



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

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1. IRAQ

• UK doctor found guilty of dishonest conduct in Iraqi civilian's death

A former British army doctor has been found guilty of "misleading and dishonest" conduct in his handling of the death of an Iraqi civilian in British military custody in 2003.

On Saturday, the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service (MPTS) ruled that Derek Keilloh was guilty of dishonest conduct in 2003, when 26-year-old hotel receptionist Baha Mousa died after being arrested in Basra, the Guardian reported.

On September 14, 2003, British troops arrested Mousa, along with nine other Iraqis, at the Haitham Hotel in Basra. Rifles, bayonets and suspected bomb-making equipment were found at the scene. Mousa was held at a temporary detention center under suspicion of being a militant.

Mousa was hooded with a sandbag for 24 hours, sustained 93 separate injuries including fractured ribs and a broken nose during the final 36 hours of his life in the custody of the 1st Battalion, Queen's Lancashire Regiment.

The MPTS noted that Keilloh, then a 28-year-old regimental medical officer, was called to a detention center at the British Army HQ in Basra, where the Iraqi hotel receptionist was unconscious after a violent incident with soldiers.

Keilloh knew of Mousa's injuries but failed to conduct an adequate examination of the body. He also failed to assess other detainees, protect them from further mistreatment or to inform senior officers of what was going on.

The MPTS will decide on Monday whether Keilloh, who now works as a general practitioner in northeastern England, is fit to continue to practice.

Mousa's death was determined to have resulted from injuries and his weakened physical state caused by mistreatment and abuse, extreme heat and a lack of food and water.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/17/278490/uk-doctor-dishonest-over-iraqi-death/>

- **Bombs, bullets kill 17, injure 77 in Iraq**

At least 17 people have been killed and more than 77 others injured in several attacks across Iraq.

According to police officials, two car bombs and seven roadside bombs exploded near two Shia mosques in the northern city of Kirkuk on Sunday. The attacks left 13 people dead and 57 others wounded.

Earlier in the day, two people were killed after a car bomb exploded at the local headquarters of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani's party in the town of Jalawla in the northern province of Diyala.

At least 13 others were also injured in the bombing. The victims are all reported to be Kurdish Peshmerga military recruits.

Also on Sunday, gunmen attacked an Army checkpoint, killing at least two soldiers in Tarmiyah, north of Baghdad.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/17/278468/bombs-bullets-kill-17-in-iraq/>

- **Eight killed, 55 injured in series of explosions in Kirkuk**

At least eight people have been killed and 55 others injured in a series of explosions in the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk, local sources say.

According to police officials, two car bombs and seven roadside bombs exploded near two Shia mosques in the city of Kirkuk on Sunday. Four women and two children are among the dead, AFP reported.

Earlier in the day, two people were killed after a car bomb exploded at the local headquarters of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) party in the town of Jalawla in the northern province of Diyalah, as a number of people seeking to join the Kurdish Peshmerga security forces had gathered.

Thirteen others were also injured in the explosion. The victims are all reported to be Kurdish Peshmerga military recruits.

Meanwhile, gunmen attacked an army checkpoint in Tarmiyah, north of the capital, Baghdad, killing at least two soldiers and wounding at least three others.

The explosions come as Iraq's central government and the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region have agreed to gradually withdraw their troops from disputed territories in the northern Iraq in a bid to end a tense military standoff.

Jalawla and Kirkuk are located in the disputed areas claimed by both the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Baghdad.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/16/278437/eight-killed-in-iraqs-kirkuk-explosions/>

- **Sadrists bloc and the National Accord Movement discuss the political crisis and how to get out of it.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / Parliamentary Ahrar bloc discussed with the head of the National Accord Movement, Iyad Allawi and members of the Political Bureau of the movement, the political crisis and how to get out of it.

A statement by the Information Office of the President of the Ahrar parliamentary bloc, Bahaa al-Araji said that "A delegation of the Ahrar bloc, headed by Araji visited the National Accord Movement. Both sides discussed, during the meeting, the importance of laws that pass in the House of Representatives and the need for consensus on these laws to be legalized, particularly the law of the Federal Court and the law of the Supreme Judicial Council. "

Araji stressed, according to the statement, the need to forget the differences at this stage and stand side by side in order to meet the challenges, specially the regional risks that could affect Iraq. / End

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GFDJKM

- **Barzani directs to stop media campaigns today.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / Massoud Barzani, President of Kurdistan directed to commit to stop media campaigns starting from Sunday 16, Dec.

A statement of the Presidency of the Kurdistan Region quoted spokesman, Omid Sabah as saying that "Massoud Barzani ordered to stop media campaigns starting this Sunday in the light of the initiative of the Presidency of the Republic."

The Presidency announced, last Friday that the two sides in Baghdad and Erbil responded positively to calls for calm and commitment to halt mutual accusations and tense statements, and also agreed to resume the work of the two military- technicians delegations . The results of their talks will be reported to their leaderships to take the appropriate decisions.

The Presidency of the Republic called the parties of the crisis, that (Sunday) today 16, Dec will be the beginning of the full commitment to halt mutual accusations and tense statements. / End
http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GFDJJH

- **Al-Mullah describes Barzani's decision on the disputed areas as an exceeding over the feelings of the Arabs.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / Haider al-Mulla, the Iraqiya coalition's spokesman, described the decision of the President of Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, to name the / Kurdish areas outside the Kurdistan region " instead of the disputed areas, as:" overcome the feelings of the Arab component."

Al-Mulla said in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA /: "The statements made by the President of Kurdistan cannot be tolerated, and if he does not back down from this decision, we will consider these areas an Arab Iraqi and we will not use the term the disputed areas nor mixed."

He added: "This decision does not consistent with the President's initiative to calm and stop tension media statements that would deepen the political crisis."

The head of the Kurdistan region, Massoud Barzani, issued a decree two days ago, directing to use the phrase / Kurdish areas outside the region / instead of the disputed areas covered by Article 140 of the Constitution./ End

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GFDJJI

- **Independent MP: political blocs cause problems, escalate crises before the election, and then agree.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / The independent MP in the National Alliance, Jawad Al-Bazzooni accused all political blocs as causing problems and escalating crises before the elections, and then come back and agree, noting that "this scenario prepared in advance and agreed upon by the political blocs."

He said in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / that "The crises and problems will continue because all the political blocs are beneficiaries," explaining that "most of the political blocs create crises with the approaching of the elections to convince voters that there is a sectarian and nationalism problems, thus the voter should elect them again for sectarian and nationalism reasons. "

He added that "The solution of problems and crises and properly administrating the State lay with the citizen, because his election to the good competencies and independent in the upcoming elections, and stay away from parties that have not submitted anything to the citizen and the country, can change the political map and the political consensus and quotas."

He noted that "the formation of a political majority government is the only way to provide services to the country and the citizen away from political and sectarian quotas." / End

http://www.ninanews.com/english/News_Details.asp?ar95_VQ=GFDLHL

2. IRAN

- **Iran president offers condolences to Americans over school shooting**

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has offered his condolences to the families of Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting victims in the United States.

The shooting on December 14 claimed the lives of 20 students and six adults in Connecticut. The students were all aged six and seven.

The following is the full text of Ahmadinejad’s condolence message released on Sunday:

“I received, with great sorrow, the news about the unfortunate incident at Sandy Hook Elementary School in the State of Connecticut which led to the deaths of 20 innocent American children and seven teachers.

The bitter memory of the Colorado cinema shooting and other killing frenzies in this country is still fresh in the memories of the public, but the occurrence of another incident, which is much more terrible, has increased concerns about the continuation of this trend and attracted world public attention to causes of such bitter incidents in American society.

Today, all nations including the majority of the noble people of the US need an atmosphere of kindness and sincerity in their evolutionary path towards the domination of ethics, spirituality and respect for human rights and dignity, and the occurrence of such heart wrenching incidents has caused grave concerns among all.

Is it not time to seriously and carefully look for the cause of such stunning violent acts and to fundamentally reconsider the policies and plans that are devised based on the material interests and profiteering ambitions of a certain group and which have various destructive effects on the society and particularly innocent children and youths?

On behalf of the great nation of Iran, I offer my profound condolences and sympathies to the American people and the families of the victims of this bitter incident, and hope that we will see the day in which all nations would live together in a world filled with love, affection and friendship.”

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/16/278438/iran-offers-condolences-to-us-families/>

- **Iran: Talks with IAEA positive**

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi says recent talks in Tehran between the Islamic Republic and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have been positive.

Salehi made the remark during a press conference in the Iranian capital on Sunday regarding the latest negotiations between the two sides, which took place on Thursday.

The Iranian foreign minister said Iran and the IAEA reached common ground on most of issues during the talks, and will discuss the remaining topics in the next meeting, which is scheduled to be held in Tehran on January 13.

He said the two sides discussed ways of hammering out a new modality plan to resolve the differences over Iran's nuclear energy program.

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

Iran argues that as a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and a member of the IAEA, it is entitled to develop and acquire nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

In addition, the IAEA has conducted numerous inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities, but has never found any evidence of divergence towards military objectives in the Islamic Republic's nuclear energy program.

Salehi also condemned the deployment of Patriot missiles belonging to the Western military alliance of NATO along the Turkish border with Syria, adding that the Syrian issue must be resolved by Syrians and without foreign interference.

He stressed that Iran has no intention to meddle in the internal affairs of other states and is merely working towards what Syrians want.

On November 21, Ankara formally asked NATO to deploy Patriot missiles on its border with Syria.

On December 4, the alliance approved to act according to Turkey's request, despite strong opposition from Syria itself, Russia, China, and Iran.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/16/278449/iran-talks-with-iaea-positive/>

- **Iran unveils six-point peace plan for Syria**

Iran's Foreign Ministry has released the details of the much-needed six-point plan drawn up in Tehran to resolve the ongoing crisis in Syria.

The long-awaited plan, unveiled on Sunday, calls for an immediate end to all violent and armed acts under the UN supervision.

"In this stage, the [Syrian] government and all armed opposition groups should immediately halt military operations particularly in residential areas, and in order to stabilize the situation and [help to] restore calm, they must cooperate with the UN [special] envoy [on Syria Lakhdar Brahimi] and the committee working under his supervision," the plan read.

The plan has also called for sending humanitarian aid to Syrians following the end of all conflicts, lifting all economic sanctions imposed against the country, and facilitating the return of displaced Syrians to their homes.

Iran's plan urges talks between representatives of all Syrian groups regardless of their political and social tendencies and the Damascus government in order to form a national reconciliation committee.

"These talks should pave the way for the establishment of a transitional government...which will hold free and competitive elections to form a new parliament and a new constitutional assembly which will draft a new constitution...and [pave the way for] holding presidential elections."

The plan calls for the release of all Syrians arrested on political charges as well as the trial of anyone who has committed atrocities.

The Iran plan also seeks an end to the false reporting of Syria developments as well as the formation of a committee to assess the damages inflicted on the country's infrastructure, and determine its reconstruction priorities.

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

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

Damascus says certain Western states, especially the United States, and their regional allies are fueling the unrest.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/16/278406/iran-unveils-peace-plan-for-syria/>

- **Iran's Majlis committee examines Iranian's death in Dutch police custody**

Iran's Majlis Committee on National Security and Foreign Policy will pursue the issue of an Iranian national's death while in police custody in the Netherlands to find out more details, an Iranian lawmaker says.

"The committee will follow up the case via Iran's Foreign Ministry to clarify aspects of the death of Hossein Mahboubi, an Iranian national in custody in the Dutch city of Utrecht," added Mehdi Davatgari, a member of the committee, on Sunday.

He added that Iran's Majlis would also investigate the issue simultaneous with an investigation by the Islamic Republic's Embassy in the Netherlands.

Under international law, a foreign state that arrests a national of another country must report the case to the embassy of the respective government, he pointed out.

However, Dutch officials did not inform Iran's embassy about the issue, the legislator emphasized.

Davatgari said the Majlis committee would give more information about the issue once its details are revealed.

Mahboubi was a United Arab Emirates resident who had traveled to the Netherlands.

The Iranian Embassy in The Hague said the 40-year-old was arrested in the city of Utrecht on Sunday, December 9, 2012, and died in police custody hours later.

The Dutch authorities have launched an investigation into the case to find out the cause of the death and also clarify whether the police had been involved in the incident.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/16/278355/majlis-pursues-iranian-death-in-holland/>

- **Iran demands damages for attack on consulate in Afghan city**

Iran has called on the Afghan government to pay for damages resulting from an attack on its consular office in the western Afghan city of Herat and to guarantee its full security.

Iran's Consul General to Herat Rahim Mohammadi Yekta censured the failure of Herat officials to fulfill their legal duties in protecting the consulate building and told reporters that his colleagues need "psychological security" to carry out their work.

"We demand both compensation of damages and the full security of the mission," he said.

The Iranian diplomat emphasized that the host country is responsible for providing the security of a consulate building and paying for necessary damages in case of need.

Iran on December 11 temporarily closed its consular office in Herat after the mission's compound was attacked by a group of people.

An unnamed informed source in Iran's Foreign Ministry said, "The Islamic Republic of Iran has sent an official letter of protest to Afghanistan's embassy in Tehran regarding the recent incident outside our country's consulate in Herat."

The source also dismissed the baseless allegations that Iran has killed Afghan nationals along its border with Afghanistan.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/16/278341/iran-demands-damages-in-afghan-attack/>

- **Ahmadinejad condolences to American nation**

TEHRAN, Dec. 17 (MNA)- President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad condoled and sympathized with the American people and the families of the children killed in the shooting spree incident of a school in Connecticut State.

Iran's presidential website reported, Dr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad wished that one day all nations of the world would be living besides each other with peace and love.

President of the republic Islamic of Iran added: 'The horrific and bitter memory of the killings in a cinema in Colorado State and other frenzy-like murders in this country (US) had not been pacified that the recurrence of a much horrific incident intensified the concerns over this process and attracted the attention of the world's public opinion to the root-causes of such bitter incidents in the American society.'

President asked in his message from the Americans: Isn't the time ripe to reconsider the policies and programs which are based on the materialistic interests of specific groups of people and leaves many destructive influences on the individuals, particularly the children by adopting a serious and through investigation into such violent behavior.

'Today, all nations of the world, including the venerable American people in their evolutionary move towards the rule of ethics and spirituality as well as respecting the dignity of people need an atmosphere full of kindness and intimacy, and occurrence of such incidents cause deep concerns in everyone,' Ahmadinejad added.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1768142>

- **EU has become a U.S. puppet: Velayati**

TEHRAN, Dec. 17 (MNA)- The senior advisor to the Supreme Leader says the European Union has become a puppet in the hands of the United States.

Ali Akbar Velayati made the remarks during a conference in Tehran on Sunday.

“The United States dictates the European Union and NATO what they should do, and they cannot make independent decisions even in regard to their own national interests,” he said, adding, “That is (a kind of) political colonialism.”

Elsewhere in his remarks, Velayati said that the Syrian people took to the streets to demand Islamic reforms, but the Westerners got al-Qaeda involved in the popular movements that resulted in killings and bombings.

Velayati also noted that the movements in the Middle East region are signs of the Islamic Awakening and it is obvious from people’s votes and slogans that pro-Islamic forces will play key roles in the regional developments.

He called on academics and religious scholars to develop a blueprint for the Islamic Awakening movement in order to save it from deviation, saying that otherwise “the Westerners will try to divert the current of the Islamic Awakening.”

Velayati emphasized that the experience of the Islamic Revolution in Iran can be very helpful to other Muslim nations in foiling enemy's plots.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1768100>

3. SYRIA

- **Syria VP says neither side can win war**

Syria's vice president has said a "historic settlement", involving the formation of a national unity government, was needed to end the 21-month conflict in the country.

Farouq al-Sharaa told a Lebanese newspaper that neither the forces of President Bashar al-Assad nor opposition fighters were in a position to win the war in Syria.

Sharaa said the situation in the country was heading from bad to worse, al-Akhbar newspaper cited him as saying in its Monday edition.

Sharaa, a Sunni Muslim figure in the minority Alawite-led regime, has served in top posts for almost 30 years.

The latest development came as Iran, Syria's main ally, said it was backing presidential elections in the war-torn country as part of a six-point plan outlined on Sunday to halt the violence.

The plan, described by state media and Iranian news agencies, also calls for efforts to halt the flow of weapons into Syria and to hold talks that include the government of President Assad.

Iran in the past has offered initiatives to end the Syrian bloodshed, but none are likely to gain any momentum with the main rebel forces who suspect Tehran for its close ties to Assad regime.

Iranian plan

The latest proposals were offered during the opening of a two-day conference that includes 200 Syrian religious and political figures and envoys from countries including Syrian neighbours Turkey, Iraq and Lebanon, according to the semi-official Fars news agency.

Key Syrian rebel figures did not attend.

Fars said the plan included efforts to halt the flow of arms into Syria, an apparent reference to rebel backing by rival nations, including Turkey and Gulf Arab states such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Iran also is believed to supply Assad's military with assistance.

Later steps include creating a transitional government to lead Syria toward parliamentary and presidential elections. The reports gave no indication whether Assad could seek to remain in power under the Iran-backed plan.

Meanwhile, Laurent Fabius, the French foreign minister, has said he believed Assad would fall soon and that the new opposition coalition had to be supported to prevent extremists taking control.

"I think that the end is nearing for Bashar al-Assad ...even the Russians are considering it," Fabius told RFI radio.

France, one of Assad's harshest critics, was the first Western country to recognise the new Syrian National Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people.

In a further sign of an escalation on the ground, Syrian fighter jets bombed the Palestinian Yarmouk district in Damascus on Sunday, killing at least 25 people sheltering in a mosque in an area where Syrian rebels have been trying to advance into the capital, opposition activists said.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/2012121620915125592.html>

- **Syria planes strike Damascus refugee district**

Warplanes have bombarded a district housing Palestinian refugees in the Syrian capital for the first time since the anti-regime uprising began.

Reports on Sunday suggested that a mosque sheltering people who had fled violence in nearby suburbs was hit and at least eight people were killed.

Video posted online, purporting to show the aftermath, showed several bodies and destruction.

"Warplanes staged an airstrike on an area near al-Bassel hospital... in Yarmouk camp, hurting several people," the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The district has seen clashes between government troops and rebels and been bombarded earlier in the conflict but Sunday was the first time air power was used, according to activists.

Yarmouk is a residential area where Palestinians and Syrians from the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights have lived for decades. Since violence intensified in and around Damascus in summer, residents from nearby neighbourhoods which have seen intense fighting between rebels and government troops have taken shelter in the area.

'Immediate action'

Palestinian President Mahomud Abbas appealed on Sunday for an immediate halt to firing on Palestinian refugee camps in Syria.

"We call on the warring sides in Syria to spare the Palestinian people and their camps in Syria," Abbas said in a statement carried by official Palestinian news agency WAFA, adding that bombing of the refugee camps "must be stopped immediately."

"We also call on the international community to take immediate action to provide protection to our people in Syria," Abbas said, adding that the Palestinians were "not involved" in the conflict.

As the Syrians, Palestinians have been divided over the uprising, with some taking up arms against the regime and others fighting to defend it.

Yarmouk is part of an arc sweeping from the east to southwest of the Syrian capital where government troops have been trying for several weeks to push back rebels.

Activists also reported bombardment of the nearby districts of Hajar al-Aswad and Assali.

Meanwhile, Alaeddin al-Sabbagh, former head of public relations in the Syrian intelligence, announced his defection while speaking to Al Jazeera.

He said he had been in touch with rebels for some time and that they knew he was serving the revolution while he was in office. He called Assad's regime a "clinically dead" one.

The opposition says more than 40,000 people have been killed since the uprising started in March last year and gradually turned into a civil war. Hundreds of thousands have fled to neighbouring countries and many more have been displaced internally.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/2012121612329600740.html>

- **US, UK training Syrian militants in Jordan**

Syrian militants have been receiving training to use light and heavy weapons in Jordan with the help of the British and US governments, a new report says.

The report published by the McClatchy website cites militants to reveal the training took place as far back as October and involved hundreds of militants.

“We hoped there would be more training on larger weapons,” the report quoted Kamal al Zoubani, a militant from the southern Syrian city of Daraa as saying. “But we were allowed to take light weapons back to Syria with us.”

The report quotes Zoubani as saying he was selected to receive the training along with at least three groups of 50 to 60 militants at a military base in southern Jordan in October, where uniformed Jordanian military officers were present, as well as people he believed to be American intelligence officers.

Meanwhile, another militant, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the training had expanded to anti-tank weapons and Stinger anti-aircraft missiles and that uniformed British and Jordanian military officers were present.

The revelations about militants being trained in Jordan comes after on Wednesday the United States recognized the so-called National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people.

The UK, France, Turkey, and the [Persian] Gulf Cooperation Council have also recognized militants fighting the Syrian government.

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

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

Damascus says certain Western states, especially the United States, and their regional allies are fueling the unrest.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/16/278424/us-uk-train-syrian-militants-in-jordan/>

- **West adventurism behind rise in Syrian refugees: Iran official**

A senior Iranian official says the increasing number of Syrian refugees fleeing the violence in their homeland results from Western adventurism in the Arab country.

“Syria’s main problem is the [foreign] meddling and the funds and weapons that Western and Arab forces send into the country,” Hossein Sheikholeslam, Iran Majlis Director General of International Affairs said on Sunday.

He stressed that the main reason behind the widespread displacement of Syrians since the beginning of the unrest in the country is the destruction and violence caused by terrorists and militants.

“Turkey, Arab [states] and the West are after their own interests in Syria and seek to achieve their interests while diminishing Syria's ability to resist [against Israel and the West],” said Sheikholeslam, who is also an adviser to Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani.

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

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

The repercussions of the ongoing unrest have deeply affected Syrians with hundreds of thousands of people fleeing the country to seek refuge in neighboring countries.

Damascus says certain Western states, especially the United States, and their regional allies are fueling the unrest.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/16/278400/west-behind-rise-in-syrian-refugees/>

- **Child deaths and bitter cold in Syrian refugee camps**

ZAATARI, Jordan (Reuters) - One-year-old Ali Ghazawi, born with a heart defect, faced a battle for survival even before his family fled Syria's civil war. It was a struggle he lost two weeks ago in the bitter winter cold of a tented refugee camp in north Jordan.

Ali died two days after undergoing a heart operation in Zaatari camp, which houses at least 32,000 refugees who escaped fierce bombardment in Syria's rebellious southern province of Deraa, cradle of the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad.

"I covered my son with two blankets, but he was not warming up, and he turned blue before he passed away in my hands," said his sobbing 22-year-old mother, alone with a three-year-old daughter after she left her husband in Deraa and crossed the border in November.

Ali was the fourth baby to die in three weeks in the windswept camp. United Nations aid workers say none of the deaths were the direct result of conditions in Zaatari, yet they highlight the challenge facing relief agencies scrambling to provide basic shelter for half a million refugees in the region.

"These deaths are a result of cumulative factors, some related to shortage in needs and natural causes. But on top of that, the reality that conditions are harsh cannot be ignored," said Saba Mobaslat, programme director at Save the Children.

Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey each host more than 130,000 registered refugees, and relief workers predict the numbers will only increase as violence escalates around the capital Damascus.

Mirroring Syria's youthful population, almost 65 percent of Jordan's camp residents are newborns and young children.

"Every night we are getting children as young as four days old, six days old, one week, two weeks old, and it's a real struggle to try to make sure that everyone survives," said Andrew Harper, Jordan head of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

"Women are giving birth on the border, and people are coming across pregnant. It's a situation where we just need to redouble efforts, particularly as we move into winter, because you have hundreds of pregnant women who cross the border," Harper said.

Families often send the most vulnerable to safety, he added, so alongside the very young in Zaatari are many older refugees. "Last night we had a couple who were 97 years old," he said.

"CHILDREN'S CAMP"

Along the main road in the middle of the camp's muddy and gravel streets, children of all ages race around the makeshift market place that sprang up after the camp opened in July.

Many families join in, out of enterprise or necessity, selling everything from hot falafel to household goods, old clothing and fresh vegetables.

"It's a children's camp. You walk into it and there are children everywhere. It's in your face. The male adults are staying behind, and a woman comes with 10 children without her bread earner," Mobaslat added.

In one of several UNICEF-run playgrounds, among seesaws, swings and volunteers giving music lessons, the scars of war are fresh in the minds of most children.

"I long for my home, and I hope Bashar falls to get back to my home. It's much better than here, where we are humiliated," said Mohammad Ghazawi, 12, who came to play after a break from selling cheap cigarettes.

Their elders complain that two thin blankets per refugee distributed in recent weeks were not enough to warm them in tents that let in rain water despite zinc reinforcements and waterproof layers that have helped insulate them.

"Kids are dying from cold and lack of blankets. My kids shiver at night, and one has constant diarrhoea," said Mohammad Samara, 46, who fled heavy shelling in the southern Syrian town of Busr al-Sham in October with his wife and four children.

Carsten Hansen, country director for the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), which has set up a heated tent that receives families on arrival, says much progress has been made to help distribute aid.

"Everybody is trying to mobilise resources ... in order to react to bigger numbers and a huge influx," Hansen said, adding that 6,000 gas heaters had been airlifted to Jordan to help heat the tent camp.

FROM CRISIS TO DISASTER?

Harper said UNHCR was working to prevent "this humanitarian crisis becoming a major disaster". But he said that while aid teams were racing to improve conditions at Zaatari, there were 100,000 other registered refugees living outside the camp and probably another 100,000 unregistered, whose living conditions were not improving.

In Lebanon, too, host to 154,000 refugees, many face a bleak winter, and aid workers expect their numbers to more than double by the middle of next year.

In the Bekaa Valley town of Bar Elias, a woman from the northern Syria province of Idlib says her home for the last year has been a wooden shack with only plastic sheeting to protect from the rain. Plastic bags are stuffed into the roof as extra insurance against leaks. "There is no water, no electricity, no school for my kids," she said in a croaky voice.

"My husband is sick. The situation is very bad."

Mads Almaas, NRC country director in Lebanon, said many more may flee Syria over the winter to escape worsening conditions there, putting even greater strain on relief efforts.

"The violence will not only continue but also get worse. And even in the increasingly likely event of the fall of Assad, we don't think the violence will end," he said.

Almaas said the United Nations would launch a regional response plan on Wednesday anticipating a total of 300,000 registered refugees in Lebanon by mid-2013. "At first we thought it was too high. Now we are concerned it is too low," he said.

In Turkey, which hosts 136,000 refugees, camps for the most part have facilities such as portable electric heaters, and refugees receive three hot meals a day from the Red Crescent. But temperatures can plunge below freezing in the rugged terrain along the 900 kilometre (560 mile) border with Syria during the winter months, and rain can be torrential and cause flooding.

Overcrowding remains a concern, with extended families cramped in single tents and ever more refugees arriving as fighting across the border drags on.

Across the region, aid workers fear an explosion in violence could leave them seriously overstretched.

"Right now funds are sufficient. What is a challenge is if we get any shocks, something like 5,000-10,000 refugees arriving (in Lebanon) in a matter of hours," Almaas said.

If fighting swept through the centre of Damascus, thousands of Syrians could flee to the Lebanese border in a matter of hours. "For that, we are not prepared as the NRC. I also question the international community's capacity."

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=32185>

- **Syrian jets strike rebels around Damascus**

BEIRUT, (Reuters) - Syrian warplanes bombed insurgents east of Damascus on Saturday and government forces pounded a town to the southwest, activists said, in a month-long and so far fruitless campaign to dislodge rebels around the capital.

Jets bombarded the Beit Sahm district on the road leading to the international airport and the army fired rockets at several rebel strongholds around Damascus, President Bashar al-Assad's bastion through 21 months of an increasingly bloody uprising.

The 47-year-old Alawite leader, forced on the defensive by the mainly Sunni Muslim rebels, has resorted increasingly to air strikes and artillery to stem their advances on the ground.

NATO's U.S. commander also accused his forces on Friday of firing Scud missiles that landed near the Turkish border, in explaining why the Western alliance was sending anti-missile batteries and troops to Syria's northern frontier.

The Syrian government denies firing such long-range, Soviet-built rockets. But Admiral James Stavridis wrote in a blog that a handful of Scud missiles were launched inside Syria in recent days towards opposition targets and "several landed fairly close to the Turkish border, which is very worrisome".

It was not clear how close they came. Turkey, a NATO member once friendly toward Assad but now among the main allies of the rebels, has complained of occasional artillery and gunfire across the border, some of which has caused deaths, for months. It sought the installation of missile defenses along its frontier some weeks ago.

"Syria is clearly a chaotic and dangerous situation, but we have an absolute obligation to defend the borders of the alliance from any threat emanating from that troubled state," Stavridis wrote.

Batteries of U.S.-made Patriot missiles, designed to shoot down the likes of the Scuds popularly associated with Iraq's 1991 Gulf War under Saddam Hussein, are about to be deployed by the U.S., German and Dutch armies, each of which is sending up to 400 troops to operate and protect the rocket systems.

Damascus has accused Western powers of backing what it portrays as a Sunni Islamist "terrorist" campaign against it and says Washington and Europe have publicly voiced concerns of late that

Assad's forces might resort to chemical weapons solely as a pretext for preparing a possible military intervention.

In contrast to NATO's air campaign in support of Libya's successful revolt last year against Muammar Gaddafi, Western powers have shied away from intervention in Syria. They have cited the greater size and ethnic and religious complexity of a major Arab state at the heart of the Middle East - but have also lacked U.N. approval due to Russia's support for Assad.

ASSAD WARNED

As well as the growing rebel challenge, Syria faces an alliance of Arab and Western powers who stepped up diplomatic support for Assad's political foes at a meeting in Morocco on Wednesday and warned him he could not win Syria's civil war.

Assad's opponents have consistently underestimated his tenacity throughout the uprising, but their warnings appeared to be echoed by even his staunch ally Moscow when the Kremlin's Middle East envoy Mikhail Bogdanov conceded he might be ousted.

Russia said on Friday Bogdanov's comments did not reflect a change in policy. France, one of the first countries to grant formal recognition to Syria's political opposition, said Moscow's continued support for Assad was perplexing.

"They risk really being on the wrong side of history. We don't see their objective reasoning that justifies them keeping this position because even the credible arguments they had don't stand up anymore," a French diplomatic source said, arguing that by remaining in power, Assad was prolonging chaos and fuelling the radicalization of Sunni Islamist rebels.

European Union leaders who met in Brussels on Friday said all options were on the table to support the Syrian opposition, raising the possibility that non-lethal military equipment or even arms could eventually be supplied.

In their strongest statement of support for the Syrian opposition since the uprising began, EU leaders instructed their foreign ministers to assess all possibilities to increase the pressure on Assad.

With rebels edging into the capital, a senior NATO official said that Assad is likely to fall and the Western military alliance should make plans to protect against the threat of his chemical arsenal falling into the wrong hands.

HUNGER SPREADS

Desperate food shortages are growing in parts of Syria and residents of the northern city of Aleppo say fist fights and dashes across the civil war front lines have become part of the daily struggle to secure a loaf of bread.

Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem told U.N. humanitarian chief Valerie Amos that U.S. and EU sanctions on Syria were to blame for hardships in his country and urged the United Nations to call for them to be lifted.

Moualem also called on the United Nations to expand its relief efforts in Syria to include reconstruction "of what has been destroyed by the armed terrorist groups", the state news agency SANA said, using a label employed by authorities to describe the rebels.

Amos said in Rome on Friday the United Nations is committed to maintaining aid operations in Syria.

The World Food Programme (WFP) says as many as a million Syrians may go hungry this winter, as worsening security conditions make it harder to reach conflict zones.

"NOTHING OFF THE TABLE"

At the EU summit, Britain's David Cameron pushed for an early review of the arms embargo against Syria to possibly open the way to supply equipment to rebels in the coming months. Germany and others were more reluctant and blocked any quick move. But there was widespread agreement that whatever action can be taken under current legislation should be pursued, and the arms embargo would still be reviewed at a later stage.

"I want a very clear message to go to President Assad that nothing is off the table," Cameron told reporters at the end of the two-day meeting. "I want us to work with the opposition ... so that we can see the speediest possible transition in Syria.

"There is no single simple answer, but inaction and indifference are not options."

Forty thousand people have now been killed in what has become the most protracted and destructive of the Arab popular revolts. The Assad government severely limits press and humanitarian access to the country.

Among factors holding Western powers back from arming the rebels is the presence in their ranks of anti-Western Islamist radicals. Following a U.S. decision this week to blacklist one such group, Jabhat al-Nusra, as "terrorist", thousands of Syrians demonstrated on Friday against ostracizing it.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=32177>

4. ISRAEL-PALESTINE

- **Israeli forces attack Press TV crew in Gaza**

Israeli forces have opened fire on Palestinian farmers and Press TV crew in the southern Gaza Strip, Press TV reports.

Press TV correspondent Ashraf Shannon said Israeli forces fired on the farmers and Press TV crew near the border fence in the Khan Yunis area.

Shannon said, "Israel troops were standing 200 to 250 meters away from us, and it was clear that we were journalists, standing right behind the farmers."

But "all of a sudden, they started shooting [at us]. No one was threatening them. No one was firing. No one was throwing stones at them."

On November 21, Press TV correspondent Akram al-Sattari was injured in an Israeli airstrike on a hotel that had housed journalists in the Gaza Strip. The day marked the start of an Egypt-mediated ceasefire agreement, which ended an eight-day-long Israeli war on the coastal sliver that had killed at least 166 Palestinians.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/16/278462/israeli-forces-attack-press-tv-crew/>

- **New Palestinian group vows 3rd intifada**

Palestinian youths in the West Bank city of al-Khalil have reportedly formed a group with the aim of bringing about a third intifada in the occupied territories.

According to a video recently posted on the Internet, the National Union Battalions group said it will fight to recover "all of Palestine."

Members of Palestinian groups like Hamas, Fatah, Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) are the founders of the group.

"This is the beginning of a third Palestinian intifada, which is erupting from the heart of al-Khalil and will spread to all of Palestine," the group said.

It also warned the Tel Aviv regime to stop arresting Palestinians in the West Bank, or face the consequences.

“If Israel kills Palestinian people, [Palestinians] will kill in return and will strike Israel with an iron fist,” said the representatives of the group in the four-minute video.

They also stated that the group would not give up “one inch of Palestine, from the sea to the river.”

The group also called for the removal of all Israeli barriers in the West Bank, the release of all Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails, a complete Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian land, the cessation of Israeli offensive against the citizens of al-Khalil, the opening of crossings to the Gaza Strip and the transfer of Palestinian tax revenues, which has been blocked by Israel since the UN vote on upgrading the status of Palestine.

The group supported the UN recognition of Palestine as a non-member observer state, which is seen as a long-sought victory for the Palestinians, but an embarrassing diplomatic defeat for the Israeli regime and the United States.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/16/278331/new-palestinian-group-vows-3rd-intifada/>

- **Ahmed Jibril leaves Damascus after clashes in Yarmouk Palestinian camp**

The head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC) has reportedly left Damascus following clashes with the militants in Syria at the Palestinian refugee camp of al-Yarmouk.

Reports say Ahmed Jibril and his son have left Yarmouk, located in the Taqaddum neighborhood in southern Damascus, for the country’s Mediterranean city of Tartous.

The move followed almost 12 days of heavy clashes during which the foreign-backed militants attacked the refugee camp, which is home to thousands of displaced Palestinians.

Syrian forces along with Palestinians in Yarmouk have been fighting back to push the militants out of the camp.

The PFLP-GC is one of the strongest Palestinian groups in the refugee camp.

Yarmouk and the districts surrounding it have borne the brunt of the turmoil in Syria over the past months. In September, at least 20 people were killed when mortar shells landed in the Palestinian refugee camp.

Many people, including large numbers of Syrian security forces, have been killed in the turmoil that began in Syria in March 2011.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/16/278330/palestinian-chief-leaves-syrian-capital/>

- **Israeli FM resigns after indictment**

Avigdor Lieberman, the Israeli foreign minister, has said he was resigning after being charged with fraud and breach of trust, Reuters news agency has reported.

Lieberman made the announcement on Friday a day after being charged with fraud and breach of trust for promoting an ambassador.

"Though I know I committed no crime ... I have decided to resign my post as foreign minister and deputy prime minister," Lieberman said in an emailed statement, adding that he hoped to clear his name "without delay".

Lieberman initially refused to step down over the indictment and called the investigation a witch hunt.

"I am not legally bound to submit my resignation... but I have decided to step down from my duties as foreign minister and deputy premier," added the controversial ultra-nationalist politician.

However Lieberman, who leads the ultra-nationalist Yisrael Beitenu party, was cleared of more serious offences, including bribery and money-laundering.

Israel's Justice Ministry said on Thursday it would charge Lieberman over alleged irregularities tied to the promotion of an Israeli diplomat who had leaked him privileged information about a police probe into his activities.

His resignation comes five weeks before Israel's general election.

Opinion polls had predicted that the right-wing party of Lieberman and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's Likud, running on a joint-party ticket would win the January 22 election, and it was not clear if his removal from the race would hurt their chances.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/20121214142312348586.html>

- **Israeli FM charged over breach of trust**

Avigdor Lieberman, Israel's foreign minister, has been charged with fraud and breach of trust for promoting an ambassador who had shared information with him about the case being built against Lieberman.

However the minister, who leads the ultra-nationalist Yisrael Beitenu party, was cleared of more serious offences, including bribery and money-laundering.

"After examining the file, I have arrived at the conclusion that there is insufficient evidence to charge him in the first case and have decided to close it," said Israeli prosecutor Yehuda Weinstein on Thursday.

"But on the case of the promotion of the ambassador, I have decided to charge him."

While the closing of the main case against him is something of a victory for Lieberman, he will still face enormous pressure to resign over the charges, ahead of January 22 elections.

Lieberman's party is running on a joint list with the Likud faction of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, which is expected to win around 39 seats in the 120-seat Knesset, far ahead of the opposition.

In the past, Lieberman has suggested he would resign if the main case against him went ahead.

The foreign minister has always proclaimed his innocence of all the allegations against him.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/20121213154413476929.html>

- **Hamas holds rare West Bank rally**

Thousands of Palestinians have attended a rare Hamas rally in the city of Nablus in the Israeli-occupied West Bank celebrating the 25th anniversary of the group's founding and its recent "victory" over Israel in Gaza.

"Our message is that Hamas is here, on the ground and in the heart of our people"

- Hosni al-Burini, Hamas MP

The rally is the first time that the West Bank's ruling Palestinian Authority (PA), which is dominated by Hamas rival Fatah, has allowed such a gathering since 2007.

It comes as the two movements take tentative steps towards restarting a reconciliation process.

Yusef Iqtishaat, a teenager attending the rally with his family, was among those eagerly brandishing the movement's flag.

"It's a great day thanks to the victory in Gaza," he told AFP.

In November, Hamas and other Palestinian factions fought an eight-day conflict with Israel that left 174 Palestinians and six Israelis dead and ended with an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire.

Reconciliation

Among those speaking at the Nablus rally was Amin Maqbul, the secretary-general of Fatah's revolutionary council, who saluted the rival movement.

"Hamas has given thousands of martyrs, prisoners and wounded for Palestine," he said, adding that Fatah head and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas would soon hold reconciliation talks with Hamas's chief-in-exile.

"There will soon be a meeting in Cairo between Abu Mazen [Abbas] and Khaled Meshaal to complete the reconciliation and this will be a historic day," he assured the audience.

The rally was a rare opportunity for Hamas to display its support in the West Bank, where the PA has clamped down on the rival group.

The longtime rivalry between the two Palestinian movements boiled over in 2007, a year after Hamas won a surprise victory over Fatah in legislative elections.

Armed members of the two groups battled in Gaza, with Hamas eventually routing Fatah and taking control of the coastal territory, while the PA has continued to rule the West Bank.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/201212142617934671.html>

- **Ayalon extends olive branch after FM attacks on EU**

Characterizing Israeli-European ties as important on many different levels, Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon offered an olive branch to the EU Sunday, just days after outgoing foreign minister Avigdor Liberman slammed Europe for what he said were biased policies toward Israel.

“Israel-Europe ties are very important on a strategic, political, economic and cultural level, and therefore we should have a serious and intensive – but not public – dialogue,” Ayalon said at a meeting with EU Middle East envoy Andreas Reinicke.

Ayalon, who Liberman unceremoniously left off the joint Likud Beytenu list for the upcoming elections, said Israel would continue to engage in quiet diplomacy with the EU to work out all the issues on their joint agenda.

“There are more things we have in common than that separates us,” Ayalon said.

Liberman slammed the Europeans in two public speeches last week, making comparisons in one between the behavior of certain EU countries now and their actions during the Holocaust, and saying at The Jerusalem Post’s Diplomatic Conference that many world leaders would be willing to sacrifice Israel instantly to appease radical Islamists and buy themselves quiet.

Ayalon told Reinicke that Israel was disappointed with how the EU voted on November 29 on the Palestinian statehood bid at the UN General Assembly, with the Czech Republic being the only EU state opposing the matter. He also said Jerusalem was disappointed with the EU’s “disproportionate” reaction to Israel’s announcement of plans to construct some 3,000 units in east Jerusalem and the settlement blocs, and to further the planning of the E1 section linking Jerusalem to Ma’aleh Adumim.

The EU’s positions on these matters were “counterproductive” and gave the Palestinians “more of a reason to do whatever they want, and feel they can get away with it,” Ayalon said.

In an apparent effort to explain to Ayalon why the EU reacted so strongly and with such anger to Israel’s announcement of its settlement plans, Reinicke indicated that the EU viewed a two-state solution as being in its own security interests, and would forcefully oppose anything that seemed to obstruct achieving that goal.

Reinicke, who has kept a very low profile since taking his post in January, meets with Israeli officials about once every three months.

Even though Liberman resigned, and by law Ayalon – as deputy foreign minister – must leave with him, the Prime Minister’s Office announced Sunday that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu will inform the Knesset, which is to sit in special session in the coming days, that he intends to extend Ayalon’s tenure until a new government is formed following the January 22 elections.

This move is being taken with Liberman’s consent.

<http://www.ipost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=296209>

5. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Egypt opposition calls for nationwide protest against draft constitution**

The Egyptian opposition coalition National Salvation Front has called for nationwide protests on Tuesday against the draft constitution, which has been put to a referendum throughout the country.

According to a statement, issued late on Sunday, the front called on “Egyptians to take to the streets on Tuesday to defend their freedoms, prevent fraud and reject the draft constitution.”

Egyptians on Saturday cast their ballots in the first round of the referendum. The second round is due to be held next weekend.

The political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Freedom and Justice Party has said that an overwhelming majority of 56.5 percent of participants have voted in favor of the draft constitution in the first round.

But the opposition group said that it would "not recognize any unofficial result," and would wait for the formal tally after second round.

Massive protests erupted in Egypt over President Mohamed Morsi's controversial decree that he issued on November 22, assuming expanded powers and placing himself beyond judicial review.

The president later rescinded the decree, but his speedy subsequent proposal of the draft triggered further massive protest.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/17/278464/egypt-opp-calls-for-nationwide-protest/>

- **Grenade attacks leave six injured in Kenyan capital**

At least six people have been wounded in a series of explosions that hit the predominantly Somali district of Eastleigh in the Kenyan capital Nairobi, officials says.

The Kenya Red Cross said on Sunday that at least three separate grenades were thrown from a speeding vehicle.

No group or individual has so far claimed responsibility for the attack.

The explosions follows a recent grenade attack outside a busy mosque that left three people dead and 37 others injured, including a Muslim parliament member.

Moreover, a recent roadside bomb in Eastleigh district killed one person and injured several others. Last month, a bomb blast on a bus claimed the lives of at least nine people.

Kenya has experienced a series of attacks, often blamed on the Al-Qaeda-linked al-Shabab group, since it invaded Somalia last year.

Kenya dispatched soldiers over its border into the conflict-plagued Somalia last October to pursue al-Shabab militants, which it accuses of being behind the kidnapping of several foreigners on its territory.

Somalia has not had an effective central government since 1991, when warlords overthrew former dictator Mohamed Siad Barre.

The weak Western-backed transitional government in Mogadishu has been battling the al-Shabab for the past five years, and is propped up by a strong African Union force from Uganda, Burundi, and Djibouti.

Kenyan Defense Forces (KDF) officially joined the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) on July 6 in a bid to secure peace and stability in the neighboring war-ravaged country.

With the integration of some 4,664 Kenyan personnel, AMISOM forces are slightly over 17,000 troops.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/17/278512/grenade-attacks-in-kenya-leave-6-wounded/>

- **Libya closes borders with four neighbor**

Libya's National Assembly has ordered the "temporary closure" of the country's borders with four neighboring nations and declared martial law in the south, state media report.

According to Libya's official news agency, LANA, the assembly issued a decree on Sunday ordering the "temporary closure of the land borders with Chad, Niger, Sudan and Algeria pending new regulations" on the passage of people and goods.

The decree added that, "The provinces of Ghadames, Ghat, Obari, Al-Shati, Sebha, Murzuq and Kufra are considered as closed military zones to be ruled under emergency law."

Assembly member Suad Ganur who represents the city of Sebha said that the measure is taken in reaction to an "upsurge in violence and drug trafficking, and the presence of armed groups that act with complete impunity," as well as illegal immigrants.

The decree also enables the Libyan Defense Ministry to choose a military governor tasked with detaining fugitives and arresting and deporting illegal immigrants.

Members of the National Assembly from the southern regions had boycotted its sessions earlier this month in protest against the deteriorating lawlessness in the region.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/17/278473/libya-closes-borders-with-four-neighbors/>

- **56% Egyptians support draft constitution: Unofficial figures**

Unofficial figures show that 56 percent of participants in Egypt's referendum have voted in favor of the draft constitution.

A senior official in the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party operations room said on Saturday, "The referendum was 56.5 percent for the 'yes' vote."

He said the tally was based on counts from more than 99 percent of polling stations.

According to the figures by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, from the nearly 6,300 polling stations in ten governorates, including Cairo, 43.5 percent have said no to the draft constitution.

Egyptians on Saturday cast their ballots in the first round of a referendum on the country's draft constitution that has led to the worst political crisis in the country since the ouster of former dictator Hosni Mubarak in 2011.

The rest of the nation will go to the polls on December 22.

Meanwhile, the headquarters of the opposition al-Wafd party in central Cairo was attacked with petrol bombs on Saturday.

The attack left two people injured. The opposition argues that the draft undermines women's rights and political freedoms, and sidelines minorities.

Massive protests erupted in Egypt over President Mohamed Morsi's speedy proposal of the new constitution and the controversial decree that he issued on November 22, granting him expanded powers and placing him beyond judicial review.

However, the president later withdrew the controversial declaration.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/16/278312/56-egyptians-back-draft-constitution/>

- **Egyptian opposition party HQ firebombed**

The Egyptian opposition party Wafd says its rivals have thrown petrol bombs at the party's headquarters in Cairo.

About 500 supporters of former presidential candidate Hazem Abu Ismail attacked the headquarters of Wafd on Saturday night, according to an editor of the Al-Wafd news website.

"They destroyed the windows at the building entrance, but didn't enter the building," Mohamed Tharwat said.

The managing editor of the Al-Wafd newspaper, which is located next to the party headquarters, said the assailants destroyed the newspaper's offices.

"I can see from the window that cars are damaged, while the headquarters of the newspaper is destroyed," Mostafa Shafik stated.

"The attackers used Molotov cocktails to enter, which left minor areas burned," he added.

Two people were injured and firefighters said they had extinguished the fire.

The Egyptians launched a revolution against the pro-Israeli regime in January 2011, which eventually brought an end to the 30-year dictatorship of former President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011.

On November 30, the Egyptian Constituent Assembly approved the final draft of a new constitution.

On December 1, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi announced that a referendum on the new constitution would be held on December 15, 2012.

Egyptians voted in the referendum on the constitution on Saturday.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/16/278283/egyptian-opposition-party-hq-firebombed/>

- **Egyptians vote on divisive constitution**

CAIRO/ALEXANDRIA, (Reuters) - Egyptians queued to vote on Saturday on a constitution promoted by its Islamist backers as the way out of a prolonged political crisis and rejected by opponents as a recipe for further divisions in the Arab world's biggest nation.

Soldiers joined police to secure the referendum after deadly protests during the buildup. Street brawls erupted again on Friday in Alexandria, Egypt's second city, but voting proceeded quietly there, with no reports of violence elsewhere.

President Mohamed Mursi provoked angry demonstrations when he issued a decree last month expanding his powers and then fast-tracked the draft constitution through an assembly dominated by his Muslim Brotherhood group and its allies. At least eight people were killed in clashes last week outside the presidential palace.

The liberal, secular and Christian opposition says the constitution is too Islamist and tramples on minority rights. Mursi's supporters say the charter is needed if progress is to be made towards democracy nearly two years after the fall of military-backed strongman Hosni Mubarak.

"The sheikhs (preachers) told us to say 'yes' and I have read the constitution and I liked it," said Adel Imam, a 53-year-old queuing to vote in a Cairo suburb. "The president's authorities are less than before. He can't be a dictator."

Opposition politician and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Mohamed ElBaradei wrote on Twitter: "Adoption of (a) divisive draft constitution that violates universal values and freedoms is a sure way to institutionalize instability and turmoil."

Official results will not be announced until after a second round of voting next Saturday. But partial results and unofficial tallies are likely to emerge soon after the first round, giving an idea of the overall trend.

In order to pass, the constitution must be approved by more than 50 percent of voters who cast ballots. A little more than half of Egypt's electorate of 51 million are eligible to vote in the first round in Cairo and other cities.

TRANSITION

Christians, making up about 10 percent of Egypt's 83 million people and who have long grumbled of discrimination, were among those waiting at a polling station in Alexandria to oppose the basic law. They fear Islamists, long repressed by Mubarak, will restrict social and other freedoms.

"I voted 'no' to the constitution out of patriotic duty," Michael Nour, a 45-year-old Christian teacher in Alexandria. "The constitution does not represent all Egyptians," he said.

Islamists are counting on their disciplined ranks of supporters and the many Egyptians who may fall into line in a desperate bid to end turmoil that has hammered the economy and sent Egypt's pound to eight-year lows against the dollar.

"I voted 'yes' for stability," said shopkeeper Ahmed Abou Rabu, 39. "I cannot say all the articles of the constitution are perfect but I am voting for a way forward. I don't want Egyptians to go in circles, for ever lost in this transition."

Mursi was among the early voters after polls opened at 8 a.m. (1:00 a.m. Eastern Time). He was shown on television casting his ballot shielded by a screen and then dipping his finger in ink - a measure to prevent people voting twice.

One senior official in the committee overseeing the referendum said Saturday's vote could extend to Sunday if crowds were too heavy to allow everyone cast ballots in one day. Voting for Egyptians abroad that began on Wednesday has been extended to Monday, the state news agency reported.

After weeks of turbulence, there has been limited public campaigning. Opposition politicians and parties, beaten in two elections since Mubarak's overthrow, only announced on Wednesday they backed a "no" vote instead of a boycott.

Flag-waving Islamists gathered peacefully at one of the main mosques on Friday, some shouting "Islam, Islam" and "We've come here to say 'yes' to the constitution".

PALACE SIT-IN

Opposition supporters assembled outside the presidential palace, where there has been a sit-in for days. The walls of the palace, ringed by tanks, are scrawled with anti-Mursi graffiti.

The referendum will be held on two days covering different regions, with the second round on December 22, because there are not enough judges willing to monitor all polling stations after some in the judiciary said they would boycott the vote.

Egyptians are being asked to accept or reject a constitution that must be in place before a parliamentary election can be held next year to replace an Islamist-led parliament dissolved this year. Many hope this will lead Egypt towards stability.

If the constitution is voted down, a new assembly will have to be formed to draft a revised version, a process that could take up to nine months.

The army has deployed about 120,000 troops and 6,000 tanks and armored vehicles to protect polling stations and other government buildings. While the military backed Mubarak and his predecessors, it has not intervened in the present crisis.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=32172>

- **Egypt 'narrowly backs' charter in first round**

Voting has ended in the first round of the constitutional referendum in Egypt, with initial results indicating that supporters of the draft document have a narrow lead heading into the second round.

The early result of the poll is based on unofficial tallies that emerged on Sunday. Complete results are not due to be released until the second round of voting on December 22 in the remaining 17 provinces.

The vote was largely peaceful, with long queues forming in Cairo and other cities and towns where this round of voting was held. The vote was staggered because many judges needed to oversee polling staged a boycott to voice their opposition.

Voting was extended for several hours, in order to allow those in queue to cast their ballots.

The Muslim Brotherhood said the group's tallies showed that 56.5 per cent of voters had supported the constitution, while 43 per cent had voted 'no'.

The Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) had representatives posted at almost every polling place in the 10 areas where the referendum was held on Saturday.

The opposition National Salvation Front coalition said in a statement that it would not recognise unofficial results, and would wait for a final tally after next week's second round.

It reiterated its allegation that balloting had been "marred by irregularities and violations".

"What it means is that its going to be quite difficult for the 'no' campaign, the opposition, to turn things around from here, and that's because Cairo and Alexandria have both cast their ballots already in this first day of voting, and it's the rural areas of Egypt that are mainly left to vote in the second round," reported Al Jazeera's Rory Challands in Cairo, adding that the latter areas tend to generally support the Muslim Brotherhood.

Potentially adding to questions over the legitimacy of the vote is the low turnout in the first round - unofficially estimated at 32 percent, which if confirmed would be far lower than the presidential or parliamentary elections following Hosni Mubarak's fall.

Deadly clashes

Mohamed Morsi, the Egyptian president, and his supporters say the constitution is vital in order to move forward with the country's democratic transition. Opponents say that the basic law is too heavily influenced by religion, and that it tramples on minority rights.

Late on Saturday, riot police fired tear gas to disperse dozens of hardline Morsi supporters who attacked the central Cairo headquarters of the opposition liberal Wafd Party with fireworks and stones.

The build-up to the vote was marked by deadly protests, with demonstrations held across the country by both opponents and supporters of the document.

The protests first started when Morsi accorded himself sweeping new powers and fast-tracked the constitution through an assembly dominated by allies from the FJP.

At least eight people were killed and several hundred injured in a series of clashes between the two camps.

On Friday, a day before the vote, rival factions armed with clubs, knives and swords fought in the streets of Alexandria. Opposition supporters trapped a Muslim preacher inside his mosque after he called for a 'yes' vote.

In order to pass, the constitution must be approved by more than 50 per cent of voters who cast ballots. A little more than half of Egypt's electorate of 51 million were eligible to vote in the first round.

Rights groups reported some abuses, such as polling stations opening late, officials telling people to vote 'yes', bribery and intimidation.

To ensure security during the referendum, 120,000 troops were deployed to reinforce 130,000 police.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/201212166936670169.html>

- **Qatar crown prince: Egypt renaissance positive sign for Arab world**

Qatar's crown prince said Sunday that Egypt is one of the most important countries in the region, and that its renaissance is a positive development for Arab and Islamic nations.

At a meeting of Arab intellectuals and journalists in Doha on Sunday, Crown Prince Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani said his country does not interfere in Egypt's internal affairs, and that Qatar would cooperate with any government Egyptians choose.

He also said Qatar is willing to help the Egyptian people by investing in projects determined by their government.

Thani denied rumors that Qatar has supported certain political factions in Egypt, and that his state planned to purchase control of the Suez Canal.

"I did not know it was for sale," he joked.

He also denied that Qatar was supporting revolutions around the Arab world. "We stand by the will of the people," he said.

Thani explained that problems plagued the former Hosni Mubarak regime even before the 25 January revolution, citing the former president's handling of the Palestinian issue.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/qatar-crown-prince-egypt-renaissance-positive-sign-arab-world>

- **Brotherhood defends referendum vote from reports of irregularities**

The Muslim Brotherhood on Sunday defended the legitimacy of the first phase on the constitutional referendum, responding to opposition and human rights activists who have called the Saturday poll "unfair."

In a statement published on its official Facebook page, the Islamist group said the referendum "proves Egypt has become a democratic country."

“The queues of people from the morning until late in the evening ... [were] a great scene proving that the Egyptian people took off the coat of passivity and felt their sovereignty and rights to realize their will,” the statement went on.

However, the main opposition coalition, the National Salvation Front, said there were several irregularities during the vote.

Front member George Ishaq, speaking to Sky News Arabic on Sunday, urged citizens who were unable to cast their ballots to file lawsuits against the High Judicial Elections Commission for refusing to extend voting times.

Preliminary results showed that the constitution was approved by a narrow margin in the 10 governorates of the first round, with opponents outnumbering supporters in Cairo and Gharbiya, and the opposite in Alexandria and Upper Egyptian governorates.

At a press conference on Sunday, human rights and civil society organizations demanded a repeat of the first round vote due to fraud and violations, such as the lack of full judicial supervision.

But the Brotherhood’s statement praised the judges who supervised the referendum for performing a great national duty in maintaining its integrity.

Local human rights watchdogs also reported other forms of electoral irregularities, such as permitting members of the Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party to congregate inside polling stations, allowing religious propaganda in mosques and preventing Christians from voting.

The high elections commission said it will announce the final results of the referendum at the end of the second round, which is set to take place this coming Saturday in Egypt’s remaining 17 governorates.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/brotherhood-defends-referendum-vote-reports-irregularities>

6. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Hezbollah says rebels will not win in Syria**

BEIRUT (Reuters) - Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said on Sunday the rebels in Syria cannot emerge victorious from the 21-month-long conflict.

Nasrallah, a staunch ally of President Bashar al-Assad, said: "The situation in Syria is getting more complicated (but) anyone who thinks the armed opposition can settle the situation on the ground is very very very mistaken."

Syrian rebels accuse the Shi'ite group of sending fighters to Syria to help Assad, who is trying to crush a revolt against his rule. The group denies these accusations.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=32193>

- **US trains Syria militants in Jordan: Report**

The United States has been providing militants fighting against the Syrian government with military training on the sophisticated use of anti-aircraft weapons in Jordan, a report says.

US-based National Public Radio (NPR) reported on Wednesday that "Jordanian authorities, along with their US and British counterparts" had organized training for the militants.

One of the militants, speaking on condition of anonymity, said he attended a training course in Jordan and that the training was "not led by uniformed Western soldiers, but rather by men in plainclothes who spoke several different dialects of Arabic."

"This suggests the trainers may have been private contractors, who are sometimes used by the US for training and assembly of sophisticated weaponry," the report said.

Another militant said that members of the Jordanian military attended the training sessions.

On December 11, US President Barack Obama said Washington would recognize the so-called National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as the “legitimate representative of Syrian people.”

The US administration had earlier decided to provide military assistance, including logistical support and sophisticated weapons, to the militants in Syria.

According to the NPR report, an unnamed source said uniformed US military officials regularly meet with militants to discuss military plans.

The source added that the current debate focuses on whether the militants in Syria should first capture the southern region of Dara’a, near the border with Jordan, before advancing toward the capital, Damascus, or they should only concentrate on fighting in Damascus.

“They [Americans] want us to have structures. It’s all about structures,” the source stated.

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

Damascus says some Western states, especially the US, and their regional allies including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey are trying to fuel the turmoil.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/13/277757/us-trains-syria-militants-in-jordan/>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Protesters at king’s speech attacked in Bahrain**

Saudi-backed Bahraini forces have attacked hundreds of pro-democracy protesters censoring an annual speech by the king, which had praised forces of the country.

The demonstrators took to the streets in several villages near Manama on Sunday, despite a ban imposed by the Al Khalifa regime on protest.

Bahraini forces fired teargas canisters and birdshot to disperse the demonstrators.

In his speech, delivered earlier in the day to mark the Bahrain National Day, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa praised the country's "armed, security, and National Guard forces who are always ready" to ensure "security and stability."

Demonstrators shouted slogans against the Al Khalifa family and called for the resignation of the country's Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, the king's uncle, who has retained his post for decades.

Inspired by popular revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, Bahrainis launched a revolution against the ruling regime in mid-February 2011.

The Bahraini government promptly launched a brutal crackdown on the peaceful protests and called in Saudi-led Arab forces from neighboring Persian Gulf states to assist the campaign of suppression.

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

A report, published in November 2011 by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, which had been established by the monarch himself on June 29 that year, found that the Al Khalifa regime had used excessive force in the crackdown and accused Manama of torturing political activists, politicians, and protesters.

The protesters say they will continue holding anti-regime demonstrations until their demand for the establishment of a democratically-elected government is met.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/16/278453/protesters-at-kings-speech-attacked/>

- **Bahrain king claims to respect liberties as crackdown continues**

While Bahraini king says the Persian Gulf state respects liberties and has tolerance towards dissents, there is ongoing crackdown on protests in capital, Manama.

"Bahrain will remain a nation of law, institutions, liberties and tolerance between different religions and cultures," AFP quoted the monarch as saying on Sunday in a speech marking the National Day.

King Hamad also praised the country's "armed, security, and National Guard forces who are always ready" to ensure "security and stability."

As he made his speech in the capital, Saudi-backed regime forces fired tear gas and sound bombs to disperse anti-regime protests in several Shia villages. The demonstrators shouted slogans against the ruling Al Khalifa family and called for the resignation of the country's Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa, the king's uncle who has retained his post for decades.

There were no immediate reports of casualties.

On Friday, tens of thousands of Bahrainis took to the streets in Manama to demand reforms, despite a ban imposed by the Al Khalifa regime on protests.

Scores have been killed, many of them under torture while in custody, and thousands more detained since the popular uprising in Bahrain began in mid-February 2011.

The Bahraini government promptly launched a brutal crackdown on the peaceful protests and called in Saudi-led Arab forces to help quell the unrest.

Protesters say they will continue holding anti-regime demonstrations until their demand for the establishment of a democratically-elected government is met.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/16/278415/bahrain-king-claims-to-respect-liberties/>

- **Kuwait forces bar protesters from parliament**

Security forces in Kuwait have blocked hundreds of protesters from staging a rally outside the nation's parliament building.

After being removed from outside parliament on Sunday, demonstrators gathered in front of Kuwait's supreme court building. The non-violent confrontation came as the country's ruler inaugurated the new legislature amid criticism from the opposition

Anti-government factions, which have held near-daily demonstrations, earlier boycotted a December 1 election over objections to changes in voting rules.

Protest leaders are vowing to increase pressures until Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber Al Sabah, the emir of Kuwait, disbands the current parliament and orders new elections and reinstating former voting rules that allowed casting multiple ballots.

The opposition says the amendments of the electoral law enables the government to control the outcome of polls.

According to a statement from the ministry of information, the new parliament is "younger and more diverse than its predecessors", allowing the inclusion of all Kuwaitis in the political process, and enacting long stalled initiatives.

"We are eager to work with government to bring about the development and reforms that will ensure Kuwait's continued prosperity," said Yacoub Alsanea, one of the newly elected member of parliament.

Violent confrontations between riot police and youth activists erupted earlier this month as protesters express their rejection to the election.

All the 50 seats in the legislature were won by pro-government candidates after the opposition boycotted the poll.

Al-Sabah has said his amendments will help preserve national security and stability.

The Gulf state has been rocked by a series of political disputes since mid-2006 between parliamentarians and the government.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/20121216936222291.html>

- **Yemen gives 93 soldiers jail terms for attack on base**

SANAA, (Reuters) - A Yemeni military court sentenced 93 members of the Republican Guard to prison terms of up to seven years for an attack on a military complex in August, the Defense Ministry said on Saturday.

The sentences, which were more lenient than expected, followed increased tensions between factions loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, whose son commands the Republican Guard, and the interim government led by President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi.

On Tuesday, Brigadier General Ahmed Saleh refused orders to hand over long-range missiles to the Defense Ministry, raising fears of showdown that threatens a fragile transition agreed in February.

The United States and Yemen's Gulf neighbors fear political instability in the impoverished Arabian Peninsula state will allow a branch of al Qaeda based there to strike at top oil exporter Saudi Arabia and Red Sea shipping lanes.

The Republican Guard, the best-equipped of Yemen's military units, is seen as important in efforts to contain al Qaeda and Islamist groups that took over towns in the south this year.

Former president Saleh, who was pushed from power in February after more than a year of protests, was granted immunity from prosecution and is seen by some Yemeni politicians as attempting to retain influence.

Judge Abdulmalik Ali Rashid al-Arshi convicted the men of offences including "assaulting a defense complex in Sanaa on Aug 14, deserting their military posts... refusing orders from the president of the republic, opening fire... resulting in murder and attempted murder," a statement on the ministry website said.

The men were given jail terms of between three to seven years, while five other Republican Guard members were acquitted, according to the ministry's statement.

The assault on the complex in August was sparked by President Hadi's decision to bring two Republican Guard brigades under the control of the southern and central military regions, which are not under Saleh's control.

Hundreds of guardsmen besieged a Defense Ministry compound in Sanaa but were captured by other military forces and about a hundred were arrested.

<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=32179>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Huge explosion hits area near NATO base in Kabul**

A large explosion has struck an area near a NATO base in the Afghan capital city of Kabul in the latest attack on foreign forces in the Asian country.

The explosion hit a Kabul district home to the NATO headquarters, on Monday.

Officials and witnesses say they have seen plumes of smoke rising from the area.

A spokesman for the US-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) confirmed that there had been a blast but said it was not at NATO's Camp Phoenix, which is on the Jalalabad road heading east from the capital.

No casualties have yet been reported in the explosion.

The United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001. The offensive removed the Taliban from power, but insecurity continues to rise across Afghanistan, despite the presence of thousands of US-led troops.

The foreign forces are scheduled to withdraw from Afghanistan by the end of 2014 and hand over responsibility for security to the Afghan government.

However, the US intends to keep some forces in Afghanistan for “training and counter-terrorism operations.”

The US-led war in Afghanistan, which has caused record-high civilian and military casualties, has become the longest military conflict in the American history.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/17/278507/blast-hits-area-near-nato-base-in-kabul/>

- **Mine blast kills 10 girls in eastern Afghanistan**

At least ten girls have been killed in a landmine explosion as they were collecting firewood in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar province.

According to Chaparhar district governor Mohammad Sediq Dawlatzai, the blast took place on Monday when one of the girls, all aged between nine and 11, accidentally struck the mine with an axe.

"An old mine left over from the time of the jihad (against Soviet troops in the 1980s) exploded, killing 10 girls and wounding two others," he said.

However, Nangarhar provincial government spokesman Ahmad Zia Abdulzai said that the mine was planted by "the enemies of Afghanistan", a reference to Taliban insurgents.

The militants use improvised explosive devices, including roadside bombs, against Afghan forces, foreign troops and civilians.

In the first six months of 2012, over 1,140 Afghan civilians were killed and around 2,000 were wounded, mostly by roadside bombs, according to statistics released by the United Nations. Thirty percent of the casualties were women and children.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001 as part of Washington's so-called war on terror. The offensive removed the Taliban from power, but insecurity remains across the country.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/17/278497/landmine-blast-kills-10-girls-in-afghanistan/>

- **11 Taliban militants killed in joint Afghan-US military operation**

A joint military operation by Afghan security and US-led forces has claimed the lives of at least 11 Taliban militants in southern part of the war-torn country, officials say.

"The joint operation of Afghan and the US-led forces was conducted in Baghak area of Khakriz district near Kandahar yesterday during which 11 Taliban members were killed," said Kandahar governor's spokesman Javid Faisal on Sunday.

Kandahar is the birthplace of the Taliban group and has been the scene of intense fighting between militants and foreign forces over the past years.

After more than a decade of war, Washington has repeatedly been blamed for failing to keep its promises of bringing peace and security to Afghanistan.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001 as part of Washington's so-called war on terror.

The offensive removed the Taliban from power, but led to years of invasion; insecurity is rising across the country despite the presence of thousands of foreign troops in Afghanistan.

The US-led war in Afghanistan, which has caused record-high civilian and military casualties, has become the longest military conflict in the American history.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/16/278421/11-taliban-militants-killed-in-afghanistan/>

- **Abbottabad raid: Commission to present its report to PM soon**

ISLAMABAD: The commission investigating the killing of Osama bin Laden during a raid in Abbottabad last year will present its investigative report to Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf, DawnNews reported on Monday.

The report stated that Dr Shakeel Afridi had been paid \$10,000 to provide United States intelligence agencies with information on the Al Qaeda chief's whereabouts.

The report was compiled by the Abbottabad Commission after reviewing statements of 300 eyewitnesses and 3000 documents.

According to the report, bin Laden was living in the compound in Abbottabad from 2005 to 2011 and never left the compound. The report added that he watched Al-Jazeera TV in order to keep himself updated with Al Qaeda's activities.

The commission's report said that the bin Laden told his family to remain calm and recite the 'Kalma Tayyaba' during the operation.

The report also states that the American agency CIA had rewarded Dr Shakeel Afridi with \$10,000 to help them find Bin Laden. Dr Afridi had attempted to gain access to the compound thrice but remained unsuccessful. But with the help of a colleague, Dr Amna, he managed to get the DNA of the children in bin Laden’s family on the pretext of hepatitis vaccinations. They matched voice samples of Osama’s wife as well.

Following the verification of the DNA tests, American authorities asked Dr Afridi to shift to the US.

The report added that the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) provided the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) with four telephone numbers belonging to Osama and all letters mailed at the address of the compound.

<http://dawn.com/2012/12/17/abbottabad-raid-commission-to-present-its-report-to-pm-soon/>

- **Terrorists cannot break the country’s will: PM**

LAHORE: Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf said that Pakistan is determined in its fight against terrorism, and that the Pakistan Peoples Party will be successful in the next general elections, DawnNews reported.

Speaking during a PPP Punjab parliamentary gathering, the prime minister said that terrorists cannot break the will of the country.

“The fight against terrorism will be taken to its logical conclusion,” he said.

The prime minister said that whenever the PPP took power, resources were always few and that despite the shortcomings the government has faced, it will complete its five year tenure, having tried to improve the situation.

“The PPP will continue its policy of reconciliation, and will also take on board its allies in the future,” he said.

Raja Pervez Ashraf also said that Bilawal Bhutto will address party workers on December 27 at Ghari Khuda Bux, on the occasion of Benazir Bhutto’s death anniversary.

<http://dawn.com/2012/12/17/terrorists-cannot-break-the-countrys-will-pm/>

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

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