatriates in the Gulf voted in the highest numbers, with 5,832 voters at the Egyptian Embassy in Kuwait, 3,881 in Riyadh, 3,335 in Jeddah, 2,500 in Doha, 1,844 in Abu Dhabi and 1,390 in Dubai, the ministry reported in a statement released Wednesday.

Roshdy noted that the referendum began Wednesday morning in 128 Egyptian embassies and consulates worldwide, and will continue until Saturday, 15 December. Voters may also cast their ballots by mail.

An estimated 586,000 Egyptian expatriates have the right to vote in the referendum.



The voting began Wednesday in spite of mounting dissent among diplomats over the referendum. Last month, 180 diplomats released a joint statement alleging that the foreign ministry had instructed them to defend President Mohamed Morsy's controversial constitutional declaration abroad.

Last week, over 200 diplomats, including the ambassadors to Australia, Finland, Spain and Sri Lanka announced they would not supervise the referendum

following the deaths of protesters outside the presidential palace on 5 December.

Voting on the constitution draft comes alongside rising polarization between Islamists, who support the document, and the opposition, who argue that the drafting process was hijacked by the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi movements.

The poll is scheduled for 15 and 22 December in Egypt, amid a large number of judges refusing to supervise the vote.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/fm-20000-expats-voted-first-day-referendum>

- **Rights groups warn of referendum fraud**

Thirteen human rights organizations have warned fraud in the referendum on the new draft constitution, especially after the National Council for Human Rights said in a press conference on Wednesday that organizations interested in monitoring the referendum must obtain prior authorization from it.

The organizations also denounced the council is playing the role of mentor for civil society organizations, and warned that the climate of the referendum does not inspire integrity.

They said in a statement that the will of the people was deceived in a constitution crafted by a Constituent Assembly that does not represent all sectors and political forces of society and through rushing a referendum without giving people time to discuss the draft.

The statement also said the National Council for Human Rights is manipulating the supervision of the referendum by civil society organizations, although it is neither neutral nor professional, and knows nothing about human rights, especially as a large number of its members resigned, saying that it was biased toward the official positions of the state and silent about abuses committed by the president's party.

Eight members have resigned from the council in protest of recent political developments that followed the announcement of the controversial November Constitutional Declaration that

exempted President Morsy's decisions from judicial challenge, and in rejection of the president's insistence to hold a referendum on the draft constitution despite objections from the opposition.



The statement added that the president of the council, Hossam al-Gheriany, is also the president of the Constituent Assembly, and that the majority of the council members are members of the Muslim Brotherhood and the constitution-writing body, and therefore are not neutral and should have been banned by the Supreme Judicial Elections Commission from monitoring the referendum.

It continued that the SJEC is the only body empowered by the law to authorize civil society organizations to monitor elections.

The statement was signed by the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, the Cairo

Institute for Human Rights Studies, the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights and One World Foundation for Development, among others.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/rights-groups-warn-referendum-fraud>

- **Africa condemns army interference in Mali**

ABUJA and ADDIS ABABA ¼The African Union and West African regional bloc condemned army interference in Mali's politics on Wednesday after the prime minister was forced to resign.

They did not say how that would affect a plan for regional military intervention in northern Mali to help drive out Islamists and Tuareg separatists who seized two-thirds of the country in the chaos after a March coup.

Although the soldiers gave way to a civilian president and prime minister in April under international pressure, they have never been far from power.

Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra resigned and dismissed his entire government on Tuesday after being

arrested and taken to a barracks that served as headquarters for the former junta.

The head of the AU commission, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma "firmly condemned" the conditions of Diarra's resignation and repeated the demand "for the total subordination of the army and security forces to the civilian government."

The United States, France and the European Union have also condemned Diarra's forced resignation and the United Nations Security Council said it could consider targeted sanctions against those preventing a return to "constitutional order.

Fearing Mali has become a safe haven for terrorism and organized crime, West African leaders have signed off on a plan to send 3,300 soldiers to Mali to revamp its army and then support operations to retake the north.



Through the African Union, ECOWAS is seeking a U.N. mandate and international backing for the operation.

However, support for the military intervention is not universal and analysts fear the fresh political turmoil in Bamako could further discourage international support for the plan.

West African bloc ECOWAS promised to pursue efforts to end the crisis and reunite Mali, "dismantling terrorist networks in the North, and organizing free, transparent and inclusive elections."

Mali's interim President Dioncounda Traore named Django Cissoko, a former senior official in the president's office, as the new prime minister late on Tuesday.

The AU's peace and security commission will meet in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa on Thursday to discuss the recent

events in Mali. ECOWAS defense chiefs are due to meet in Ivory Coast on Saturday

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/africa-condemns-army-interference-mali>

- **In opposition to Morsy, Mahalla declares autonomy**

Mahalla — The “Independent Republic of Greater Mahalla” was declared by thousands of angry locals on 7 December, following bloody clashes in the city’s center on 27 November between supporters and opponents of President Mohamed Morsy.

This newly “independent city” does not have its own national flag and it maintains the national anthem. While it opposes the Muslim Brotherhood and its sponsored draft constitution, the “Republic of Mahalla” does not have its own constitution either — at least not yet.

The so-called republic is not a secessionist movement from Egypt, but rather a gesture expressing opposition to Morsy’s regime and the Brotherhood from which he hails. The declaration took place amid mounting opposition in Egypt to Morsy’s rule following a series of decisions that

were perceived as an attempt by Islamists to hegemonize power in the country.

While it was born in a town where dissidence is customary, the move also further crystallized how dominant local politics has become.

Rising opposition to Morsy

The “new republic” was declared by a few thousand unionized workers, along with opposition and independent activists who unilaterally announced their independence outside the Mahalla City Council late last week.

The move was prompted following violent clashes last week between Brotherhood supporters and their opposition.

Sayed Habib, a labor-rights activist at the Center for Trade Union and Workers’ Services in Mahalla city, explained that “workers became interested in the idea of independence after Morsy granted himself wide-reaching powers through his ‘constitutional declaration,’” which he issued on 22 November, “followed by his interventionist labor decree,” which was issued three days later.

The decree was criticized for pushing for Brotherhood hegemony over trade unions, by removing members over the age of 60 from the Egyptian Trade Union Federation and replacing them with appointed members.

Habib explained that about 5,000 workers who had finished their evening shift at the massive Misr Spinning and Weaving Company marched on to Shon Square, protesting at what they perceived to be Morsy's power grab.

Habib said that when they arrived at the square, they found hundreds of Morsy supporters waiting for them — primarily Brotherhood members and their sympathizers.

“While we outnumbered them, a number of these pro-Morsy thugs were carrying shotguns and Molotov [cocktails], which they used against us,” he said.

Other workers and activists who had participated in this march said birdshot, firebombs, rocks and fireworks were used against them.

Videos taken around Shon Square appear to verify the use of these weapons. The videos also show anti-Morsy protesters fighting back with rocks, Molotov cocktails and fireworks. These clashes left more than 350 injured, with some putting that number at more than 700 on 27 November.

Further polarizing the two camps was the issuing of the new draft constitution on 30 November, which opponents claim was hastily prepared and rushed through the Constituent Assembly, dominated by the Brotherhood and other Islamists.

The fatal clashes around the presidential palace in Cairo on 5 – 6 December between Brotherhood loyalists and opposition protesters also influenced Mahalla's move toward independence. Those clashes left at least eight dead and more than 700 others injured.

Speaking at Shon Square in honor of this “newly autonomous” city on 9 December, Ahmed Hassan al-Borai, ex-minister of manpower, announced Mahallans would “not be terrorized by the Brotherhood's militias.” Borai added that the draft constitution “deprives women of their

constitutional rights. It serves to deny 50 percent of Egyptian society their basic rights.”

Alaa al-Bahlawan of the liberal opposition Constitution Party also declared Mahalla’s independence from Morsy’s “corrupt rule.”

“We support this declaration of independence and aspire to see Mahalla leading and safeguarding the 25 January revolution,” he announced.

Addressing an audience of more than 1,000 city residents who had congregated in the square, Fathy Abdel Hamid of the Independent Federation of Pensioners joined the declaration.

“We are not here to merely denounce the Muslim Brotherhood and their draft constitution,” he announced. “We are here to declare that we will not tolerate rulers who bleed us in order to remain in power.”

Angry chants shook the square, with protesters shouting slogans such as “Down with the rule of the supreme guide,” referring to the Brotherhood’s

leader, and “Raise your head high, you are a Mahallan!”

Anti-Morsy Mahallans spray-painted graffiti on walls across the city reading “Mahalla is a Brotherhood-free zone,” while other street art and murals denounced the “Muslim Brotherhood’s draft constitution.”

Another guest speaker, veteran opposition organizer George Ishaq, described Mahalla as “a citadel of freedom” and added that he would be honored to be a citizen of this independent entity.

“[The Brothers] are leading us toward a fascist state,” he said. “We cannot and will not accept fascism.”

Yet another guest speaker, Kamal Abbas, chief of the Egyptian Democratic Labor Congress, shouted, “They want us to be slaves, not free men and women. Their draft constitution seeks to impose child labor and forced labor, and also seeks to outlaw independent trade unions.

“Mahalla is now leading the Egyptian revolution,” he concluded. “Mahalla has been liberated.”

Mahalla's nominal act of independence, however, is largely symbolic, and has no real administrative effect severing it from the Egyptian state. Many residents do not recognize the act, while others openly reject such calls.

Mohamed Youssef, a teacher passing by Shon Square during the rally on 9 December, commented, "I don't support these insane calls for independence. This is merely an effort organized by a few thugs aimed at weakening Egypt's national unity."

Following the rally, hundreds of protesters marched to the Mahalla City Council and again declared their independence. Dozens of veiled women led chants against "Morsy's subjugation of women" and "Muslim Brotherhood rule."

Upon arriving at Mahalla City Council, the protesters began chanting "Long live Egypt," and then sang the national anthem.

Parking his Vespa to inspect the scene, a passer-by commented, "I thought these

people had broken off from Egypt. Why are they singing the national anthem?"

"I assume we still don't have our own currency and passports here?" he added.

A history of dissidence

Referred to as the "Industrial Citadel of the Nile Delta," Mahalla al-Kubra is located some 120 kilometers north of Cairo, in Gharbiya Governorate.

"The Autonomous City of Mahalla" or "the Republic of Mahalla" is not the first of its sort. "The Republic of Zefta," a town also located in Gharbiya, emerged during the 1919 Revolution against Britain's protectorate over Egypt.

However, unlike Zefta, the "Independent Republic of Mahalla" does not have a central revolutionary council or any real administrative autonomy from the Egyptian state.

"This is not the same as the Zefta republic," Mahalla cab driver Wael Noaman said. "We are not under occupation or colonization, like we were under the British. This is a dangerous

precedent that could lead to other Egyptian peoples and cities declaring independence from Egypt.”

Noaman went on to say that as the country was under Brotherhood occupation, their occupiers would still be Egyptian.

“If Morsy or his men mess up, then we can oppose them or even overthrow them, like [former President Hosni] Mubarak.”

In more recent history following the 25 January revolution, the village of Tahseen declared administrative autonomy in September. Located in the Nile Delta governorate of Daqahlia, Tahseen residents responded to a water utilities crisis by not paying taxes or utility bills and embarking on a localized civil disobedience campaign.

Activists in the “Independent Republic of Mahalla” have said they will also embark on campaigns of civil disobedience, like the residents of Tahseen. But other than briefly blocking the Tanta-Mahalla highway and a railroad leading to the city on 7 December, not much has been seen here in terms of civil disobedience.

Mahalla’s significance as a city of resistance predates this experimental “Independent Republic.” In December 2006, Mahalla’s publicly owned Misr Spinning and Weaving Company — Egypt’s largest, with a workforce of some 20,000 — launched an historic strike that resulted in an unprecedented wave of strikes throughout Egypt from 2007 to 2008.

Another strike at the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company, planned for 6 April 2008, was thwarted by state security, which arrested strike leaders and threatened workers back into production.

Nevertheless, a localized popular uprising erupted throughout the city on 6 and 7 April of that year. Portraits of the then-President Hosni Mubarak were smashed and the local headquarters of his National Democratic Party was attacked as throngs of protesters chanted anti-regime slogans.

That anti-Mubarak uprising in Mahalla is commonly seen as one of the precursors to the 25 January revolution.

“This city resisted and confronted the previous dictatorship. It helped to bring

down Mubarak,” said independent youth activist Mohamed Abdel Azim. “We are now refusing Morsy’s dictatorship, and we will topple him if necessary.”

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/opposition-morsy-mahalla-declares-autonomy>

- **Libya bomb wounds 2 policemen: security**

Bomb explosion in Benghazi severely wounds two Libyan traffic policemen

Two Libyan traffic policemen were seriously wounded on Wednesday when a bomb exploded in front of their station in the eastern city of Benghazi, a security source told AFP.

"The explosion went off when they stopped their vehicle in front of the station. The car exploded and the two traffic policemen aboard were seriously hurt," added the source.

Security services were investigating to determine if the bomb was planted inside the car or placed in front of the station, an AFP journalist at the scene said.

Benghazi, cradle of the 2011 revolt that toppled veteran dictator Muammar Gaddafi, has recently witnessed several explosions and a wave of attacks targeting policemen and military officers.

The new authorities, who are struggling to rebuild the national army and form a professional police, have failed to bring the perpetrators to justice.

On September 11, the US consulate in Benghazi was the target of an attack – attributed to Islamic extremists – that killed four Americans, including Ambassador Chris Stevens.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/60397/World/Region/Libya-bomb-wounds--policemen-security-.aspx>

- **Tunisia arrests 11 after deadly border attack**

Tunisian security official claims eleven 'bearded' suspects have been arrested for attack which resulted in death of policeman near Algerian border earlier this week

Tunisian security forces hunting gunmen that killed a policeman near the Algerian

border this week have arrested 11 suspects, a security official said on Wednesday.

"Eleven men, bearded ones, were captured, and another one is still on the run," the official told AFP, using the word "bearded" to designate Islamist militants.

On Monday, gunmen shot and killed Anis Jlassi, head of the police station in the western region of Kassarine and wounded four of his men.

Security forces had been hunting for the gunmen near Dernaya.

At the beginning of the operation, the security services said they were seeking five "bearded" men and that they had located their camp, where an item of Algerian origin and a Tunisian SIM card were discovered.

Earlier on Wednesday, a security official said Tunisian forces had lost track of the armed group.

Meanwhile, the interior ministry said security forces defused on Tuesday an explosive device that a man had left on a

bus in Kairouan in central Tunisia. It did not provide any other details.

Clashes, strikes and attacks by hardline Islamists have multiplied across Tunisia in the run-up to the second anniversary of the start of Tunisia's revolution, which will be marked on Monday.

Members of Tunisia's militant Salafist movement, thought to number between 3,000 and 10,000, have been implicated in numerous acts of violence since last year's revolt.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/60382/World/Region/Tunisia-arrests--after-deadly-border-attack.aspx>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• Hariri calls Assad 'monster,' rejects warrants

BEIRUT: Lebanon and Syria engaged in a judicial war Wednesday with former Prime Minister Saad Hariri calling Syrian President Bashar Assad a "monster," a day after Damascus issued arrest warrants for him and a member of his Future parliamentary bloc over allegations of arming and funding Syrian rebels.

As Syria issued its arrest warrants, Lebanon's Judge Riad Abu Ghida set a date for an interrogation for two senior Syrian security officers charged with former minister Michel Samaha in a terror plot to destabilize Lebanon.

The recourse to judicial action reflected mounting tension between the two neighbors fueled by the reverberations of the 21-month-old bloody conflict in Syria on Lebanon where rival political factions are sharply split in their support for Assad and opposition groups fighting to topple him.

Hariri scoffed at the Syrian arrest warrants issued against him, Future bloc MP Oqab Saqr and rebel Free Syrian Army official Louay Meqdad.

"It is ironic for a monster to become a human being who advocates justice and issues sentences. Bashar Assad has all the characteristics of a monster," Hariri said in a statement released by his office.

He added that Syria's beleaguered president has lost "his moral, humanitarian and political prerogatives"

to rule: "He [Assad] is wanted and he will sooner or later stand to face justice [wanted] by the Syrian people.

"He [Assad] will also definitely appear before the Lebanese judiciary for deliberately participating in assassinations, terrorism and sending explosives to incite strife among Lebanese," the head of the Future Movement said.

"The warrants [should] revert to their owner, Bashar Assad; a courtroom is waiting to try him on charges of shedding blood in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq, the killing of children and the annihilation of the Syrian people," Hariri added.

A judicial source said that Lebanon would likely ignore the Syrian warrants.

"The prosecutor's office will examine the legality of the warrants, but will likely decline to respond to the request or will send them back to Damascus," a judicial source told The Daily Star, pointing to the lack of evidence in the case.

“Both Hariri and Saqr enjoy parliamentary immunity and therefore cannot be prosecuted,” the source added.

Syria issued arrest warrants Tuesday for Hariri, Saqr and Meqdad over charges of providing weapons and funds for “terrorist groups” in Syria.

Interior Minister Marwan Charbel said Interpol’s office at the Internal Security Forces received the warrants at midday Tuesday, adding that copies had been sent to all Arab states.

The move comes almost two weeks after a Lebanese television station aired audio recordings of Saqr allegedly discussing supplying Syrian rebels with arms.

Saqr has denied the allegations and said the tapes were doctored, adding that Hariri had tasked him only with providing humanitarian aid to thousands of Syrian refugees displaced by the fighting in Syria.

In Damascus, Syria’s prosecutor general urged that parliamentary immunity be lifted on Hariri and Saqr.

“[Syria’s] prosecutor-general was informed after the recordings uncovered the involvement of [the three men] in providing money and weapons to the terrorists in Syria,” Syria’s official news agency SANA quoted Attorney-General Mohammad Marwan al-Loji as saying.

Loji said the recordings also showed Hariri, Saqr and Meqdad were involved in sending Lebanese fighters into Syria from Lebanon.

“As soon as they heard the recordings, Lebanese authorities should have lifted [parliamentary] immunity against the deputies involved and handed them over to the Lebanese or Syrian judiciary, in accordance with bilateral agreements,” Loji said.

Loji’s comments came on the day that Investigative Judge Riad Abu Ghida set Jan. 14 as a date for the questioning of Syrian Gen. Ali Mamlouk, the head of Syria’s national security bureau, and an officer identified as Brig. Gen. Adnan over their alleged role in a terror plot to destabilize Lebanon. The two men were indicted along with Samaha, a key ally of Assad, in August over the plot said to have

been aimed at stoking violence in Lebanon.

Abu Ghida, however, decided not to summon Assad's senior adviser Bouthaina Shaaban as a witness in the case.



Judicial sources said Shaaban will be summoned after the outcome of the interrogation with Mamlouk and Adnan. They said Abu Ghida will send the request to an investigative judge in Damascus via Lebanon's Foreign Ministry, through the Justice Ministry.

Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea rejected the warrants as "a link in the serial of shedding the blood of the Lebanese, particularly March 14 leaders, since 2005," in a statement.

"After everything that has happened in Syria, Assad and his aides have lost their

right to claim any legitimacy that entitles them to issue warrants," he added.

Commenting on the Syrian arrest warrants, Hezbollah official and Nabatieh MP Mohammad Raad told reporters after meeting former President Emile Lahoud: "This is an internal Syrian affair in which we do not interfere."

Speaking to reporters after meeting Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour, the Syrian Ambassador to Lebanon Ali Abdel-Karim Ali said he had appointed Rashad Salameh, a former Kataeb official, to file suit against "anyone who participated, incited, funded and sent arms [to Syrian rebels] and were actual accomplices in shedding the blood of Syrians." – With additional reporting by Youssef Diab

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Dec-13/198322-hariri-calls-assad-monster-rejects-legitimacy-of-warrants.ashx#ixzz2EvMqo38J>

- **Lebanese Army receives six U.S. helicopters**

BEIRUT: The U.S. delivered Wednesday six military helicopters to the Lebanese Army.

The U.S.-made Huey II military helicopters arrived at Beirut's airport at 8 a.m. Wednesday on a U.S.-rented Russian cargo aircraft.

The all-purpose helicopters, coming from Texas, can accommodate 13 passengers with a carrying capacity of 11,200 pounds (5 tons).

Spare parts for the helicopters, which will stay at Rafik Hariri International Airport, were also among the shipment.

Officers from the Lebanese Air Force and American officials from the U.S. Embassy in Beirut were at the airport to receive the helicopters.

A diplomatic source told Reuters news agency that the helicopters were part of "bilateral military assistance" between Lebanon and the United States.

The Lebanese Air Force has 24 Huey helicopters and 11 French-made Gazelles, both of which can be equipped with guns and missiles. With Reuters

[http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Dec-12/198212-lebanese-army-](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Dec-12/198212-lebanese-army-receives-six-us-helicopters.ashx#ixzz2EvMwACXy)

[receives-six-us-helicopters.ashx#ixzz2EvMwACXy](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Dec-12/198212-lebanese-army-receives-six-us-helicopters.ashx#ixzz2EvMwACXy)

- **Syrian Army destroys home in Lebanon border town**

BEIRUT: Syrian regime forces destroyed a house in Lebanon's eastern border town of Masharikh al-Qaa by planting a landmine because it blocked the view from a checkpoint, sources told The Daily Star Wednesday.

Regime forces asked Hussein Ezzedine to evacuate his home in the town of Masharikh al-Qaa before detonating a mine that destroyed it, according to sources. No casualties were recorded.

The sources said that the regime forces bombed the house because it blocked the view from a Syrian observance checkpoint at the eastern border.

Masharikh al-Qaa has repeatedly been victim to clashes between Assad forces and rebels. Many shells have hit the eastern border town, home to mainly Sunni-populated farms scattered across a flat agricultural landscape in the northeast corner of the Bekaa.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2012/Dec-12/198250-syrian-army-destroys-home-in-lebanon-border-town.ashx#ixzz2EvNAMGqV>

6. SYRIA

• Three bombs target Syrian Interior Ministry

BEIRUT: A car bomb and two other explosives went off at the main gate of the Syrian Interior Ministry in Damascus on Wednesday, causing some deaths, state television said.

It did not give figures on casualties. Lebanon's al-Manar television, which supports Hezbollah, said four people were killed and more than 20 wounded in the explosions.



The ministry is in Kafar Souseh, an area of the Syrian capital that borders the central Ummayad Square and is contested

between rebels and forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad.

A resident said she heard sirens and shooting after a "huge explosion". The pro-government TV station Al-Ikhbariya aired footage of concrete rubble, blood on the floor and a 2-metre-wide hole in the road.

Rebels have made gains on the outskirts of Damascus recently but relied on hit and run attacks and bombs in the centre of the city, often on state security buildings or areas loyal to Assad, such as Jaramana, where twin bombs killed 34 people in November.

A July 18 bomb attack that killed four of Assad's closest aides, including his feared brother-in-law Assef Shawkat, was followed shortly by an insurgent advance into the city but they were later pushed back.

At least 40,000 people have been killed in Syria's uprising, which started in March 2011 with street protests which were met with gunfire by Assad's security forces, and spiralled into the most enduring and destructive of the Arab uprisings.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Dec-12/198253-blast-in-damascus-targets-syrian-interior-ministry-state-tv.ashx#ixzz2EvNMJqgl>

- **Syria minister wounded in bombing: security source**

BEIRUT: Syrian Interior Minister Mohammed Ibrahim al-Shaar was wounded in a deadly bomb attack targeting his ministry on Wednesday but his condition is not serious, a security source told AFP.

"He was wounded in the shoulder when the ceiling fell in his office," the source said on Thursday, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"He was taken to hospital but his condition gives no cause for concern and he should be discharged rapidly."

The triple bombing, using a booby-trapped car and two other devices, was made possible by a betrayal within the ministry's own protection service, the source said.

"It is impossible to get near the ministry gate except in an official vehicle," he added.

The attack killed five people and wounded 23, the state SANA news agency reported.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said nine people were killed.

It is the second time that the interior minister has been wounded in an attack.

Shaar narrowly escaped being killed in a spectacular July 18 bombing that claimed the lives of four other top security officials, including the defence minister and the brother-in-law of President Bashar al-Assad.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Dec-13/198341-bomb-explodes-near-syrian-capital.ashx#ixzz2EvNY2eHv>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Manama inches towards much-anticipated dialogue**

Rights seminar brings together political formations for first time in months

Manama: Bahrain's first concrete steps towards a dialogue to end the social and political crisis that has hit the nation for 20 months are set to be made at a seminar on human rights.

All political formations in the country have been invited to take part in the meeting to be held behind closed doors.

Bahrain Centre for Strategic, International, and Energy Studies (Derasat) said it was holding a seminar on human rights in Bahrain on Thursday and that "participants will represent the diverse segments of the political and human rights community in Bahrain."

Dr Mohammad Abdul Gaffar, advisor to the king for diplomatic affairs and chairman of Derasat board of trustees, said the seminar, "Human Rights in Bahrain — Achievements and Aspirations: A Look into the Reality and the Future", would address "issues related to human rights in the Kingdom of Bahrain, and the mechanisms to strengthen them through

a review of Bahrain's considerable experience.

"In taking the initiative to organise this event, Derasat hopes to contribute significantly to the human rights' agenda."

Sources said that all the societies have accepted the invitation to the seminar and that they would be represented by leading figures.

The presence of the political formations around the same table would be considered a major breakthrough in the quest for a dialogue that has been elusive for months.

Radicals on all sides have stalled efforts to bridge the gap following protests that hit the country in February and March.

On Friday, Crown Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa said dialogue was the only way forward and that he looked forward to a meeting between all components of the Bahraini society.

"I am not a prince of Sunni Bahrain; I am not a prince of Shia Bahrain. I am a prince of the Kingdom of Bahrain and all mean a

great deal to me personally,” Prince Salman said at the Manama talks. “I soon hope to see a meeting between all sides, and I call for a meeting between all sides, as I believe that only through face to face contact will any real progress be made. It does not even have to be on a very serious subject, but meetings must take place to prevent us sliding into an abyss that will only threaten all of our national interests as we, here in the Kingdom of Bahrain, although small, are large in what we symbolise, what we represent and what we have achieved,” he said.

For Prince Salman, 43, the silent majority in Bahrain deserved a better social, economic and political deal.

“Unleashing people power means that we must respect the opinions of people,” he said. “There is a silent majority here in the Kingdom of Bahrain who feel their voices are unheard. They are the ones who go to sleep at night with no security on their gates. They are the ones who live in mixed communities, representing different sects, ethnicities and political beliefs. They are the ones who have to live, day to day, with the spectre of a sectarian conflict erupting that may damage themselves or

their own interests, their future or their children at any time. That cannot be allowed to happen. Responsible leadership is called for. That is because the majority of the people of Bahrain want a solution that puts the events of last year firmly in the past, and I believe that dialogue is the only way forward,” he said.

The differing political views represented in disparate political groups here in Bahrain must be reconciled, Prince Salman said.

“They will only be reconciled by sitting together and agreeing a framework where the limit of what is acceptable is the limit of what is unacceptable to the other, with the ultimate goal being to reach an agreement,” he said.

The remarks by Prince Salman have been warmly welcomed locally, despite attempts by some lawmakers and columnists to tie the possibility of a national dialogue to a public denunciation of violence.

The call to start a dialogue was also hailed internationally with the US and France expressing their support.

In his speech, Prince Salman had called upon the international community to assume its responsibilities towards improving the situation in Bahrain.

“We have our work cut out for us, but the international community must play its part,” he said. “Wishing for peace never works, but peace making does. I call on our friends in the West to engage like the United Kingdom has done — engage all stakeholders, train all groups, work with us to make our environment and our capacity greater and stronger. Stop exclusively scrutinising government actions alone. There is a moral responsibility on all sides to work to bring the Bahraini body politic together. We must heal these wounds. We must stop the violence. We must reduce the fear and we must stop the bigotry. I call on you unequivocally to condemn violence if ever it occurs. We will continue to do our part, but you will help us all if you do yours,” he said.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/manama-inches-towards-much-anticipated-dialogue-1.1118238>

- **Bahrain minister pledges ‘transparent’ dialogue**

Both houses of parliament welcome call for reconciliation talks

Manama: Bahrain’s justice minister on Tuesday assured sceptical members of parliament that they would not be excluded from a much-anticipated national dialogue expected to be launched between the various segments of the Bahraini society.

“There will be no exclusions of lawmakers and there will be no interference from foreign countries in the dialogue,” Shaikh Khalid Bin Ali Al Khalifa said during the parliament session after MPs expressed concerns on both counts.

“Everything will be transparent and in the open and there will not be a dialogue on the table and another one under the table. The dialogue will be Bahraini and there will be no foreign involvement,” he said after several lawmakers expressed reservations about the merit of the expected dialogue “if it was not conducted properly.”

Some lawmakers said that there should be no dialogue until the opposition renounced violence on Bahrain's streets.

The variance in positions highlighted the extent of divisions that have crept into Bahraini society since the events of February and March last year that marked the worst social and political crisis in the country's modern history.

Attempts to find a solution to the uneasy situation that has affected social life and negatively impacted commercial activities have failed as hardliners from various sides stalled any move to bring moderate voices to the negotiating table.

However, a ray of hope shone when Crown Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa called for dialogue between various segments of society in a recent public speech. "I am not a prince of Sunni Bahrain, I am not a prince of Shiite Bahrain. I am a prince of the kingdom of Bahrain and all mean a great deal to me personally. I soon hope to see a meeting between all sides — and I call for a meeting between all sides — as I believe that only through face-to-face contact will

any real progress be made," Prince Salman said at the Manama Dialogue on Friday.

The dialogue did not even have to be on a very serious subject, Prince Salman suggested. "But meetings must start to take place to prevent us sliding into an abyss that will only threaten all of our national interests as we, here in the kingdom of Bahrain, although small, are large in what we symbolise, what we represent and what we have achieved. His Majesty the King of Bahrain was a pioneer of the reform process here in the Middle East," he said.

Prince Salman's call was welcomed by opposition groups, led by Al Wefaq National Islamic Society, who expressed their readiness to take part in the talks.

On Monday, the Shura Council, the appointed chamber of the bicameral parliament, hailed the call for dialogue to end the crisis.

Lawmakers from the lower chamber on Tuesday said that they welcomed the invitation to start the dialogue.

However, several MPs insisted that it had to be “fully Bahraini without foreign involvement” and that it had to be meaningful to “ensure certainty for future generations.”

The appeal for dialogue also drew praise from the US administration.

“I welcome the call for dialogue by His Royal Highness Crown Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa, and encourage all political societies and civil society to engage with the government of Bahrain,” Michael Posner, US assistant secretary of state for bureau of democracy, human rights, and labour, said in a statement on Monday. “We also acknowledge the positive response of Al Wefaq and a coalition of other opposition societies to the crown prince’s call for dialogue, and their reaffirmation of the previously-issued Declaration of Non-Violence,” the US official said at the end of a visit to Bahrain where he attended the Manama Dialogue, an international conference.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-minister-pledges-transparent-dialogue-1.1117259>

- **Oman court upholds sentence against 22**

Prison for wrongful gathering and for insulting the Sultan

Muscat: The Appeal Court upheld Muscat Primary Court sentences against 22 Omani activists as well as netizens after the fourth hearing on Wednesday.

Literati, a lawyer and activists were among 11 sent to jail for six months and slapped with a 600 Omani riyals fine for wrongful gathering while the three-judge bench comprising judges Badar Al Rashid, Mohammed Al Akhzami and Al Mukhtar Al Harthi overturned another six month prison term for blocking traffic, against the 11.

The three- judge bench upheld part of the Primary court sentence against poet Saeed Al Hashmi, media personality Basma Al Rajhi, lawyer Basma Al Kiyumi, Mukhtar Al Hinai, Nasser Al Ghilani, Mohammad Al Shezari, Khaled Nawfali, Badar Al Jabri, Mohammad Al Jamoudi, Abdullah Al Ghilani and writer Mahmoud Al Rawahi, who recently won an award in Oman for best short novel writing.

Al Rawahi also got the Muscat Primary Court's sentence of one-year prison term and 1000 riyals fine for insulting the Sultan upheld by the Appeal Court. However, according to a lawyer, he will have to spend only one year in prison.

Besides Al Rawahi, 11 others also had their appeal dismissed by the three-judge bench. Hamoud Al Rashdi (writer), Ali Hilal Al Muqbalı (blogger), Hamad Al Kharousi (poet), Mohammad Al Habsi, Talib Al Abri, Abdullah Araimi, Abdullah Al Siyabi, Mohammad Al Baadi, Rashid Al Baadi and Muna Hardaan, who writes a blog under the pen name of Rose of Dhofar, will have to spend one year in prison and pay 1000 riyal fine.

All those whose sentence was upheld will go to high security Central Prison in Sumayil sometime next week.

Al Jamoudi, Al Hinai and Al Nawfali, who were sentenced for wrongful gathering, are also facing another case of insulting the Sultan and violation of country's Cyber Laws.

The next hearing in Appeal Court will be on December 19 and some cases pending

in Primary Court will be heard on December 26.

The lawyer for 11 convicted for wrongful gathering was confident before the fourth hearing that they had put up strong arguments before the date for judgement. In the final hearing, the three judges dismissed one charge of blocking traffic but upheld the charge of wrongful gathering.

The 11 were among a group that had protested in Muscat against the arrest of Esmail Al Muqbalı, Habiba Al Hinai and Yaqoub Al Kharussi. The three were arrested when they went to Fahoud oil fields last May to show solidarity with the striking workers from contracting companies, working for two oil companies in the country.

The under trial activists and bloggers have so far attended 10 hearings, six in Primary Court and four in Appeal Court.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/oman/oman-court-upholds-sentence-against-22-1.1117742>

- **Gulf states, opposition urge arms for rebels**

Coalition spokesman says rebels are capable of imposing a no-fly zone

Manama: Syria's opposition and its Gulf backers will press western governments this week to supply weapons to rebels, arguing that significant progress has been made to unify armed groups and bring them under civilian control.

As the Friends of Syria coalition prepares to meet in Marrakech on Wednesday, opposition leaders and Gulf officials said the time for outside direct military intervention has passed, with the rebels' demands confined to supplies of arms, particularly anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles.

Yasser Tabbara, a spokesman for the Syrian National Coalition, the newly formed opposition front that has won western backing, said the rebels, who have made significant military advances in recent weeks, were capable of imposing a no-fly zone on their own, if given more advanced anti-aircraft weapons.

He said the opposition also wanted the European Union arms embargo to be lifted and all financial and military aid to be channelled through its institutions.

Khalid bin Mohammed Al Attiyah, Qatar's minister of state for foreign affairs and the country's man on Syria policy, said one of the outcomes of the Marrakech meeting should be to allow Syrians to defend themselves and counter President Bashar Al Assad's air force.

"At this stage, after 20 months, I think the people of Syria do not want us to provide them with a no-fly zone," he told a conference in Bahrain organised by London's International Institute for Strategic Studies. "They want us to provide them with the means for them to impose their own no-fly zone. They are now ready and prepared to impose their own no-fly zone. The lack of means is what is holding them back."

Tabbara said a majority of the main brigades fighting the Al Assad regime agreed at the weekend to a unified military command, with a senior military defector, Salim Idriss, appointed as chief of staff.

The 30-member military council was formed after days of meetings in Turkey, under the watchful eye of western and Arab officials, and its members were picked by the brigades themselves. It is designed to act as the military arm of the Syrian National Coalition.

The coalition is also hoping to announce this week the name of the prime minister for the planned provisional government, with Riad Hijab, the Assad regime prime minister who has defected, among those under consideration.

However, it is far from clear that the opposition's efforts will be sufficient to persuade the US and European states to provide military support to the rebels, amid persistent worries that arms could fall into the hands of extremist groups fighting alongside the rebels.

The exact composition of the council and the extent to which it represents the rebels will also have to be tested, as will the council's effectiveness, given that several past attempts at unity have failed.

The US has signalled that it could follow France and Britain in recognising the coalition as the sole representative of the Syrian people, giving the group a diplomatic boost. But western diplomats say Washington is more likely to play the role of coordinator of robust military assistance in the future, rather than provider.

Syrian rebels are believed to have received as well as captured some anti-aircraft missiles, but it is not clear they have captured enough to pose a serious challenge to Al Assad's air superiority.

The US has been particularly concerned about Jabhat Al Nusra, a jihadi group that is not a member of the new military council but has played an increasingly high-profile role in recent rebel military successes. Washington has indicated to the opposition that it planned to list it as a terrorist organisation.

Opposition leaders, however, argue that the group has been welcomed by rebels because it has brought much-needed financial and military capabilities and they have urged the US administration to delay the listing.

On Sunday, a group of rebels that included Jabhat Al Nusra took over a regime military command centre in Aleppo province, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a UK-based pro-opposition monitoring group.

Qatar and Saudi Arabia have so far been the main suppliers of military equipment to Syria's armed opposition but diplomats say the rebels require intelligence and greater amounts of arms, some of which have to be provided by western states. Most urgently they need shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missiles known as Manpads, anti-aircraft guns and more light weaponry.

William Hague, the British foreign secretary, told reporters in Manama that no action on Syria had been ruled out but UK policy remained to provide non-lethal assistance. In order to maintain some flexibility, however, Britain was among countries that pressed recently for the EU sanctions, including an arms embargo, on Syria to be renewed for three months only, rather than a year.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/region/syria/gulf-states-opposition-urge-arms-for-rebels-1.1116634>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• Panetta in Afghanistan to Discuss Troop Drawdown

Leon Panetta

VOA News

December 12, 2012

U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has arrived in Afghanistan on an unannounced visit that will include talks with President Hamid Karzai.

Panetta arrived in Kabul on Wednesday for consultations with Karzai and top military commanders, including U.S. General John Allen, about troop levels in the country after the international combat mission ends in 2014.

Before arriving in Afghanistan, Panetta told reporters the White House hoped to have a decision soon on the U.S. troop make-up after the withdrawal.

"Part of the reason for this trip is to talk with General Allen and to discuss with him some of the options that are being prepared for the president's considering, with regards to the enduring presence. Our hope is that we can complete that process within the next few weeks," he said.

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

- **Panetta traveled to Afghanistan from Kuwait.**

About 68,000 U.S. troops remain in Afghanistan. Military officials have called for keeping as many as 15,000 troops in the region after 2014 for training and counterterrorism efforts.

In November, Panetta said the U.S. would need to keep a substantial number of troops in the country to ensure that al-Qaida "never again finds a safe haven." He did not specify how many troops would be needed to achieve this goal. The U.S. and Afghanistan are in the process of negotiating a bilateral security agreement outlining the future U.S. presence in the country.

The defense secretary also noted a decline in the number of attacks by Afghan security forces against U.S. forces but said these so-called insider attacks remained a concern.

In another development, Afghan and coalition forces say they have arrested a Taliban leader who controlled a group of insurgents who had launched attacks on coalition troops and Afghan forces.

Security forces say the unidentified militant leader was involved in planning a suicide attack when he was arrested in Ghazni province on Wednesday.

Some information for this report was provided by AP and AFP.

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

- **11 Afghan Cabinet Ministers Face Impeachment**

By RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan

December 12, 2012

KABUL -- Afghanistan's lower house of parliament has voted to start

impeachment proceedings against 11 cabinet ministers.

The parliament's deputy speaker, Abdul Zaher Qadir, said on December 12 that a majority of lawmakers in the Wolesi Jirga voted in favor of the measure.

The ministers are facing criticism for having spent less than half of their ministries' 2012 budgets aimed at developing projects such as infrastructure-building.

The 11 ministers include the Interior, Defense, Economy, Water and Energy, Education, Urban Development, Mining, Higher Education, Antinarcotics, and Information and Culture ministries.

Earlier this month, the lower house cleared the minister of water and energy, Mohammad Ismail Khan, of wrongdoing in impeachment proceedings.

He was accused of budget irregularities and was also under scrutiny for allegedly mobilizing his militia.

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

- **Afghanistan may have direct military support from India: US**

By Sayed Jawad - Tue Dec 11, 12:56 pm

Khaama Press

The US has said it will have no problem if Afghanistan seeks any direct military assistance from India for its armed forces in dealing with security issues born out of insurgent activities in the country, The Indian Express reported Tuesday.

According to a senior US defense official Washington had discussed the issue with the Indian and Afghan officials.

The officials said, "We have had discussions with the Indians about this issue and about the Afghans, and I don't see any particular problems with the overall approach here at all."

The official speaking on the condition of anonymity said, Afghan military commanders and intelligence officials have begun urging India to provide direct military assistance to the country's fledgling armed forces.

According to reports key military equipment including medium trucks with capacity of carrying 2.5-7 tonne cargos, bridge-laying equipment and engineering facilities, light mountain artillery along with ordnance were sought by the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

Reports also suggest India was also requested to help Afghanistan build close air-support capabilities for its troops in preparation of drastic scaling-down of western forces in 2014.

The official said the US and Afghanistan have jointly developed a “fairly aggressive” plan that includes broad range of support from the international community for developing capabilities that Afghanistan needs to address security issues born out of insurgent activities.

“We think it’s important to continue working on the lines of that agreed plan,” the official quoted by The Indian Express said, praising role played by India in Afghanistan.

“India has been very supportive of Afghanistan in a wide range of areas. We think that’s been very positive,” the

official said after the Pentagon submitted to the Congress a bi-yearly report on the progress being made in Afghanistan.

In the meantime as President Obama considers how quickly to withdraw the remaining 68,000 American troops in Afghanistan and turn over the war to Afghan security forces, a bleak new Pentagon report has found that only one of the Afghan National Army’s 23 brigades is able to operate independently without air or other military support from the United States and NATO partners.

The report, released Monday, also found that violence in Afghanistan is higher than it was before the surge of American forces into the country two years ago, although it is down from a high in the summer of 2010.

But a defense official who briefed reporters at the Pentagon sought to offer a more positive picture of the Afghan security forces’ abilities than the report would suggest. Acknowledging that the progress of the security forces had been “incremental,” the official said that many of the forces patrol and carry out some operations independently, without help

from NATO. “They often don’t rely on any assistance from us at all,” said the official, who declined to be named under ground rules imposed by the Pentagon.

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

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

Bu bülten **ORSAM Ortadoğu Uzman Yardımcısı Nebahat Tanrıverdi O tarafından hazırlanmaktadır. Bülten Ortadoğu ülkelerinin yerel haber kaynaklarından derlenmektedir. Belirtilen görüşler bölge ülkelerinin haber kaynaklarına ve ismi geçen yazarlara ait olup ORSAM’ın görüşünü yansıtmamaktadır.*