



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

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1. IRAQ

- **Al-Nujaifi discusses with Indonesia's ambassador in Iraq, bilateral relations.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / House Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi discussed, today 25, Dec, with the Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia to Iraq, Svzen Nooralddin bilateral relations.

Al-Nujaifi confirmed, during the meeting with Indonesian Ambassador, the need to employ and develop the historical relations with Indonesia to achieve cooperation, particularly in the parliamentary side. A statement from al-Nujaifi's office said.

At the end of the meeting, the Indonesian ambassador expressed his pleasure to meet Iraqi Parliament Speaker and his important role in the current phase.

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

- **Iraqiya MP: Committee on Russian arms deal is to vote on its report today.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / MP, of the Iraqiya coalition, Talal al-Zobaie declared that the committee formed of security and defense and Integrity parliamentary committees charged to prepare a report on the Russian arms deal, will vote today on its report, which will contain the names of the characters involved in this deal.

He told the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / today that "a joint committee, includes members of the committees of the security and defense and Integrity, had been formed to reveal the people involved in the Russian arms deal through the report that will be submitted in this regard."

The arms deal between Iraq and Russia raised doubts about an existence of financial corruption involved intermediaries, Iraqi, Russian and other figures.

The value of this deal, which was signed by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki during his recent visit to Moscow, 4, 2 billion dollars and includes, especially helicopters Mi-28 and systems of surface-to-air missiles.

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

- **A politician calls the government to mobilize military on the Iraqi-Turkish border.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / The secretary-general of the Sons of Iraq coalition, Abbas al-Muhammadawi called the Iraqi government to mobilize Army on the Iraqi-Turkish border in preparation for any emergency."

Muhammadawi said in a statement today 25, Dec that "The Turkish government is alarming through its excesses and its interference in Iraq's internal affairs and this is what drives us to strengthen our arsenal and rally our forces in preparation for any military threat may come from the Turkish side."

He said: "The U.S. is committed to arming the Iraqi army, calling on the government to act on all States to buy weapons and strengthen the arsenal of the Iraqi army."

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

- **Barzani arrives to Sulaymaniyah.**

The reporter of the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / said "It is scheduled that Barzani is to meet with members of the political bureau of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan PUK later today."

This visit comes after a meeting of the Political Bureau of the National Union Party last Saturday after the deteriorating of President's health, in which PUK stressed on the strategic commitment to the agreements between the parties PUK and KDP.

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

- **Kurdish MP: The National Alliance has not responded to our message yet.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / MP, of the Kurdistan Alliance, Hassan Jihad said that "The National Alliance did not send an answer to the message of the Kurdistan Alliance about the political situation in the country and the practices of the state of law coalition and the government towards the Kurdistan region."

He said in a statement to the National Iraqi News Agency / NINA / "The Kurdish delegation that visited Baghdad recently headed by Barham Saleh, had delivered a letter to the President of the National Alliance Ibrahim al-Jaafari, and the heads of the blocs within the National Alliance, which included 9 points on key political situations in the country."

He explained that "the main points are, not to implement the Constitution selectively, and implement the terms of the Erbil agreement, which is not implemented yet, and to cancel the Tigris and Nineveh operations commands, and deal with the / disputed areas / Constitutionally and in accordance with Article 140. Adding "forming a higher committee for the reconstruction of infrastructure in the country, and finding a balance in the government and security positions, and emphasizing on adoption of the rules of procedure of the Council of Ministers."

He noted that "the implementation of these points, will contribute to get the country out of political conflicts and recurrent crises between the blocs on one hand and between the Governments of the region and the center of the other hand."

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

- **Ahrar MP accuses some blocs of fabricating crises to divert attention from the real problems.**

BAGHDAD / NINA / MP, of the Ahrar bloc, Abdul Hussein Resan al-Husseini, accused some blocs / did not name / of fabricating crises to distract citizens from the real problems.

Al-Husseini said in a statement today: "The blocs care with political problems more than the problems of the citizens."

He added: "The stage that the country is experiencing at the moment is very sensitive, and the political blocs use all its possibilities for upcoming provincial elections."

He said: "The problems of the ration card and the formation of the Tigris command have succeeded in drawing the attention of the citizens on the main problem afflicting the country, which is lack of basic services."

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

2. IRAN

- **Iran, Iraq to finalize gas export deal soon: Iranian official**

Tehran and Baghdad are set to finalize a deal on gas exports from the Islamic Republic to Iraq in the near future, Iran's Deputy Oil Minister Javad Oaji says.



Oaji, who is also the managing director of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC), said on Tuesday that Iran would begin exporting natural gas to Iraq in 2013.

“Once the aforementioned contract between the two countries is finalized, Iran will export 20 to 25 million cubic meters of gas per day to Iraq in the scheduled time frame,” he noted.

Iranian Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi said in July that the Islamic Republic is expected to start exporting natural gas to Iraq by April 2014 upon the completion of the Iran-Iraq gas pipeline project.

Iran’s South Pars, which is part of a larger gas field shared with Qatar, is divided into 24 phases and holds about 14 trillion cubic meters of gas, or about eight percent of the total world reserves, and more than 18 billion barrels of liquefied natural gas resources.

Iran, which sits on the world's second largest natural gas reserves after Russia, is making efforts to up its gas production by increasing foreign and domestic investments, especially in South Pars gas field.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/25/280015/iran-iraq-set-to-finalize-gas-export-deal/>

- **Iran to take full control of Bushehr NPP by mid-2013: Russia official**

Head of Russia's nuclear corporation Sergei Kiriyenko says the full control of Iran's Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) will be transferred to the Islamic Republic by mid-2013.



"It (Bushehr NPP) should be commissioned in the first half of next year," said the head of Russia's Rosatom corporation, a major contractor in charge of the project, Interfax reported on Monday.

"Everything there (in Bushehr NPP) has been launched, it is in operation," Kiriyenko added.

The initial construction of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant began in 1975 by German companies, but the work was halted following the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

In 1995, Iran and Russia reached an agreement to complete the project, but power generation was delayed several times due to a number of technical and financial problems.

Iran officially launched the power plant on September 12, 2011, which started by generating electricity at 40 percent of its capacity.

The 1,000-megawatt plant was connected to the country's national power grid with the power of 60 MW on September 3, 2011. It reached the capacity of 190 MW on September 27, 2011, and a day later it increased its capacity to 300 MW.

The plant reached its full electricity production capacity of 1,000 megawatts for the first time in early September 2012.

The Bushehr NPP, located southeast of the city of Bushehr along the Persian Gulf, operates under the full supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/25/280010/iran-to-fully-control-nplant-by-mid2013/>

- **Iran ready to enhance cooperation with Vietnam: Salehi**

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi has voiced the Islamic Republic's readiness to expand economic, trade, parliamentary and cultural cooperation with Vietnam.



Salehi made the remarks in a Monday meeting with visiting Chairman of Vietnamese National Assembly Committee for Security and Defense Nguyen Kim Khoa.

Pointing to the two countries' determination to enhance and strengthen bilateral ties, the Iranian foreign minister said, "Both states enjoy great and good potential to expand cooperation, particularly in the financial sector."

Salehi expressed hope that Iran and Vietnam would use the capacity to increase the volume of their trade.

The Vietnamese official, for his part, expressed Hanoi's readiness to boost cooperation with Tehran in various fields.

He described the recent visit of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Vietnam as a major step toward expanding mutual relations.

Earlier in November, President Ahmadinejad travelled to Vietnam for a two-day official visit, where he stressed the determination of both Tehran and Hanoi to enhance their bilateral cooperation in all areas.

Ahmadinejad said there was no limitation for the expansion of economic, industrial, cultural, scientific, and technological relations between the Islamic Republic and Vietnam, adding, "Iran is determined to make use of the huge potential of the two countries to develop each other's economies."

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/25/280001/iran-ready-to-expand-ties-with-vietnam/>

- **Russia, India back Iran's nuclear rights**

Russia and India have agreed that the Islamic Republic of Iran has the right to develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh made the remarks in a joint statement issued on Monday.

The statement, issued at the end of the 13th India-Russia Annual Summit in New Delhi, also said the only way to deal with the issue is through political channels and diplomacy.

In addition, the two countries signed \$2.9 billion in contracts, according to which Russia will sell India military helicopters and technological kits for manufacturing warplanes.

On Friday, the European Union imposed new sanctions on Iran over its nuclear energy program, which include blacklisting an individual and a group of companies.

On December 13, the US Treasury Department also imposed sanctions on seven Iranian companies and five nuclear experts for contributing to the country's nuclear energy program.

At the beginning of 2012, the United States and the EU imposed new sanctions on Iran's oil and financial sectors with the goal of preventing other countries from purchasing Iranian oil and conducting transactions with the Central Bank of Iran.

The illegal US-engineered sanctions were imposed based on the unfounded accusation that Iran is pursuing non-civilian objectives in its nuclear energy program.

Iran rejects the allegations, arguing that as a committed signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), it has the right to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

In addition, the IAEA has conducted numerous inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities but has never found any evidence showing that Iran's civilian nuclear program has been diverted to nuclear weapons production.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/25/279977/russia-india-back-irans-nuclear-rights/>

3. SYRIA

- **Brahimi: The situation in Syria is worrying**

UN-Arab League envoy meets with president in Damascus, as burials are held for victims of air strike near a Hama bakery.

Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN-Arab League envoy to Syria, has said after talks with Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian president, that the situation was "worrying" and gave no indication of progress toward a negotiated solution for the civil war.

"The situation in Syria is still worrying and we hope that all the parties will go toward the solution that the Syrian people are hoping for and look forward to," Brahimi said after his meeting with Assad in Damascus on Monday.

The UN envoy said he and President Assad exchanged views on the crisis and discussed possible steps forward, which he did not disclose.

Brahimi has apparently made little progress toward brokering an end to the conflict since starting his job in September, primarily because both sides adamantly refuse to talk to each other.

His mission came as activists reported intense fighting in the central province of Hama, where anti-government gunmen entered the predominantly Alawite town of Maan.

Assad's regime is dominated by members of his minority Alawite sect, an off-shoot of Shiite Islam.

Opposition gunmen entered Maan and raised the opposition flag over the main police station, Hama activist Mousab Alhamadee said via Skype.

Killer gas bombs

Activists, meanwhile, accused Assad's regime of unleashing killer gas bombs in the central city of Homs.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights quoted activists in the central city of Homs as saying that six rebels died in two neighborhoods on Sunday night after inhaling white smoke that came out of shells fired on the area.

"We demand that an international team be sent to the area to investigate the type" of the shells used, said Observatory chief Rami Abdul-Rahman.

Amateur videos released by activists showed men in hospital beds suffering breathing problems as doctors placed oxygen masks on their faces. Some of them coughed strongly as they tried to breath.

"At first, the smell was strong. Then little by little, it got weaker," a man who was identified as a rebel in the area said in the video. "The smell was like hydrochloric acid, and people started choking and I wasn't able to breath." He added.

"My eyes hurt and burned, my head started hurting, I wasn't able to breathe. I just want to breathe clean air," said the man who closed his eyes and said he was having difficulty seeing because of the attack.

US-bakery attack

Meanwhile, the United States accused the Syrian regime on Monday of launching a "vicious" attack on civilians at a bakery in the town of Halfaya that left at least 60 people killed.

"The United States condemns in the strongest terms the latest vicious attacks by the Syrian regime against civilians, most notably the attack on people waiting to buy bread at a bakery in the town of Halfaya," acting State Department spokesman Patrick Ventrell said in a statement.

"Brutal attacks such as these show that this regime has no future in Syria. Those that commit atrocities will be held accountable. The United States calls on all parties that continue to assist the regime in executing its war against the Syrian people to end their support."

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/2012122423043363796.html>

- **Assad regime's days are numbered, warns Washington**

The United States warned late on Monday that the Syrian regime's days are numbers following a massacre of hundreds of civilians in the bombing of a bakery earlier this week.

Washington condemned the "vicious" attack in which at least 200 people were reported to have been killed in a regime air strike on a bakery in the town of Halfaya, in the central province of Hama, Al Arabiya reported on Sunday.

"Brutal attacks such as these show that this regime has no future in Syria," acting State Department spokesman Patrick Ventrell said in a statement.

"Those that commit atrocities will be held accountable. The United States calls on all parties that continue to assist the regime in executing its war against the Syrian people to end their support," he added.

The official SANA news agency blamed the bakery killings on an "armed terrorist group" -- the regime term for rebels -- saying "many women and children" had died.

The National Coalition, recognized by many countries and groupings as the legitimate representative of Syrians, blamed Assad's regime for the "massacre" in Halfaya, saying it "targeted children, women and men who went out to get their scarce daily bread ration".

The U.S. comments came as United Nations peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi held "constructive" talks in Syria with the embattled President Bashar al-Assad on Monday.

"I had the honor to meet the president and as usual we exchanged views on the many steps to be taken in the future," Brahimi said, while labeling the crisis as "worrying" given the scale of the bloodshed.

More than 44,000 people are estimated to have been killed since the eruption in March 2011 of the uprising that morphed into an armed insurgency when the Assad regime unleashed a brutal crackdown on dissent.

On Monday alone, at least 119 people were killed nationwide, including 38 civilians, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Brahimi, who last visited Syria on October 19, expressed hope "all parties are in favor of a solution that draws Syrian people together".

"Assad expressed his views on the situation and I told him about my meetings with leaders in the region and outside," said the veteran Algerian diplomat who took over the position from former U.N. chief Kofi Annan.

Assad said his "government is committed to ensure the success of all efforts aimed at protecting the sovereignty and independence of the country," state television reported.

As violence raged in flashpoints across Syria, some 1,000 people attended Christmas mass in Damascus, praying for peace to return nearly two years into an uprising that has killed tens of thousands.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/25/256959.html?PHPSESSID=i1m9et56821vn539h87009lh14>

- **Syrian regime used gas on opposition fighters: activists**

The Syrian regime forces have used some sort of lethal gas against opposition fighters in the besieged al-Khalidya and other areas in the central city of Homs, Al Arabiya television quoted activists as saying Monday.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights told AFP that at least six rebels were killed after inhaling “odorless gas and white smoke” emanating from bombs deployed by regime forces in clashes with opposition fighters.

While the activists couldn’t verify the type of toxic gases used, they said it was close to the deadly sarin that can cause extreme suffocation, nerve paralysis and temporary blindness.

According to the Observatory’s director, Rami Abdel Rahman, “these are not chemical weapons, but we do not know whether they are internationally prohibited.”

Russia, one of the few staunch allies of Syria, downplayed fears of chemical weapons being deployed.

“I do not believe Syria would use chemical weapons,” Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told English-language television channel RT. “It would be a political suicide for the government if it does.”

Medical doctors and nurses were not able to rescue the injured due scarcity of medical supplies, the opposition Syrian Revolutionary Council said.

Early December, NBC News reported that the Syrian military has loaded precursor chemicals for the deadly nerve gas sarin into aerial bombs and is awaiting final orders from President Bashar al-Assad.

U.S. officials told NBC News that the loaded aerial bombs could be dropped onto the Syrian people from dozens of fighter jets.

While the U.S. officials said that sarin bombs had not yet been loaded onto planes and that Assad had not yet issued a final order to deploy them, if confirmed, the move would mark a step further in Syria's progression toward possibly using chemical weapons.

The opposition National Coalition, meanwhile, accused Damascus of committing a "massacre" of dozens of civilians in the bombing of a bakery -- an allegation fended off by the Assad regime.

On Monday, activists said at least 15 civilians were killed after Syrian regime forces bombed another bakery in Talbisa, Homs.

More than 44,000 people are estimated to have been killed since the eruption in March 2011.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/25/256925.html?PHPSESSID=i1m9et56821vn539h87009lh14>

4. ISRAEL-PALESTINE

Jerusalem committee approves 1,200 housing units in Gilo

Plan includes 930 apartments for immediate construction and around 300 that could be built at a later time; decision is part of large wave of 5,500 housing approvals in Jerusalem over the Green Line.

The Interior Ministry's Jerusalem District Planning and Building Committee late on Monday night gave their final approval to around 1,200 apartments in the neighborhood of Gilo, which is over

the 1967 Green Line. The plan includes 930 apartments for immediate construction and around 300 that could be built at a later time.

The latest housing approval was part of a large wave of 5,500 housing approvals in Jerusalem over the Green Line that the Interior Ministry and Jerusalem's Municipality's planning committees discussed over marathon meetings last week.

The Slopes of Gilo South was discussed on Thursday but the Committee did not make a final decision until Monday evening.

The largest project approved last week was the Jerusalem Local Planning and Construction Committee's final approval on Wednesday to 2,610 apartments in Givat Hamatos' first stage. Givat Hamatos, which will be located between Talpiot and Beit Safafa, is the first completely detached new Jewish neighborhood over the Green Line since the construction of Har Homa in 1997.

Givat Hamatos has four stages and will eventually have 4,000 apartment units. Last Tuesday, the Interior Ministry approved Givat Hamatos B, approximately 700 units for Arab residents in Beit Safafa. However, they postponed a decision over 1,000 apartments in Givat Hamatos C. City councilor Yair Gabbay, who sits on both the Local and District Planning Committees, said that the project was not approved because it was poorly planned and not because of any ideological moves.

Additionally, the District Committee gave final approval to the 1,500 apartments in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Ramat Shlomo which set off a diplomatic crisis for receiving partial approval during Vice President Joe Biden's visit in March 2010.

Ironically, Gilo Community Council director Yaffa Shitrit opposed the new Gilo project because they are concerned about the destruction of the Gilo forest and an increase in traffic. The community filed public opposition to the project during the approval process.

Shitrit said the council supported additional building in the area, but only after the neighborhood of 29,600 residents has sufficient infrastructure and enough new roads to relieve additional traffic from thousands of new units.

<http://www.ipost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=297219>

- **'Rumors about legal case are false manipulation'**

Liberman says media reports surrounding allegations against him in Belarus Ambassador Affair are unconnected to reality.



Former foreign minister Avigdor Liberman on Tuesday dismissed a flood of "rumors and quotes" about the Belarus Ambassador Affair, asserting they have no connection to reality.

Liberman issued a statement dismissing the reports the morning after Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon unequivocally denied reports broadcast Monday night by both Channel 2 and Channel 10 which claimed he had given police testimony against his former boss.

The allegations concern the indictment against the former foreign minister in the so-called Belarus Ambassador Affair, with more serious accusations that could lead to new charges of active, rather than passive fraud. Ayalon's reported statements would also contradict Liberman's version, in which he took no active role in the affair.

Liberman said that he wanted to emphasize that rumors and quotes attributed to him and his "associates" that were circulating in the media, "did not exist... and their purpose was not particularly sophisticated manipulation, to disrupt the proceedings and throw sand in the eyes of the public."

"Everything I have to say, I will say in the proceedings of the investigation by the police and the court," he added

A short time after the Channel 10 and Channel 2 programs were aired, Ayalon denied in a written statement that he was even questioned by police, and Liberman maintained his innocence on all charges.

What gives these reports a soap-opera feel is that earlier this month Liberman, in a complete surprise, left Ayalon off his party's list of candidates for the next Knesset as part of the merged Likud- Beytenu list.

The prosecution and the police both refused to confirm or deny whether Ayalon was recently questioned.

According to the broadcasts, the deputy foreign minister was questioned only recently about the affair, which until then had only involved allegations that former ambassador Ze'ev Ben- Aryeh leaked investigative material to Liberman, after which Liberman passively withheld information on this from a Foreign Ministry committee that was considering Ben-Aryeh for a new posting in Latvia.

The new allegations against Liberman, which started to surface last week, are that he did not just passively withhold information, but actively interfered in the appointment process on Ben-Aryeh's behalf.

The reports also said that 10 candidates originally had sought the Latvia position, but most dropped out when promised other promotions – possibly by Liberman through other Foreign Ministry officials speaking on his behalf.

Other media reports have alleged that Liberman concealed negative reports about Ben-Aryeh from the appointments committee. Yediot Aharonot quoted sources who said that "the influence of Liberman" was pervasive throughout the process.

Liberman maintains that Ben-Aryeh was an able diplomat who was well-suited for the job.

The new allegations, which the reports said stem primarily from Ayalon – who was head of the appointments committee and was involved in the proceedings – would move the charges from the realm of passive fraud to active fraud, with potentially more serious applicable punishments and political consequences.

The Channel 10 report added that several other witnesses from the appointments committee confirmed and reinforced Ayalon’s statements regarding Liberman’s alleged conduct.

Channel 2 reported that Liberman would be re-questioned this coming weekend regarding the new allegations.

Also on Monday, the State Comptroller’s Office formally confirmed that it had received requests to investigate Attorney-General Yehuda Weinstein’s handling of the Liberman case.

Liberman and many other politicians have questioned Weinstein’s decision to delay an indictment so he could investigate the new charges after the attorney-general announced he would file the indictment last week, and after Liberman had already resigned as foreign minister.

A spokeswoman for the YAHBAL serious and international crimes unit, which investigated the Liberman case, on Monday refused to explain why the case was reopened – when just last week she had said the unit considered the matter closed.

She added that the case was, from the unit’s point of view, complete, and as it had been handed over to the prosecutor, it was his office that was responsible for providing answers about the recent developments.

Media reports indicated that there may have been disagreements between the prosecution and the police about reopening the case for more questioning, but it is Weinstein who ultimately will make the final decision.

On Sunday, the state explained its decision to reopen the case for further questioning based on a Channel 10 news report from last week indicating that the fraud allegations against Liberman could be amended to include active fraud instead of mere passive fraud.

One ministry source said that while it was not unusual for foreign ministers to indicate their preferences for ministerial posts, what made this case different was the allegation that Liberman received something from Ben-Aryeh beforehand. Furthermore, the source said, Ben-Aryeh did not distinguish himself as a diplomat worthy of such a posting after having just recently returned from Belarus.

Generally, diplomats spend two years back in Israel before being appointed to another position abroad. Ben-Aryeh was in Israel for less than a year after returning from Belarus before being appointed envoy to Latvia.

<http://www.ipost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=297223>

- **Israel establishes first university in occupied West Bank**

JERUSALEM (Reuters) -- Israel upgraded a college in a West Bank Jewish settlement to a university on Monday, reflecting a determination to keep control of the enclave in any peace deal with the Palestinians.



The decision gives the Ariel campus, established in 1982 near the city of Nablus, the same status as universities inside Israel. It comes after Israel announced plans to expand other settlements on occupied land, drawing protest from European governments and the United States.

"For the first time in decades, Israel has a new university," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said in a statement.

Final approval came from military chiefs, who formalized a cabinet decision in September. Their decision was delayed while experts examined legal challenges from other universities that opposed the upgrade.

Some Israeli university heads argued that public funding for the new university would come at their expense.

The Palestinian Higher Education Office also condemned the decision and urged universities worldwide to boycott the institution.

Israeli settlements are illegal under international law.

European nations and Washington have criticized Netanyahu's plans to build as many as 6,000 more settlement homes, announced since a Nov. 29 United Nations vote gave Palestinians effective recognition as a state and angered Israel.

European governments have summoned Israeli ambassadors to protest at the expansion of settlements, particularly those established on captured land that Israel annexed to Jerusalem in a move that was never recognized internationally.

Israel has signaled it intends to retain control of several larger settlement blocs such as Ariel under any future pact, while the fates of other enclaves may be negotiated.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=550892>

- **Netanyahu aims to deport tens of thousands of Africans**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Monday he aims to repatriate tens of thousands of African illegal migrants and that the inflow into Israel from the Sinai Peninsula has been brought to a halt.

“Our aim is to repatriate tens of thousands of infiltrators now in Israel to their countries of origin,” he said, adding Israel had been in contact with several African governments.

“After having been confronted by the threat of hundreds of thousands (of illegal migrants), this month not a single infiltrator has reached cities in Israel,” he said, quoted in a government statement.

“We have reached this result over the past several months, and next month we will have completed the construction of the fence on the border with the Sinai,” facing Egypt, he said.

Israel began constructing the fence in late 2010 to stem the influx of thousands of illegal migrants through the porous border, which has also been a major drug and human trafficking route into Israel.

“Now we are moving on to the next stage, the repatriation of the infiltrators already here.”

Interior Minister Eli Yishai had warned in August that Sudanese illegals who did not leave the country by October 15 would be detained, held in camps and deported.

Israel already began expelling South Sudanese in June, after Yishai ruled they were no longer at risk in their newly independent homeland.

An Israeli court the same month gave the green light for plans to repatriate around 2,000 illegal migrants from the Ivory Coast.

Rising tensions over the growing number of illegal immigrants exploded into violence in May when a protest in south Tel Aviv turned ugly, with demonstrators smashing African-run shops and property, chanting “Blacks out!”

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/25/256982.html?PHPSESSID=i1m9et56821vn539h87009lh14>

5. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Nour Party leader to resign Tuesday, forms alliance with Abu Ismail**

A leading figure in the Salafi Dawah group said Monday that Emad Abdel Ghafour, head of the Salafi Nour Party, and the Salafi preacher Hazem Salah Abu Ismail agreed to form a new political alliance.



Sources from the party told Al-Masry Al-Youm Sunday that Abdel Ghafour, spokespeople Yousry Hammad and Mohamed Nour and other party leaders plan to resign Tuesday.

Hisham Abul Nasr, head of the Salafi Dawah branch in Giza, told Al-Masry Al-Youm that the new alliance will be named “Al-Watan,” and will be headed by Abu Ismail with Abdel Ghafour as his first deputy.

Abdel Ghafour and 95 percent of the party youths in greater Cairo are resigning on Tuesday to join the new party, Abul Nasr added.

He said the new alliance is negotiating with all Islamist parties and forces to join and face liberal parties in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Ayman Elias of Abu Ismail's campaign said the new party is not responsible for any divisions within the Nour Party. "They were already divided," he said.

Nour Party Vice President Sayed Mostafa said no member of the party's supreme committee expressed his wish to replace Abdel Ghafour.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/nour-party-leader-resign-tuesday-forms-alliance-abu-ismail>

- **Sabbahi invited us for dialogue, says Jama'a al-Islamiya**

A leading figure in Jama'a al-Islamiya's Construction and Development Party said Monday that former presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabbahi invited the group for a dialogue.



At a press conference, Safwat Abdel Ghany, who was recently appointed to the Shura Council by President Mohamed Morsy, said the group agreed to the dialogue and informed the Popular Current Party founder of its acceptance.

The group and the party also launched during the press conference an initiative entitled "Dialogue for the Homeland," which it said is intended to contribute to a better future for the country.

The group called on Morsy to invite all political forces to the dialogue to discuss the articles of the constitution that need to be amended.

"We aim to end the state of polarization between the Islamist forces and the liberal and leftist forces," said Tarek al-Zomor, the group's spokesperson. "And we want to put Egypt on the right track."

In response to a question on reported violations during the constitutional referendum, Zomor said the High Judicial Elections Commission would consider any complaints. “Democracy may be new to us,” he said, “but this does not mean the referendum was rigged deliberately.”

He appealed to all political forces who contributed to the current state of polarization among Egyptians to apologize to the people.

Zomor thanked the Egyptian people for disregarding attempts to incite them to violence and for approving the new constitution. He also thanked the Armed Forces and the police for their role in securing the referendum.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/sabbahi-invited-us-dialogue-says-jama-al-islamiya>

- **Clashes in Tahrir Square over referendum results**

Scores of protesters held a march in Tahrir Square on Monday to denounce alleged rigging of the constitutional referendum in favor of President Mohamed Morsy and the Muslim Brotherhood.



Scuffles erupted between them and supporters of Morsy in the vicinity of the Egyptian Museum, leading to some injuries. Museum security did not intervene.

Passersby tried to persuade the protesters to stay away from the square to avoid further clashes, but they said they would not leave unless Morsy is toppled.

More tents were erected in the square, but the Constitution, Wafd and Popular Current parties removed theirs.

Protesters claimed they saw “Pakistanis with long beards” meeting in the nearby Omar Makram Mosque.

The square turned into a marketplace, as street vendors displayed their wares.

Members of the Arab National Youth Organization Supporting Gaza raised banners, calling on the Egyptian people and President Morsy to stand by the Palestinian cause.

April 6 Youth Movement member Ahmed Saeed said a march would head from Tahrir Square to the presidential palace on Tuesday to denounce the final outcome of the referendum, while a large number of protesters said they would remain in the square until 25 January to commemorate the revolution and demand retribution for its martyrs.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/clashes-tahrir-square-over-referendum-results>

- **Egypt awaits official referendum results**

Electoral commission to announce results on Tuesday, amid opposition allegation of irregularities.

Egypt is awaiting official results of a referendum on a new constitution reportedly backed by two-thirds of voters, but which the opposition alleged was riddled with fraud.

The final polling figures will be announced on Tuesday, the head of the electoral commission, Mohamed el-Tanobly, said on Monday.

"The Supreme Elections Committee will announce on Tuesday at 7 P.M. (17:00 GMT) the results of the referendum on the new constitution," judge Samir Abu el-Matti told state radio and TV late on Monday.

Matti also said that the committee, which is led by judges, had spent the last two days investigating opposition and rights' groups accusations of voting fraud.

President Mohamed Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood and state media say an unofficial tally shows 64 percent of ballots backed the new charter after a staggered referendum held December 15 and 22.

If confirmed, the text would be adopted and new legislative elections would have to be called within two months.

But the National Salvation Front opposition coalition claimed numerous instances of polling "fraud and violations" and is demanding the electoral commission investigate before issuing its official figures.

"The referendum is not the end of the road. It is only one battle," the Front said. "We will continue the fight for the Egyptian people."

The challenge suggested no quick end to Egypt's political crisis, which erupted a month ago when Morsi allocated himself near-absolute powers to push through the charter written up by a Muslim Brotherhood-dominated panel.

Fierce protests ensued, including violent clashes on December 5 that killed eight people and wounded hundreds, eventually leading Morsi to give up those powers while defiantly maintaining the referendum.

On Monday, an official statement says Morsi had ordered parliament's upper chamber to convene on Wednesday.

The statement on Monday comes a day after Morsi appointed 90 members to the Muslim Brotherhood-dominated Shura Council. The 90 include at least 30 Muslim Brotherhood members and six minority Christians. The council has a total of 270 members, two-thirds of them elected.

'Increasingly polarised'

Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood, testing newfound power after decades of being sidelined by ousted leader Hosni Mubarak, are spearheading the changes.

Against them are ranged the largely urban, liberal, leftwing, Christian and secular supporters of the opposition who feel alienated by Morsi.

They see ambiguities inserted in the charter as opening the way to future strict Islamic law.

Germany is echoing the call for an investigation into the alleged voting fraud, saying the new constitution can only be seen as valid "if the process of its adoption is beyond reproach".

The US, which provides Egypt's powerful military with \$1.3bn in aid per year, has kept mostly quiet on the turmoil buffeting its key Middle East ally.

But the Republican chairwoman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the US House of Representatives, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, called the vote "a defeat for the Egyptian people" at the hands of "an Islamic dictatorship".

Iran, which is trying to claim the ongoing Arab Spring was inspired by its own 1979 revolution, welcomed the referendum.

It said it promoted "progressive, Islamic and revolutionary goals" in Egypt.

Rating agency Standard and Poor's on Monday downgraded Egypt's long-term credit rating because of "elevated" tensions over its political crisis, and warned it could lower it further.

The country's long-term rating was lowered to "B-" from "B" because the turmoil has "weakened Egypt's institutional framework, and the increasingly polarised political discourse could diminish the effectiveness of policy-making", the agency said.

A \$4.8bn loan from the International Monetary Fund was put on hold this month, adding pressure on Egypt's central bank, whose foreign reserves have more than halved since Mubarak's ouster to less than \$15bn.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/2012122414154261801.html>

6. JORDAN and LEBANON

- **Hostages' families vow to up pressure on Turkey**

BEIRUT: Families of the nine remaining Lebanese pilgrims held in Syria protested Sunday outside the Turkish Embassy and vowed to gradually step up pressure on Ankara to help secure the release of their loved ones. "We will exert incremental pressure on all Turkish interests within our means in Lebanon and any area we can reach starting next year," said a statement read by one of the relatives in Rabieh.

Eleven Lebanese men were kidnapped in the Aleppo district on May 22, shortly after crossing into Syria from Turkey.

They were on their way back to Lebanon following a pilgrimage to Shiite holy sites in Iran.

Only two of the 11, Hussein Omar and Awad Ibrahim, have been released so far. Turkey says it is continuing to work toward the release of the remaining hostages.

"We have not taken any escalatory steps or kidnapped anyone because the families respect the Lebanese state, which does not deserve that respect," the statement said. "If the only way of returning our sons is to kidnap Turks, then we will and have no problem with that."

The families also asked President Michel Sleiman to contact former Prime Minister Saad Hariri and Future Movement MP Oqab Saqr to follow up on negotiations with regard to the kidnapped.

Saqr has said that he was negotiating with the kidnappers for the release the captives.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2012/Dec-24/199724-hostages-families-vow-to-up-pressure-on-turkey.ashx#axzz2G3Qb5dr8>

- **Lebanon lawyer files 'genocide' case against Syria minister**

A Lebanese lawyer said he filed a lawsuit on Monday against Syrian Interior Minister Mohammed al-Shaar, accusing him of having ordered hundreds of killings in the northern city of Tripoli in 1986.

Lawyer Tareq Shandab said he filed the case as Shaar is currently undergoing treatment at the American University Hospital for light wounds from a December 12 suicide bomb attack on the interior ministry in Damascus.

The case accuses Shaar, who in 1986 was in charge of security in Tripoli, of "genocide, ethnic cleansing, political assassination and the killing of religious officials and children in Bab al-Tebbaneh, Tripoli, in 1986," he told AFP.

It alleges that Shaar and his aides along with "criminal" Lebanese accomplices on Dec. 19, 1986 "killed and slaughtered more than 600 people from the Tebbaneh district."

At the time, Lebanon was immersed in a bloody civil war that broke out in 1975 and left some 150,000 people dead over 15 years.

Syria dominated Lebanon politically and militarily for nearly 30 years until international pressure led Damascus to withdraw its troops shortly after the assassination of former premier Rafiq Hariri in 2005.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/25/256986.html?PHPSESSID=i1m9et56821vn539h87009lh14>

- **Jordanians doubtful over proposed changes in new parliament**

As Jordan gears up for the January 23 legislative election, streets and roundabouts were filled with banners portraying the smiling or stern faces of parliament hopefuls, but experts expressed reservations about the capability of the next parliament to bring about the sought-after change.

Analysts expect the 17th parliament to be a copy of the controversial 16th chamber, with few new faces.

However, analysts and political party leaders expressed confidence that Jordan is not on the brink of political turmoil but agreed that both the government and opposition powers have failed to "seize the historic moment" brought about by the Arab Spring.

Authorities in the Kingdom have set January 23 to be the date for early legislative election out of which a parliamentary government is expected to emerge.

Despite calls by opposition powers, mainly the Islamists, to revisit the 2012 election law, King Abdullah has kept affirming that the legislative polls will be held on schedule, urging would-be candidates and voters to participate actively in the process.

Opposition parties, including the Muslim Brotherhood's Islamic Action Front, have been calling for revisiting the 2012 election law, claiming that it reinstated the controversial one-person, one-vote system, on the basis of which the 2010 elections were conducted.

With their calls unheeded, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Kingdom's largest opposition group, and other opposition forces decided to boycott the polls in protest against the election law which they claimed to be the direct cause of the country's political weakness and social instability.

In a recent interview with the Kingdom's largest Arabic newspaper Al Rai and its only English daily The Jordan Times, the King reiterated that the January 23 elections and the upcoming parliamentary government were not the final destination in the reform process, saying that "there is no final destination on the reform path. Reform is a process."

Interviewed by Al Arabiya English, political analyst Mohammed Abu Rumman and Social Leftist Movement leader Khaled Kalaldehy explained that, except for some formalities, the next parliament will be incapable of bringing about any tangible change.

They said there was an 80 to 90 per cent chance it would be similar to the 16th House, whose members were the target of criticism of opposition forces and public movements.

Except for the national lists stipulated in the new election law, the presence of the Independent Elections Commission (IEC) and the promises of a parliamentary government, Abu Rumman argued that the elections will bring the same incompetent deputies of the last parliament to power.

For the first time in Jordan's history, the election will be overseen by an independent commission — the IEC, which was created in line with a provision added to the Constitution last year.

Under the new election law, each voter will be given two votes: one for a candidate at the district level and another for a closed proportional list that will compete for 27 seats at the national level.

Several opposition powers have called for raising the number of seats allocated for the closed proportional list to be at least 50 per cent of the total 150 Lower House seats.

"Citizens' difficult economic conditions and their growing distrust in the abilities of MPs to make any progress, coupled with the boycott atmosphere prevailing the country and the poorly worded election law will certainly sully the image of the election and weaken people's participation," Abu Rumman said.

In addition to the Islamists' and leftists' decision to boycott the election, he indicated that the absence of Jordan's heavy-weighted figures and statesmen from the scene has its strong impact on people's enthusiasm to take part in the polls.

"The second day after the election is authorities' most worrying concern. What would the decision maker do if people demand that the newly-elected parliament be dissolved just one day after the polls?" Abu Rumman wondered.

On the pledges for a parliamentary government, the Al Ghad daily's columnist explained that a parliament elected on the basis of an election law that gives prominence to individualized and fragmented deputies at the expense of organized and diversified political powers is technically incapable of producing a fully-fledged government.

"In politics, a parliamentary government is formed by a political party or a coalition of political parties gaining the majority of seats in a parliament but in the case of Jordan, a 27-seat list is technically incapable of doing so as it will be rivaled by the remaining 123 deputies," Abu Rumman added.

Even if the 123 MPs decide to form blocs and then elect a government, he argued, their efforts will be "fragmented and unpromising" as they have no partisan experience and are merely chosen on the basis of geographical and tribal considerations.

"Parliamentary governments are formed by heterogeneous political parties and they cannot be in any way the product of individualized actors."

"Regrettably, Jordan's government and its opposition powers have failed to seize the historic movement brought on by the Arab Spring," Abu Rumman said, adding that "political parties, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, and public movements have been confined to certain demands and discourse alien to the Kingdom's distinctiveness and authorities have bet on the failure of the Arab Spring."

He also explained that members of the next parliament, empowered by their legitimacy as deputies elected on fair and transparent election guaranteed by the IEC, may act with more confidence but whatever they do will be "insufficient and unsatisfactory" as the rules of the political game in Jordan remain unchanged.

"Decision makers in Jordan and other Arab states have not realized yet that the political formulas and the security discourse that long prevailed are no longer accepted by the public who are becoming more and more determined to be involved in their countries' decision-making processes," Abu Rumman said.

Since the beginning of protests and popular demands in Jordan some two years ago, officials have been saying that economic woes are Jordanians' major concerns and those who chanted slogans demanding more political and even constitutional changes were just a minority, trying to take advantage of the atmosphere of freedom created by the Arab Spring and authorities' peaceful approach to demonstrations.

"It is not in the interest of governments to promote that people's major demands are economic as they do not have solutions for them," Abu Rumman said, adding that "the problem in Jordan and in several Arab countries is that their governments do not have political legitimacy."

However, Abu Rumman expected the situation in Jordan to remain in safe levels despite its political dilemma, saying that "Jordanians seeing violence and unrest sweeping Syria and Egypt are not willing to sacrifice their country's security and stability."

The same remarks were expressed by Khalaldeh who also cast doubt on the capability of the next deputies to bring about the envisioned reforms, citing the election law which, he said, is in the service of tribal candidates and at the expense of political parties.

Kalaldeh explained that the absence of political powers from the next elections due to the disappointing 2012 election law and people's long-unsolved economic troubles have had their negative impact on citizens' enthusiasm to participate in the polls.

Decision makers believe that parliamentary election is the ultimate goal of the reform process whereas it is the beginning, Kalaldeh said, echoing Abu Rumman's remarks that the next deputies will be the same as their predecessors.

Unlike Abu Rumman, Khalaldeh believes that economy is Jordan's major challenge, saying that the main cause for Jordanians' anger was the economic situation that deteriorated by the liberalization and privatization policies.

Jordanians have become weary of the unprecedented levels in rising living costs, unemployment, economic inequality and corruption in their country, the leftist leader said, adding that these results were caused by politicians who are still in power.

"Unfortunately, policy makers and the ruling elites have not made any compromises since the beginning of the Arab Spring, still determined to handle the state affairs in the same way and unaware of the growing discontent of the mature public," Kalaldeh said.

Kalaldeh also said that real political reforms are the remedy for Jordan's economic crisis, but he charged that influential elites were fighting against real reform because it would jeopardize their interests.

For Kalaldeh, King Abdullah and the Royal family are a point of consensus for the country, saying that calls of political parties and public movements have centered on reforming the regime and not its downfall.

"No political party or group has adopted slogans that call for the downfall of the regime," he said, indicating that such slogans were raised by a minority of angry youth.

"All in all, Jordan will not drift into violence and unrest and is far from being the next target for the Arab Spring," Kalaldehy concluded.

Muslim Brotherhood Spokesperson Murad Adayleh said in a recent interview with The Jordan Times that the Islamist movement believes the King is the consensus figure for all Jordanians.

"What we want is to reform the regime, as the country's stability is of the utmost importance to all opposition groups, particularly since we live in a turbulent region."

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/24/256853.html?PHPSESSID=i1m9et56821vn539h87009lh14>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **Drone kills two Qaeda militants in southern Yemen: officials**

At least two militants were killed on Monday in what security and local officials said was a U.S. drone strike on a suspected position of al-Qaeda-linked insurgents in southern Yemen.

Washington has escalated its use of drones to kill suspected al-Qaeda militants in Yemen, where the group exploited anti-government protests last year to seize swathes of territory in the south of the country before being driven out by a military offensive in June.

The officials said the drone hit a vehicle in a town in southern al-Bayda province, killing at least two suspected militants. One of those killed in the attack was a Jordanian citizen, a local official and a resident said.

Yemen's stability is a priority for the United States and its Gulf Arab allies because of its strategic position next to top oil exporter Saudi Arabia and shipping lanes, and because it is home to one of the most active wings of al-Qaeda.

The U.S.-backed military offensive drove the militants out of areas they seized in the south but has not prevented them from launching attacks that have dealt damaging blows to the army and security apparatus.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/24/256889.html?PHPSESSID=i1m9et56821vn539h87009lh14>

- **Saudi Arabia calls for 'strong and solid' Gulf union**

Saudi Crown Prince Salman Bin Abdul Aziz attending a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit in Bahrain Monday expressed the kingdom's hope for the declaration of a Gulf union.

"We aspire to a strong union with integrated economies, a joint foreign policy and a common defense system," Prince Salman said.

Meanwhile, King Hamad of host country Bahrain called for the GCC to provide "a security umbrella for its peoples" and urged "economic complementarity" between its six member states.

Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, Kuwait's emir, called for humanitarian aid for Syrian civilians and urged Iran to reach a peaceful settlement with neighbors, including over three Gulf islands in dispute with the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

He announced a donor conference for civilians caught up in the Syrian conflict to be held at the end of January at the request of the United Nations.

In an exclusive statement to Al Arabiya, UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan said the GCC was concerned by Iran's nuclear activity, and the Bushehr reactor in

particular. He added that the lack of transparency by Iran on its program has raised suspicions over whether the nuclear activity is intended for peaceful purposes.

The two-day summit is to focus on strengthening "Gulf unity... especially politically, economically, in defense, security and culturally," Bahrain's Foreign Minister Sheikh Khaled bin Ahmed al-Khalifa had said.

Last week, Bahrain said an announcement over a union of the six member states would not be made at the summit.

A Gulf union would supersede the existing GCC and bring member states even closer.

In November, the six Gulf states recognized a newly-formed opposition bloc as the Syrian people's legitimate representative.

The GCC members -- Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates -- were the first to recognize the opposition coalition.

"The states of the council announce recognizing the National Coalition... as the legitimate representative of the brotherly Syrian people," GCC chief Abdullatif al-Zayani said.

He said the oil-rich bloc would support the coalition in the hope that "this will be a step towards a quick political transfer of power."

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/24/256782.html?PHPSESSID=i1m9et56821vn539h87009lh14>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

- **Two militants, one policeman killed in Kashmir fighting**

SRINAGAR: Police in Indian-administered Kashmir said two suspected militants and a police officer were killed in a gunbattle in the disputed Himalayan region.

Police officer Manoj Panditha said in addition to the dead, one Indian army soldier was wounded in the fighting late Monday in the southern Kashmir village of Dodhiporao.

Panditha said Tuesday that police believe men belonged to the Lashkar-i-Taiba militant group.

There has been no independent confirmation of the incident.

Kashmir is divided between India and Pakistan and claimed by both in its entirety.

About 68,000 people have been killed since 1989 in an armed rebellion against Indian rule and in an ensuing Indian crackdown that has largely crushed the militants.

India accuses Pakistan of training and arming the militants, a charge Islamabad denies.

<http://dawn.com/2012/12/25/two-militants-one-policeman-killed-in-kashmir-fighting/>

- **Karachi violence claims seven lives**

KARACHI: Seven people were killed in different incidents of violence across Karachi whereas four people died and several others were injured in a road accident in the city's Clifton area on Monday, DawnNews reported.

A police officer's son was gunned down in Darakhshan area of Karachi early on Tuesday. The incident was a result of personal enmity according to police sources.

A tortured body of a man was found in Karachi's Old Haji Camp area whereas another body was found in the city's Gulshan-i-Iqbal Block 5 area.

A man was injured in a firing incident near police headquarter in Garden area of the city. The injured was shifted to a nearby hospital where he succumbed to his wounds.

Another person was killed in a gunfiring incident near Five-Star Chowrangi in Karachi's North Nazimabad area.

Two people were killed and two others injured in separate incidents of violence in Shah Faisal Colony and Orangi Town areas of Karachi.

The government vehicle of Sindh Member of Provincial Assembly, Kulsoom Akhter Chandio, belonging to the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), was snatched in Karachi's Gulistan-e-Jauhar area. An FIR was registered at the Shahrah-e-Faisal police station on the complaint filed by the MPA's driver.

In an unrelated incident four people were killed and several others others when a van overturned near Do Talwar (two swords) in Clifton area of Karachi.

<http://dawn.com/2012/12/25/karachi-violence-claims-seven-lives-3/>

- **Hoti calls for immediate steps to rein in militants**

PESHAWAR, Dec 24: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ameer Haider Khan Hoti called upon the political leadership and the military on Monday to immediately put their heads together to find a permanent solution to the problem of militancy.

"Time has come that the military and political leadership take a quick decision and guide the nation. Otherwise, it will be criminal negligence," he told lawmakers in the provincial assembly

amid a sombre mood over the assassination of Senior Minister Bashir Ahmad Bilour in a suicide attack on Saturday.

When the assembly's proceedings began, Chief Minister Hoti, along with ministers and legislators, placed a wreath of red and white roses in the chair of the slain ANP leader. Mr Bilour's portrait, red cap and shawl were put on his seat and lawmakers lit candles on his desk as a mark of respect and to pay tribute to their colleague. Women members wore black shawls and men black armbands.

Bashir Bilour, who had been elected five times as an MPA, was the third lawmaker of the sitting assembly to have fallen to terrorism.

Earlier, Awami National Party's MPAs Alamzaib Khan and Shamsheer Khan, from Peshawar and Swat, had died in bomb attacks.

Sikandar Khan Sherpao, an MPA, and Jails Minister Mian Nisar Gul survived bomb and suicide attacks.

The chief minister said a delay in taking a decision would amount to a "betrayal of the martyrs".

"The enemy will be weakened if we take a bold decision. Otherwise, our enemy will gain more strength and power," he said.

He also said that some people had a misconception that the situation would improve once Nato forces pulled out of Afghanistan.

"The people who have started terrorism and killing innocent people have already vowed to take over Pakistan after coming to power in Afghanistan," he said, adding that the nation had two choices: to fight them or leave the ground open for them.

He said that if militants continued killing leaders and candidates of political parties one by one, the general election would become doubtful.

The Qaumi Watan Party's parliamentary leader, Sikandar Sherpao, said those sitting in Islamabad did not realise the problems of the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Fata.

"People in Islamabad are just watching a game and enjoying, but they should understand that this fire can also engulf other areas of the country," he warned.

Provincial Environment Minister Wajid Ali Khan said Pakhtuns had been used as fuel in an unending, bloody war while others were getting political and economic benefits from the ongoing conflict. He regretted that some leaders were still trying to justify the activities of militants.

Information Minister Mian Iftikhar Hussain said it was surprising that the US, Pakistan and Afghanistan were separately holding talks with the Taliban, warning that this strategy wouldn't succeed.

Instead of holding talks separately, all stakeholders should sit together and hold a meaningful dialogue with the Taliban, he said.

Mian Iftikhar also criticised the 'good and bad Taliban' mantra and said indiscriminate action should be taken against all terrorists.

<http://dawn.com/2012/12/25/hoti-calls-for-immediate-steps-to-rein-in-militants/>

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