



MIDDLE EAST DAILY BULLETIN

GÜNLÜK ORTADOĐU BÜLTENİ

Domestic Policy in the Middle East Countries

Bölge Ülkelerinde İç Siyaset

The Restructuring Procces of Iraq

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1. IRAQ

- **Parliament adjourns session due to lack of quorum**

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: The Iraqi parliament decided on Wednesday to adjourn its regular session until January 8 due to lack of quorum, a media source said.

Parliament's Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi adjourned the session until January 8, 2013 due to the lack of quorum," the source told Aswat al-Iraq news agency.

Today's agenda includes the vote on the Federal Court bill presented by the legal commission and the National Water Council draft law presented by the agriculture and water commissions.

http://en.aswatiraq.info/%28S%28byb1dl55bc2s3m55z1gwmvny%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=151888&l=1

- **Kurdistan Region's Government describes talks in Baghdad positive**

Erbil (NINA) – Prime Minister of Kurdistan Region, Nechirvan Barazani, described the visit of the Kurdish delegation to Baghdad to resume dialogue as "Positive Step".

During a meeting on Thursday, Dec. 27, of the Region's Cabinet, Nechirvan Barazani said that this step is a result of President Talabani's efforts when agreed on it with the Prime Minister, prior to becoming sick.

He added, "We do not reject dialogue, rather we support dialogue and peaceful solutions to the end, because we believe that all problems can be solved through dialogue."

On Wednesday, a Kurdish delegation held talks in Baghdad, to be resumed on Sunday in Erbil.

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

- **Delegation from Basra tribes joins protests in Ramadi**

Ramadi (NINA) – A delegation representing tribal chiefs and dignitaries of Basra province arrived on Thursday evening, Dec. 27, in Ramadi to join the protesters there.

Chairman of Anbar Scholars' Council, Thamir al-Asafi, told NINA that the delegation made of 15 convoys has

arrived into the protest site north of Ramadi, announcing solidarity with the protesters' legitimate demands.

He added that upon its arrival, the delegation met with Anbar's tribal chiefs and dignitaries to unify their demands against exclusion and marginalization practiced by some parties and political blocs and components of the Iraqi people.

Earlier in the day, thousands of Anbar residents and delegations from other Iraqi provinces arrived in Ramadi to join the open 5-days old protest.

Source at Anbar province said that military force has prevented some delegations from enter Anbar province to join the protest forcing them to turn back.

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

- **Rasoul, Abdul Mehdi discuss political situation**

Sulaymaniya (NINA) – First Deputy Secretary General of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Kosert Rasoul, the official at the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC),

Adel Abdul Mehdi, discussed on Thursday, Dec. 27, current political situation.

Informed source said that the two affirmed the importance of the historic relations between PUK and SIIC and the role played by President Jalal Talabani in consolidating the relations.

On behalf of PUK, Rassoul expressed hope that President Talabani returns soon to resume his post, asserting the PUK insistence to continue on the President's footsteps in consolidating its relations with all Iraqi and Kurdish forces.

For his part, Abdul Mehdi stressed the necessity to consolidate the relations between the two sides for the interest of all.

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

- **Anbar tribal council: the government incapable to meet the demands of Iraqi people.**

Ramadi / NINA /--Anbar tribal council confirmed in a statement today that the government failed to meet the demands

of Iraqi people and currently dragging the country from a crisis to another.

Head of Council Hamid Turki said during a speech addressed to the demonstrators in Anbar,: " Anbar tribes are expressing their unity and their rejection of tyranny and abuse demanding usurped rights by the government.

Meanwhile MP for the IS coalition Ahmed al-Alwani said in a speech to the protesters that most cities of Iraq's provinces are now involved in the demonstrations and sit-ins calling on the government to end the policy of exclusion.

The Popular Committees who organizing the sit-in of Anbar confirmed that on Friday next there will be a unified prayers in all the cities of Anbar in (Friday of Dignity).

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

- **INA MP calls to increase meetings with Sunni patriotic figures to avoid sedition**



Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Karim Alewi, of the Iraqi National Alliance called to increase the meetings with the Sunni patriotic figures to void the sedition over the issue of the Finance Minister, Rafi al-Esawi."

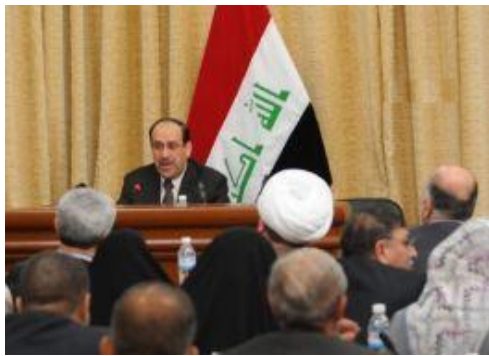
In a press statement received by AIN on Friday, he said "There are Sunni patriotic figures who suffered a lot from the injustice of the previous regime," assuring that "Esawi's representation to the Sunni sect is related to his involvement in the criminal actions, if he is involved in such actions, Sunni people will not accept him to be as their representative."

"There are many Sunni patriotic figures that are loyal to the political process in Iraq," he concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=25576:ina-mp-calls-to-increase-meetings-

[with-sunni-patriotic-figures-to-avoid-sedition-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2](#)

- **Kurdish MP: Maliki's message over MPs' immunity to limit "Their freedom of expression"**



Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Adil Abdullah, of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan assured that the recent message of the Premier, Nouri al-Maliki, for the parliament concerning the MPs' immunity outside the parliament aims at limiting their freedom of expression.

He stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "This is an incorrect step that contradicts democracy," noting that "We call Maliki to abandon this step since MPs are elected by the people and they represents them."

"Legally, interpreting the articles of the constitution is the task of the Federal Court rather than the Premier or the

Council of Ministers according to Article 93 of the constitution," he continued.

"There procedures to lift the MP's immunity in case he is to be caught red-handed in committing a crime," he assured.

"It is not possible to arrest MPs without the approval of the Parliament Chairmanship during the legislative term," he concluded.

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=25575:kurdish-mp-maliki's-message-over-mps-immunity-to-limit-their-freedom-of-expressionq-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

- **Shiya urges Anbar citizens to follow constitution concerning Esawi's case**

Baghdad (AIN) –MP, Abdul Abbas Shiya, of the State of Law Coalition urged "The citizens of Anbar to follow the constitution and the law concerning the case of the guards of the Finance Minister, Rafi al-Esawi."



He stated to All Iraq News Agency (AIN) "The demonstrations and the sit-ins in Anbar province that are adopted by some of the Iraqiya Slate MPs to call for releasing Esawi's guards are electoral propaganda as it is clear for all."

"The Governmental procedures concerning Esawi's guards are implementation for the judicial warrants," he added, noting that "The situation in Iraq requires implementing the judicial decisions and those who object the judiciary, object the State as a whole."

He warned "The citizens of Anbar from blocking the border inlets since this will result in negative consequences for them."

http://www.alliraqnews.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=25574:shiya-urgens-anbar-citizens-to-follow-constitution-concerning-esawis-case-&catid=35:political&Itemid=2

• Islamic party keeps protesting in Ramadi

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: The Islamic party in Anbar said on Wednesday it will continue the sit in on the international highway in the city of Ramadi against what its members termed "aggression".

"Leaders and cadres of the party will continue their sit in staged on the international highway in the city of Ramadi and in other cities of the province after the arrest of guards of Finance Minister Rafi' al-Issawi," Khaled Ubeid al-Ulawni, a leading figure of the party told Aswat al-Iraq newsagency.

Thursday reports said that a number of finance minister Rafi' al-Issawi's bodyguards were arrested for terrorism charges, while Issawi's closed circles called for peaceful demonstrations in protest for such arrests.

Iraqiya bloc held an emergency meeting, during which Premier Nouri al-Maliki was criticized for "attacking the Sunnisect", as stated later.

Finance Minister Rafi' al-Issawi called for the resignation of Maliki and called the

parliament to withdraw confidence from the government, which was initiated few months earlier.

http://en.aswatiraq.info/%28S%28byb1dl55bc2s3m55z1gwmvny%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=151886&l=1

- **Parliament votes on two bills, hosts youth minister**

BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq: The third session of the second legislative term which will be held on Wednesday will witness the vote on the Federal Court and the National Water Council bills, as well as questioning the youth minister, a parliamentary source said.

“Today’s agenda includes the vote on the Federal Court bill presented by the legal commission and the National Water Council draft law presented by the agriculture and water commissions,” the source told Aswat al-Iraq news agency, noting that the lawmakers will also question youth minister.

The session includes also the first reading of the national fund for supporting non-governmental organizations draft law.

http://en.aswatiraq.info/%28S%28byb1dl55bc2s3m55z1gwmvny%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=151885&l=1

- **President Talabani needs two months to rest, Kurdish sources**

BAGHDAD/ Aswat al-Iraq: Chairman of the Central Council of the Kurdish National Union Party announced today that the response of President Jalal Talabani to medication is "good", but expecting that he needs another two months for rest.

Adil Murad told Aswat al-Iraq that the bleeding had stopped, but needs two months to rest away from political work.

Earlier, President Talabani remained three months in Germany for medication where his knee was operated.

President Talabani used to suffer from health implications for the last years, where he was admitted to Hussein Medical Hospital in Jordan for few weeks, then moved to USA.

Murad added that Kosrat Rasoul will head the party during Talabani's absence, with

the assistance of Barham Saleh and a 3-man committee.

http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%28byb1dl55bc2s3m55z1gwmvny%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=151882&l=1

- **Nujaifi sponsors initiative to close views between Maliki and al-Issawi**

Shafaq News / An informed political source revealed Thursday, that the parliament Speaker , Osama al-Nujaifi is seeking to close between Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and Finance Minister , Rafie al-Issawi through a meeting between the two sides.

The political situation in the country is witnessing significant tension over the arrest of the Finance Minister Issawi's bodyguards , as demonstrations emerged in Anbar province to condemn the arrest operation .



The source, who asked not to be named said in an interview with "Shafaq News" that "Parliament Speaker and leader in al-Iraqiya List, Osama al-Nujaifi sponsored an initiative to close views between Maliki and al-Issawi," noting that Nujaifi "expressed his hope to arrange a meeting between the two officials in the coming days " .

The Office of the General Commander of the Armed Forces, Nuri al-Maliki announced last Saturday that al-Maliki ordered the members of the executing force to arrest a number of the Finance Minister Rafie al-Issawi bodyguards and refer them to the judiciary for not acting professionally when implementing judicial orders.

Al- Iraqiya List, announced last Thursday that "all" members of the protection of the leader in the list and the Finance Minister , Rafie al-Issawi were arrested by a military force in Baghdad, holding Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki the responsibility for what happened.

While the Iraqi judiciary announced last Friday, the "confession" of the Finance

Minister , Rafie al-Issawi of implementing assassinations attacks in the country.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/4533-nujaiifi-sponsors-initiative-to-close-views-between-maliki-and-al-issawi.html>

- **Saadi describes Maliki as "sewerage hero" and demands Baghdad residents to account him**

Shafaq News/ The Independent MP of the National Alliance (NA) ,Sabah al-Saadi described on Thursday, Prime Minister , Nuri al-Maliki as " sewerage hero " because of the poor service in the country during the rain, calling on the Baghdad people to account him because they are the most voted for him.



Saadi said in a conference building of the parliament, attended by "Shafaq News" that "God wanted this rain which lasted for hours to be scandalous to the corruptors and losers."

Saadi explained that "Prime Minister , Nuri al-Maliki came out to us in Falasteen Street to remind us of the days of Saddam when a tomato crisis took place and Saddam was nicknamed by the name " Abu Tamamta "and today we witnessed the sewage crisis so that Prime Minister would be," the sewerage hero " according to what he said.

Hundreds of residents of Huria and Shulla areas from Karkh district of Baghdad came out on Wednesday, in demonstrations to protest on poor services as rain flooded its alleys and entered the houses.

Baghdad witnessed last Tuesday heavy rain and due to the outdated sewage pipes, water collects and sank many areas of the capital.

The General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers announced, on Tuesday evening, delaying the official work day today in Baghdad because of the rain.

<http://www.shafaq.com/en/news/4529-saadi-describes-maliki-as-sewerage-heroq-and-demands-baghdad-residents-to-account-him.html>

- **Iraqi President's Condition "Stable and Improving"**



ERBIL, Kurdistan Region—Official sources from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) said on Wednesday that Iraqi President Jalal Talabani will be flown to Germany for further treatment.

Dr. Najmaldin Karim, a member of Talabani’s medical team and a senior PUK official said, “If it is necessary the president will be flown abroad for treatment,”

Meanwhile, Dr. Karim added, “The president’s condition is stable and improving,”

Dr. Karim confirmed that a medical team from Germany has arrived in Baghdad to treat the Iraqi president.

Talabani, 79, has struggled with his health in recent years and he underwent knee surgery in Germany last summer.

Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani wrote on his Facebook page on Wednesday, “I am saddened by my dear brother and president Talabani’s ill health and I wish him a speedy recovery.”

“In following President Talabani’s condition I am in touch with the doctors in Baghdad,” Barzani wrote.

The US Embassy in Baghdad also released a statement wishing a speedy recovery for Talabani.

“The Embassy of the United States of America expresses its best wishes for the speedy recovery of the President of Iraq, Jalal Talabani. Our thoughts are with the President, his family, and the people of Iraq,” read the statement.

<http://www.rudaw.net/english/news/iraq/5564.html>

- **Following Scrapped Russian Deal Iraqis Say Country Needs Progress More Than Arms**

BAGHDAD, Iraq – Emerging from decades of war, ordinary Iraqis say their struggling country needs economic progress more than weapons, after Baghdad signed a \$4.2 billion arms deal with Russia in October but cancelled the agreement the next month.

Many Iraqis say that the aborted arms deal had reminded them of life under Saddam Hussein, the ousted dictator who built up his military and drove the country into the 1980-88 war with neighboring Iran and disastrous confrontations with the United States that followed his 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

“Iraq does not need any weapons systems,” said Ahmed Karim, a nurse in Baghdad. “This country has just come out of hardship and it should avoid militarization,” he said, referring to the US-led occupation that ended last year, after the last American troops who landed during the 2003 invasion pulled out.

Iraq’s tragedies, killings and sectarian violence all stemmed from the abundance of weapons in the country, Karim said, adding that the scrapped arms deal

“reminds us of the days of the old regime that left all Iraqis at the mercy of wars.”



Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, whose government had finalized the weapons deal with Russia in October, scrapped the agreement last month, alleging that officials from the defense ministry had gained illegally from the contract.

Government employee Batul Faeq agreed that the country needs weapons, but said that reform and wise economic policies are currently more important priorities.

“As Iraqis we believe that the country does not need jet fighters and tanks to protect itself as much as it needs economic planning and reform in social and government institutions,” said Faeq. “The government should serve higher goals.”

Maliki’s deal with Russia had included dozens of MiG fighter planes, attack

helicopters, panther tanks and surface-to-surface missiles.

Though rich in oil and gas, Iraq has been struggling to rebuild its war-torn industries since Saddam's fall.

Bushra al-Ubeidi, professor of international law at Baghdad University, said that Iraq has the potential to emerge as a successful country, but that its leaders were walking the path of the previous regime.

"Saddam Hussein built giant weapons factories which paralyzed the economy. And what was the result? All the weapons that cost us billions were destroyed and the country is now in huge debts."

She said that the country needs real statesmen to put it back on its feet.

Shakir Salman, a 48-year-old street vendor selling men's clothing in Baghdad, said that the ambitions of ordinary Iraqis who are preoccupied with day-to-day hardships differ from those of its leaders.

"This government signs weapons deals worth billions and it sends aid to Syria and

Gaza, while people live in poverty and deprivation. This is unacceptable," he said, recounting how he had recently lost his livelihood and been reduced to a virtual beggar after his vending cart was destroyed by fire.

Secondary school teacher Luna Botrous said she had hoped that Saddam's fall would be the end of Iraqi suffering and poverty.

"But almost 80 percent of the people are afflicted by poverty. The rest are political businessmen who prospered in the new Iraq and do not care what happens to the people," she said.

"Did the Iraqi people come out of years of war only to be drawn into another conflict through the government's militarization?" she asked.

Military relations between Moscow and Baghdad, which began in the late 1950s, continued until the 1990 UN Security Council ban on arms sales to Iraq.

<http://www.rudaw.net/english/news/iraq/5494.html>

- **Proposed Bill to Change Provincial Borders Causes Fear of Ethnic Tensions**

BAGHDAD, Iraq – A law introduced by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani to redraw the administration borders of Iraqi provinces and sent to the House of Representatives for approval seems to be yet another crisis on the country's political horizon.

Sheikh Khaled al-Mafraji, leader of the Arab Political Council, told Rudaw that raising this topic at this time could only escalate the existing crisis. "Addressing such topics in such circumstances will increase the deepening political crisis, in addition to the significant uncertainties surrounding it," he said.

Mafraji added that he was confident the House of Representatives would stand against the project. "The Arab component categorically rejects this matter and we are confident that the House of Representatives will be opposed to this issue," he said.

Political analyst Laith Mohammed Reza blamed the Iraqi constitution for the issue and warned that continued focus on ethnic dimensions, without administrative

counterparts, could lead to a civil war that would be fierce and destructive and engulf everybody.

"The constitution holds the causes of conflict among provinces," Reza said. "It has legitimized conflict by having disputed areas within the same country."

Reza added, "The constitution uses the term 'normalization.' This is incompatible with all other constitutions in the world. The purpose of a constitution is to resolve and regulate conflicts, not codify and encourage them."

National Alliance MP Qasim al-Aaraji has a different opinion and believes that demarcating borders and returning areas separated by the former regime is acceptable and logical.

"The question remains: is it a right or not a right? It is a right within constitutional Article 140," al-Aaraji said.

However, he said, we hope that such issues will not be exploited to stir up trouble among the Iraqi people. But we believe that what the Baathist regime

changed must return to what it was in the past.

Political analyst Azhar al-Sumaidaie sees contradictions between the demand to implement Article 140 and demarcating the administrative borders of provinces.

"The paradox lies in the implementation of Article 140, and redrawing the administrative borders of the provinces, as this bill contradicts Article 140. It is very unlikely to be approved because it includes technical and legal irregularities," Sumaidaie said.

Nahida Daini, an MP from the Iraqiya bloc, sees the issue of border demarcation as involving risks that may result in conflict with unfavorable consequences.

"Border demarcation is a dangerous subject at the present time," Daini said. "We are still an unstable country that is engulfed in crises and loss of confidence among the political blocs."

She said that most provinces refuse to give up any part of their territories. "This might be transformed into a conflict

among the sons of the provinces after being a political struggle."



The bill proposed by the president is to eliminate decrees issued by the former Baathist Revolutionary Command Council after 1968. It included changes to provincial administrative boundaries all of which took on a political character.

Iraqi citizens have different views on the issue. Saher Amer, a 22-year-old engineering student, believes that this crisis has been created by the Kurds.

"The issue of provincial border demarcation has been created by the Kurdish parties, and they cannot succeed, now or in the near future, because these demands fall within the political agendas of partitioning Iraq," he said.

Muhannad Almuadidi, a 40-year-old citizen of Kirkuk who works in the food trade, agreed with Amer, saying, "I think the Iraqi government is fully aware of what the Kurds want to do. They aim to divide Iraq and not restore rights to their owners as they claim. We are not against anyone but we do not accept harming the unity of Kirkuk or Iraq."

Munjid Faisal, 50, a citizen of Diyala, said, "It is difficult to implement this law now because Anbar province will lose almost a third of its territories to Karbala, and Samarra will take large parts from Baghdad and Tikrit, and even Hillah demands the Yusufiyah region of Baghdad."

"In the northern provinces it will be a disaster," Faisal added. "There is also a problem currently between Kut and Diwaniyah. Only God knows where Iraq is heading! "

Sayf al-Din al-Dulaimi, 47, a resident of Anbar, recalls the incident in Nukhayb, currently part of Anbar province, that killed many innocent people and which has opened the door to conflicts between Karbala and Anbar.

"Everyone remembers the incident of Nukhayb, where Karbala demanded the annexation of Nukhayb and Anbar opposed it," Dulaimi said. "Nowadays, we want to reform the situation and not agitate it with internal conflicts because Iraq is facing enough difficulties already."

Karrar Hussein, 36, does not see a problem in demarcation, provided that the situation is permissible. "We have to divide but not at the present time. There are more important things that should be given priority, starting with the security situation, infrastructure, social services and the health and agriculture sectors," he said.

Suad Majeed, a 45-year-old teacher from Baghdad, agrees, but under one condition. "You can activate this law whenever there are sincere intentions among the political blocs that believe in the unity of Iraq, and without the introduction of Article 140 as the basis for this division," he said.

<http://www.rudaw.net/english/news/iraq/5440.html>

2. IRAN

- **Iran, Turkey Discuss Exchange of Media Products, Expansion of Cooperation**

TEHRAN (FNA)- Iranian and Turkish officials in a meeting conferred on ways to increase the two countries' media cooperation, including exchange of media products.



The issue was raised in a Wednesday meeting between Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast and Director-General of the state-owned Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) Ibrahim Shahin in Ankara.

During the meeting, Mehman-Parast pointed to historical and cultural commonalties of Iran and Turkey, and said there are many fields for Iranian and Turkish media cooperation.

He said that introduction of the culture, history and tourist attractions of the two countries would provide a common ground for media cooperation.

"Exchange of the media and TV products would serve as an important and practical area for cooperation."

Mehman-Parast left Tehran for Istanbul on Saturday to discuss bilateral ties and mutual cooperation with the Turkish officials.

Mehman-Parast, heading a high-ranking delegation, is slated to further discuss the media cooperation between the two countries.

He is also scheduled to visit to some leading Turkish media during his stay in Turkey.

<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9107130803>

- **Latest Iranian Ocean-going vessel inauguration**

TEHRAN, Dec. 27 (MNA) – Inauguration was held for the Iran-ShahreKord container ship as the latest ocean-going

vessel made inside the country. The Iran-ShahreKord container ship, Iran's newest home-made ocean-going vessel, was unveiled at the 14th Conference on Marine Industry.

The ship has been awarded all necessary certificates from international standards organizations before being officially handed to IRI Shipping Lines (IRISL).

Iran-ShahreKord can take on board 2200 containers. After Iran-Arak, it is the second ship ordered by IRI and built in ISOICO Ship Building Complex.

<http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1777259>

- **Iran Navy launches drill to display capabilities, send friendship message**

The file photo shows an Iranian military boat firing a rocket during the 10-day Velayat 90 naval exercise launched on December 24, 2011.



Among the aims of the drill is to display the capabilities of Iran's Armed Forces and the Navy to defend our country's water borders and interests in line with establishing durable security in the region and conveying the message of peace and friendship to the neighboring states."

Iran's Navy Commander Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari

The Iranian Navy has launched a specialized naval drill, dubbed Velayat 91, to display the country's capabilities and send a message of friendship to neighboring countries.

The maritime drill will be carried out in the Strait of Hormuz, the Sea of Oman, north of the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Aden and Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, Iran's Navy commander Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari told reporters on Friday.

“Among the aims of the drill is to display the capabilities of Iran’s Armed Forces and the Navy to defend our country’s water borders and interests in line with establishing durable security in the region and conveying the message of peace and friendship to the neighboring states,” Sayyari added.

He said that the Velayat 91 drill also sends this message to enemies that the Iranian nation seriously defends its vital interests in all areas, in particular in free waters.

Sayyari also said that the maneuver seeks to boost the Navy’s tactical and operational capabilities and added that during the maneuver the 23rd fleet of the Navy, comprised of Busheher warship and Jamaran destroyer, will escort Iran’s merchant vessels and oil tankers as part of the navy’s mission to fight piracy.

The Velayat 91 drill was launched on Friday and will continue for six days.

Over the past few years, Iran has held several military drills to enhance the defensive capabilities of its armed forces and to test modern military tactics and equipment.

Iran's Navy launched the massive 10-day Velayat 90 naval exercise on December 24, 2011.

The drill covered an area stretching from the east of the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Aden. Apart from military tactics, different domestically-built pieces of equipment were also tested in the drill.

The Islamic Republic has repeatedly assured other nations, especially neighbors, that its military might poses no threat to other countries, insisting that its defense doctrine is based on deterrence.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/28/280501/iran-launches-specialized-naval-drill/>

- **Iran Navy plans long term presence in international waters: Cmdr.**

The presence [of naval forces] in open seas, where different countries of the world are present, is an international scene and any presence there shows the country’s capability."

Iran's Navy Commander Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari

Iran's Navy Commander Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari says Iranian naval forces enjoy high capabilities and seek to maintain their presence in international waters.

“The presence [of naval forces] in open seas, where different countries of the world are present, is an international scene and any presence there shows the country’s capability,” Sayyari told IRNA on Thursday.

“When we are present in open seas and our destroyers cruise there on missions, we have entered the international arena and have contact with other countries and this demonstrates the Islamic Republic’s capabilities,” he added.



He added that Iranian naval experts have acquired the scientific know-how to

design and produce all weapons and equipment needed in the Navy.

In recent years, Iran’s Navy has been increasing its presence in international waters to protect naval routes and provide security for Iranian merchant vessels and tankers.

On December 16, Sayyari expressed the readiness of Iranian naval forces to extend their presence to international waters, including the Atlantic Ocean, to protect the Islamic Republic’s interests.

“In order to protect the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran and establish security for our country’s trade vessels and oil tankers in free and international waters, we are ready to extend our presence in these areas and even in the Atlantic Ocean,” Sayyari said.

Tehran has repeatedly clarified that its military might is merely based on the nation's defense doctrine of deterrence and poses no threat to other countries.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/12/28/280498/iran-navy-plans-longterm-intl-presence/>

3. ISRAEL - PALESTINE

- **'Jerusalem Post' poll: Likud-Beytenu in free fall**

By GIL HOFFMAN

Smith Research poll finds Likud's joint list with Yisrael Beytenu falls to 34 seats from 36 in one week, Bayit Yehudi gains 3 seats. Netanyahu and Liberman announce parties uniting Photo: Marc Israel Sellem/ The Jerusalem Post

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's and former foreign minister Avigdor Liberman's joint Likud-Yisrael Beytenu list continued its political tailspin, falling to a new nadir of only 34 seats in a Smith Research survey this week.

The poll, conducted Tuesday and Wednesday for The Jerusalem Post and the financial newspaper Globes, found that Likud and Yisrael Beytenu, which together have 42 seats in the current Knesset, have fallen in support from 36 seats a week ago, 39 two weeks ago, and 46 when the parties were separate and at their peak in August.

Two other polls released Thursday also found that Likud Beytenu had fallen to 34 seats.

A Likud MK complained that the Likud was not campaigning enough and that the party's hawks were being hidden despite the public moving rightward. Likud MKs blamed the party's strategist, Arthur Finkelstein, for misjudging the electorate.

"He thought we could win without a campaign," said the MK, who asked not to be identified. "Now we woke up late, and we are being attacked on all sides."

The latest trigger for Likud Beytenu's free fall was Netanyahu and other Likud leaders attacking Bayit Yehudi leader Naftali Bennett for saying his conscience would not permit him, as a reserve soldier, to evacuate Jews from their homes in Judea and Samaria. The Right saw the attacks as excessive and as opening fire on a political ally inside the right-wing bloc.

Bayit Yehudi, which won only three seats in 2009, rose from 10 to 11 seats last week, and to 14 this week, according to the poll. Surprisingly, one-third of the

former National Religious Party's voters define themselves as secular, and 40 percent of Bayit Yehudi's support comes from voters aged 30 and younger. The older voters get, the less likely they are to vote for the party.



“Sometimes the older generation marginalizes the youth of our country, saying they are only interested in iPads and video games,” said Bayit Yehudi candidate Jeremy Gimpel, who is 14th on the list. “The fact that we are the most popular party among young Israelis is testimony that Israel's next generation is as passionate and Zionist as ever.”

The poll predicts 18 seats for Labor, 11 for Shas, 10 each for Yesh Atid and The Tzipi Livni Party, six for United Torah Judaism, four each for Meretz, Hadash and Balad, three for the United Arab List-Ta'al, and two for Am Shalem.

Five hundred people representing a statistical sample of the adult Israeli population were interviewed by telephone for the poll, which has an error margin of 4.5%.

A separate survey, which Panels conducted for the weekend Hebrew newspaper Sof Hashavua, asked respondents whether the likelihood they would vote for Bayit Yehudi had risen or fallen over the past week.

Among the general public, 15% said they were more likely to vote for the party, and 11% said less likely.

Among Likud-Beytenu voters, the numbers were equal, at 11%. Among Bayit Yehudi voters, 49% said more likely and 3% said less likely.

An analysis of Likud Beytenu's voters by Panels pollster Menahem Lazar found that out of the joint list's 34 seats, only five of them came from people who had voted Yisrael Beytenu in the 2009 election. Yisrael Beytenu's other 10 seats have been lost since the merger between the two lists.

Another reason seen for the drop in Likud Beytenu's support is Liberman's pending indictment. Among Likud Beytenu voters, 57% said law enforcement authorities were wrongly pursuing him, 20% said they were being fair, and 6% said they were being too easy on him.

The Panels poll predicted 34 seats for Likud Beytenu, 18 for Labor, 14 for Bayit Yehudi, 10 each for Yesh Atid and Shas, eight for Livni, six for UTJ, five for UAL-Ta'al, four each for Meretz and Hadash, three for Strong Israel, and two each for Am Shalem and Balad.

The poll of 530 respondents took place Tuesday and Wednesday and had a margin of error of 4.3%.

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=297572>

- **Wiesenthal ranks top 10 anti-Semites, Israel-haters**

By BENJAMIN WEINTHAL, JERUSALEM
POST CORRESPONDENT

Muslim Brotherhood's rise in Egypt catapults two religious figures into No. 1

spot on Simon Wiesenthal Center's year-end list.

NEW YORK – International human rights organization The Simon Wiesenthal Center announced on Thursday its list of the top 10 anti-Semites and haters of Israel.

Those dominating the annual list were mostly from Europe and the Middle East. The list reflected right-wing, left-wing and Islamist loathing of Jews and Israel.

The rise of a Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt catapulted two religious figures into the No. 1 spot: Muhammad Badie and Futouh Abd al-Nabi Mansour.

In the Brotherhood's moral guide, Badie states that "the Jews have dominated the land, spread corruption on earth, spilled the blood of believers and in their actions profaned holy places.

Zionists only understand the language of force and will not relent without duress. This will happen only through holy Jihad."

Mansour, an Egyptian cleric who heads the religious endowment for the Matrouh

governate, said in October, according to a transcription from the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), “Oh Allah, destroy the Jews and their supporters – Oh Allah, disperse them and rend them asunder, Oh Allah, demonstrate your might and greatness upon them.”

At a nationally televised service at el-Tenaim Mosque, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi was shown fervently answering, “Amin” (Amen) to Mansour’s prayers.

The Wiesenthal Center, which is named after Austrian Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal, is considered a leading authority on anti-Semitism.

The group placed Iran’s regime in its second spot. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was cited for his July remarks that “it has now been some 400 years that a horrendous Zionist clan has been ruling the major world affairs.

And behind the scenes of the major power circles, in political, media, monetary and banking organizations in the world, they have been the decision-makers, to an extent that [in] a big power with a huge

economy and over 300 million population, the presidential election hopefuls must go kiss the feet of the Zionists to ensure their victory in the elections.”

The list also included Maj.-Gen. Hassan Firouzabadi, head of Iran’s armed forces, who said in August, “The Iranian nation is standing for its cause, [which] is the full annihilation of Israel.”

Iran’s First Vice President Mohamed Rahimi made the list as well, for saying that the Talmud “teaches [the Jews] how to destroy non-Jews so as to protect an embryo in the womb of a Jewish mother.”

As “evidence” of Jewish control of international illegal drug trade, the first vice president alleged that there wasn’t “a single addict among the Zionists.”

The German Spiegel magazine online columnist Jakob Augstein, who owns the left-wing weekly Freitag, joined the list of anti-Semites at spot No. 9. The Wiesenthal Center listed him under the caption “Influential German media personality’s bigotry,” and cited a series of quotes, including, “With backing from the US, where the president must secure the

support of Jewish lobby groups, and in Germany, where coping with history, in the meantime, has a military component, the Netanyahu government keeps the world on a leash with an ever-swelling war chant.”

Another quote from Augstein declared that “Israel’s nuclear power is a danger to the already fragile peace of the world. This statement has triggered an outcry. Because it’s true. And because it was made by a German, Günter Grass, author and Nobel Prize winner. That is the key point. One must, therefore, thank him for taking it upon himself to speak for us all.”

The columnist also trashed ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel, writing, “But the Jews also have their fundamentalists, the ultra-Orthodox haredim. They are not a small splinter group. They make up 10% of the Israeli population. They are cut from the same cloth as their Islamic fundamentalist opponents. They follow the law of revenge.”

In September, author and journalist Henryk Broder, one of Germany’s main experts on modern anti-Semitism, termed Augstein “a pure anti-Semite...who only

missed the opportunity to make his career with the Gestapo because he was born after the war. He certainly would have had what it takes.”

The founder of the pro-fascist Greek party Golden Dawn made the list at No. 6. Nikolaos Michaloliakos gave a Nazi salute in the Athens City Council, and this past May, he told an interviewer that six million did not die in the Holocaust.

Calling the figure an exaggeration, he said that “there were no ovens. This is a lie... there were no gas chambers, either.”

Hungary’s radical right-wing Jobbik Party earned the No. 7 spot, as Jobbik politician Marton Gyongyosi criticized his country’s foreign ministry for supporting Israel and raised the specter of dual loyalty by calling for background checks on Hungarian Jewish citizens.

“I think now is the time to assess how many people there are of Jewish origin here, and especially in the Hungarian parliament who represent a certain national security risk of Hungary,” he said.

The Wiesenthal Center also cited Oleg Tyagnibok (No. 5) from the fascist Ukrainian Svoboda party. He urged purges of the approximately 400,000 Jews and other minorities living in the Ukraine and has demanded that the country be liberated from the “Muscovite Jewish Mafia.”

Ukrainian MP Igor Miroshnichenko was cited for anti-Jewish remarks as well: He called Ukrainian-born American actress Mila Kunis a “zhydovka” (dirty Jewess).

The center designated European soccer (No. 4) as a forum for the outbreak of Jew-hatred, writing, “The most serious situation has been a resurgence of anti-Semitic chanting toward one particular team, Tottenham Hotspur, which is based in a traditionally Jewish section of London. In a recent match against rival West Ham United, sections of its fans chanted, ‘Adolf Hitler’s coming for you’ and ‘You’re getting gassed in the morning’ and [made] hissing noises like the sound of a gas chamber.”

Brazilian cartoonist Carlos Latuff was listed as No. 3 for “slandering Prime Minister [Binyamin] Netanyahu for doing what

every world leader would do against the onslaught of rocket attacks targeting innocent civilians” from the Gaza Strip.

Norway’s Trond Ali Linstad earned the No. 8 spot. His website warns readers to “beware the Jews” and the “influence they have in newspaper, in other media, and in many political organs.”

Linstad depicts violence against Israel as a “great success” and supports use of the slogan “Kharibat Khybarj,” a jihadist term for terrorism against Jews. He also claims that “every president in the US must adapt to the Jewish lobby,” which he says undermines US policy.

This year, King Harald V nominated Linstad for the Royal Service Medal, which awards work in the public sector, arts and sciences.

The only American to make the list, at spot No. 10, was Louis Farrakhan, the head of the African-American Nation of Islam. He said in October that “Jews control the media. They said it themselves....In Washington right next to the Holocaust museum is the Federal Reserve where they print the money. Is

that an accident?” Farrakhan added, “Did you know the Koran says that Jews are the most violent of people? I didn’t write it, but I’m living to see it.”

<http://www.jpost.com/JewishWorld/JewishFeatures/Article.aspx?id=297625>

- **Fatah cancels anniversary events in Gaza**



GAZA CITY (Ma'an) -- Fatah decided Thursday to cancel its anniversary celebrations in the Gaza Strip after the Hamas government rejected proposed locations for the event, a party official said.

Yahya Rabah, the deputy commissioner-general of the party, said Fatah made great efforts in the last 20 days to hold the celebration, but Hamas refused both al-Kateibeh and al-Saraya squares.

At a news conference, Rabah praised the role of national and Islamic factions as well as independent bodies, and Egyptian and Qatari officials who tried their best to enable Fatah members in Gaza to celebrate the 48th anniversary.

Rabah said Fatah was keen to keep the positive atmosphere in order to implement national reconciliation.

<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=551608>

- **Abbas to Meretz Delegation: Settlements Will Destroy Peace**

RAMALLAH, December 27, 2012 (Wafa) – President Mahmoud Abbas Thursday told a delegation from the leftist Israeli party, Meretz he met in Ramallah, that the intensified Israeli government’s settlement projects will destroy the peace process.

Abbas told the delegation, headed by party leader Zahava Galon, that the Palestinians were still committed to a peace process based on international resolutions and the two-state solution that will lead to an independent

Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

He said that permanent status issues will be resolved only through negotiations but after a halt in all settlement activities in the Palestinian territories, particularly in Jerusalem.

Abbas said that the new Israeli projects are a red line for the Palestinian leadership, which is going to work with all parties to stop them.

Meretz delegates expressed support for the two-state solution and congratulated Abbas and the Palestinian people for becoming a non-member observer state in the United Nations.

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21410>

- **Soldiers' Negligence Exposes Children to Risks, says Operation Dove**

AT-TUWANI, SOUTH HEBRON HILLS, December 27, 2012 (WAFA) - Israeli military escort that normally accompanies Palestinian children walking to school near Jewish settlements in the South Hebron Hills left 13 Palestinian children of Tuba

and Magayir Al-Abeed alone along the way to school near the Israeli outpost of Havat Ma'on thus exposing them to life-threatening risk, a press statement said on Wednesday.

"This path is dangerous because the children were repeatedly attacked by the settlers of the outpost," said the statement by Operation Dove, an international organization that has maintained presence in At-Tuwani and South Hebron Hills since 2004.

"The army was over an hour late on the way to school and on the way back didn't arrive at all, without explanation," it added

"After two hours of waiting between At-Tuwani and Havat Ma'on, some internationals accompanied the children home through a longer way (more than one hour instead of 20 minutes) in which the children were often attacked by settlers."

This military escort was established in November 2004 by Children Rights Committee of the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, to protect the children from the

several attacks that they have suffered since 2001 by settlers of Havat Ma'on on the route to the school. To avoid the attacks, the children were using a path one hour and half long.

“In the last month the escort has rarely fulfilled its duty; the soldiers never completed the path; they walked with the children on the way, as required by the decisions of the Knesset, in only 30% of the cases. Furthermore, the children had to wait for the escort for over eight hours in total. This compromises their safety and their fundamental right to education,” said Operation Dove

<http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=21409>

4. AFRICA and EGYPT

- **Foreign activists enter Gaza on solidarity mission**

AFP

A delegation of pro-Palestinian activists, mainly French and Egyptian, crossed into Gaza from Egypt on Thursday to deliver aid, AFP correspondents at the border reported.

The "Welcome to Palestine" delegation of about 90 people is to stay in the territory until 1 January , in solidarity with the people of Gaza and in protest against the Israeli blockade in force since 2006, organizers say.



Organized by French group EuroPalestine, the delegation includes 60 French members and 25 Egyptians, and entered Gaza through the Rafah border terminal, the only land crossing between the territory and the outside world not dependent on Israel, which also maintains an air and sea blockade.

The visitors brought drugs, surgical supplies and French textbooks, the organizers said.

In the past, several similar "Welcome to Palestine" initiatives failed when activists were refused entry by air to Tel Aviv and

by land from Jordan into the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

The Israeli blockade on Gaza was first imposed in June 2006 following the capture by militants from the territory of an Israeli soldier, who was eventually freed in October 2011 in a trade for 1,000 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

It was strengthened in 2007, when the Islamist Hamas movement took control of Gaza, then eased somewhat following an international outcry over the killing of nine activists in a 2010 Israeli commando raid on a flotilla trying to break the naval blockade.

In 2011, a UN report found the commandos used excessive force but ruled that the blockade itself was legal.

Israel says that its restrictions do not affect the civilian population of Gaza and that it allows 50,000 tons of goods to enter each week.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/foreign-activists-enter-gaza-solidarity-mission>

- **ElBaradei, Sabbahi, Moussa investigated for treason**



Newly appointed Prosecutor General Talaat Abdallah starts his work officially at his bureau at High Court of Justice, Cairo, 24 November 2012. President Mohamed Morsy dismissed Abdel Meguid Mahmoud, and appointed Ibrahim instead, who sworn-in before Morsy, Thursday evening. Mahmoud Khaled

Prosecutor General Talaat Abdallah agreed to assign a judge to investigate allegations of treason levied against Constitution Party leader Mohamed ElBaradei and former presidential candidates Amr Moussa and Hamdeen Sabbahi.

Al-Sayed Hamed, a member of the executive bureau of the Lawyers

Syndicate's Freedoms Committee, filed the charges along with his colleague, Nasser al-Asqalany.

ElBaradei, Moussa and Sabbahi lead the National Salvation Front, a coalition of 15 liberal parties opposed to the recently instated Constitution. They claim the constitutional referendum was rigged.

Prior to the referendum, the front led demonstrations against the Constitution in front of the presidential palace. At least ten died in the course of clashes with supporters of President Mohamed Morsy.

Hamed is also bringing charges of treason against former presidential candidate Ahmed Shafiq, Dubai police chief Dahi Khalfan, Judges Club head Ahmed al-Zend and Supreme Constitutional Court Vice President Tahani al-Gebali.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/elbaradei-sabbahi-moussa-investigated-treason>

- **Turkey immunizes loan to Egypt against judicial rulings**



Turkey has immunized its US\$2 billion loan to Egypt against variables such as a court ruling, said a government source.

The loan agreement also requires the Egyptian government to involve Turkish companies in public sector investment.

The source, who requested anonymity, added that Egypt would not be able to obtain international or regional loans before the International Monetary Fund decides on the US\$4.8 billion loan that Egypt has requested.

Turkey is the only country that agreed to lend money to Egypt in advance of the IMF's decision, of which US\$500 million have already been disbursed, with the rest to be paid end January. The loan does not entail any special benefits.

The Turkish government has stipulated that any dispute over the loan would be arbitrated in Istanbul, in accordance with the rules of international commercial arbitration.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/turkey-immunizes-loan-egypt-against-judicial-rulings>

- **April 6 activists to commemorate Jika's birthday on Saturday**

Graffiti of Gaber Salah, known as Jika, 17-year-old April 6 Youth Movement member, on walls at Tahrir Square, 27 November 2012. Jika died as a result of wounds sustained while demonstrating on Mohamed Mahmoud Street commemorating last year's clashes, to become the first martyr during era of President Mohamed Morsy.

The April 6 Youth Movement is planning to form a human chain on Saturday on the Qasr al-Nil Bridge to commemorate the birthday of the recently deceased Gaber Salah, better known as Jika.

Jika, a 16-year-old member of the movement, was killed in clashes during

the commemoration of the Mohamed Mahmoud events in November 2012.

April 6 released a statement written in colloquial Arabic stating, "Jika would have been 17 years old on Saturday, and we wished to celebrate his birthday; but tyranny forces us to salute his memory in his absence."

The statement said April 6 activists as well as members of other revolutionary and opposition movements would gather in Tahrir Square on Saturday at 3 pm. The protesters plan to create a human chain in Jika's name along the bridge until 5 pm, then march to the home of Jika's family in Abdeen.

April 6 members are also currently participating in the First Conference of Arab Youth for Liberation and Dignity, held in Tunis from 27 to 30 December.

The conference is organized by the Palestinian Youth Movement, which is dedicated to discussing the role of Arab youth in supporting the Palestinian cause after the 2011 uprisings that took place in countries across the region. The movement also seeks to develop new

tools of pressure in the Arab-Israeli conflict, particularly after the rise of several Islamist groups to power.

Delegations from youth movements in Egypt are participating in the conference, including April 6 and the Egyptian Current Party, in addition to delegations from Bahrain, Algeria, Tunisia, Yemen and activists from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/april-6-activists-commemorate-jika-s-birthday-saturday>

- **S. Sudan 'armed groups' attack disputed area: Khartoum**

South Sudanese 'armed groups' clash with Arab tribesmen in the Khartoum-Juba disputed region of Samaha

"Armed groups" from South Sudan clashed with Arab tribesmen in Samaha, a flashpoint border region disputed by Khartoum and Juba, the Sudanese military said on Thursday.

The fighting occurred two days ago, army spokesman Sawarmi Khaled Saad told AFP.

"We hear that there was some groups from South Sudan, armed groups... and they attacked the nomads there, the Rezeigat," he said. "The fighting was not between the Sudanese army and the South Sudanese army."

He said he had no information on casualties or what sparked the incident.

"We are trying to find a political solution for this problem," Saad said.

The Samaha region is one of five areas disputed by Khartoum and the South's government in Juba.

In November, Sudan's army said it attacked an area several kilometres (miles) north of Samaha where Darfur rebels had set up a compound, but South Sudan said bombs landed on its territory, killing civilians.

Sudan considers the area, around the Bahr al-Arab River, to be part of its East Darfur state.

This week's clash came as Sudan and South Sudan try to implement stalled economic and security deals -- including a

demilitarised border buffer zone -- which they hailed in September as ending conflict after they fought along their undemarcated border in March and April.

Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir and Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn on Wednesday evening "discussed means of implementing the agreements which were signed in Addis Ababa between Sudan and South Sudan... as well as removing the impediments", the official SUNA news agency reported.

It added that Bashir affirmed his readiness to meet South Sudan's President Salva Kiir "in any time and place" to speed up the deals reached in the Ethiopian capital after African Union mediation.

Desalegn was heading on Thursday to South Sudan after his one-day stop in Khartoum, SUNA said.

Along with the buffer zone, the September pacts allowed for a resumption of South Sudanese oil exports through northern pipelines. They also said border points would be reopened for general trade.

Khartoum accuses South Sudan of supporting rebels operating in Sudan, which has been a major obstacle to implementing the agreements.

The South, in turn, says Sudan backs insurgents on southern territory.

Separately, Sudan and South Sudan still need to reach a deal on the final status of the Abyei region, as well as on Samaha and other disputed points along the frontier.

South Sudan separated in July 2011 under a peace agreement that ended a 1983-2005 civil war.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/61390/World/Region/S-Sudan-armed-groups-attack-disputed-area-Khartoum.aspx>

- **Libyan oil terminal halted by demonstrators**

Protesters shut down key oil terminal to pressure the government to provide jobs

Protests have forced a major oil port in eastern Libya to shut down its operations

for a fourth day, the deputy oil minister said on Wednesday.

Al-Zuweitina Oil port, 790 km east of Tripoli, receives oil pumped from at least three oil fields in the Libyan desert and is responsible for exporting 60 to 70 barrels of oil a day.

Omar Shakmak said protesters forced their way into the port's management offices on Saturday and ordered the port director to quit working and shut down operations.

"They want the government to provide them with jobs and believe they can put pressure on the government by stalling oil-related companies," he said.

A number of protests outside refineries and oil-related installations have posed a significant challenge to Libya's new government, which is dependent on oil for most of its revenue.

The administration is still struggling to impose order on a vast and divided country awash with arms and militias after the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi last year.

Western Libya's main oil refinery has seen at least four shut downs since October causing petrol shortages in the capital Tripoli after war veterans demonstrating for more government compensation forced the refinery to shut down operations.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/61373/Business/Economy/Libyan-oil-terminal-halted-by-demonstrators.aspx>

5. JORDAN and LEBANON

• Salafist sheikh says regrets picking Hezbollah lawyer

BEIRUT: Lebanese militant Muslim preacher Omar Bakri, who is being retried on terrorist charges, says he regrets having appointed Hezbollah MP Nawar Sahli as his lawyer, and says attempts to replace him have so far failed.



“His constant work and absence as well as refusal to allow a new lawyer [to represent me] have made me regret having appointed him as my attorney,” said Omar Bakri, in a statement Thursday.

Bakri, a controversial preacher with joint Lebanese-Syrian nationality, was arrested on Nov. 14, 2010 in Tripoli, north Lebanon, after a court sentenced him and 21 other people to life in prison for carrying out “terrorist acts.”

However, a decision to re-try Bakri was taken after his arrest rendered the trial in absentia void.

He was released on bail on Nov. 22 after appointing the Hezbollah politician as his lawyer.

Bakri, who while in the U.K. had headed the now disbanded al-Muhajiroun radical Islamist group, says he was arrested in

Lebanon for political reasons because he opposed the policies of Britain and the United States in the region and Muslim countries.

In his statement Thursday, Bakri complained that his case was dragging on longer than he had expected.

He also hinted that his open stances against Syrian President Bashar Assad might be behind delays in his case.

“I hope the procrastination [by Sahli] and disruption in the case are not due to my stances in support of the Syrian people and against the Assad gang,” said Bakri

Lebanon’s Hezbollah has been known for its stout support of Assad.

The Sheikh said he was trying to appoint Mohammad Hafza, who hails from Tripoli, as his new lawyer but claimed that Sahli was not formally relinquishing his right to defend the Muslim preacher.

“My new lawyer has been trying to get a written authorization from Sahli for months to take over the case or take part in my defense but to no avail,” said Bakri.

Bakri left the U.K. for Lebanon in 2005 after being barred by the British government from returning to the country because his presence was not "conducive to public good."

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2012/Dec-27/200018-salafist-sheikh-says-regrets-picking-hezbollah-lawyer.ashx#axzz2GKoHMCJW>

- **Lebanon launches tender for offshore drilling**

BEIRUT: The Lebanese Cabinet agreed Thursday to lower the monthly allocations to members of the Petroleum Administration from LL35 million to LL25 million and to start the first round of oil and gas tenders in February 2013.

The ministerial statement said that each of the six members would receive a salary of LL22 million as well as a LL3-million housing allowance.

Energy and Water Minister Gebran Bassil initially suggested an allowance of LL35 million to each member of the Petroleum Administration but this proposal was outright rejected by some ministers,

March 14 MPs as well as civil servants who claim that the treasury cannot handle such enormous wages.

However, Bassil insisted that these proposed wages were not too high in view of the nature of work which will rest on the shoulders of the new committee.

The Cabinet also set March 2013 as date to award the contracts to the companies which won the tenders to extract oil and gas off the Lebanese coast.

The Cabinet session was held at Baabda Palace and headed by President Michel Sleiman.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Business/Lebanon/2012/Dec-27/200051-lebanon-launches-tender-for-offshore-drilling.ashx#ixzz2GKoQnmSI>

- **Government sets offshore drilling tender in motion**

BEIRUT: The Cabinet Thursday set the first tender for oil and gas exploration for Feb. 1 as Lebanon tries to capitalize on the hidden wealth to wipe out the public debt, stimulate the economy and create more jobs.

The Cabinet also set March 21 to publish the list of qualified firms and May 2 to receive formal applications.

British-based company Spectrum, which conducted a 3-D seismic survey off the Lebanese coast, told The Daily Star that the size of the gas off the southern coast of the country is estimated at 32 trillion cubic feet, adding that there is more gas in the northern parts of the country as well.

Some experts estimate the value of gas in Lebanon to ranges between \$300 billion to \$600 billion, not to mention the prospects of oil onshore.

Cabinet also decided to lower the proposed monthly pay from LL35 million to LL25 million for members of the Petroleum Administration after many ministers and political groups blasted the hefty package suggested by Energy Minister Gebran Bassil.

The Cabinet agreed each member of the oil committee will receive a monthly salary of LL22 million and LL3 million for housing allowance.

Many politicians and civil servants warned that this action by Bassil could prompt other public institutions and government agencies to demand similar salaries in the future.

Future parliamentary bloc member Ghazi Youssef slammed the hefty salaries and benefits of the Petroleum Administration, adding that this action could further strain the budget deficit.

“Why should the members of the committee receive salaries more than the head of the Telecom Regulatory Authority who receives an income of \$10,000 a month,” Youssef asked.

He also questioned the qualifications and experience of most of the oil committee members and asked the Cabinet to reject Bassil’s proposals.

Youssef believes that the members of the committee can only ask for higher wages once Lebanon starts extracting oil and gas.

But Bassil refused this criticism of the committee, arguing that these members will negotiate billions of dollars of contracts with major oil companies.



“These allocations are still below the criteria in other countries in oil sector,” Bassil said, adding that some candidates for these posts have turned down the offers to work with the government because the salaries are below their expectations.

The minister said that some government agencies receive higher salaries than the members of the Petroleum Administration.

“I can assure that the new members will generate more revenues to the treasury once Lebanon strikes oil and gas,” he added.

But experts say that it will take between five to seven years until Lebanon truly enjoys the gas wealth off the coast. They added that the process of selecting

qualified oil companies and starting actual drilling is quite long and for this reason it would be wrong to start counting the money.

The other challenge facing Lebanon is the debate over the disputed maritime zone with Israel, an issue that is not expected to be resolved soon.

But Western diplomats, according to some news media, are keen to resolve this issue to prevent an open confrontation between Lebanon and Israel.

The Cabinet has also decided to postpone discussions on the controversial salary scale until after New Year and promised to secure sufficient funds for this bill.

President Michel Sleiman told the ministers that the salary scale should not be rushed because it could cause a financial burden to the treasury if funds were not secured.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Business/Lebanon/2012/Dec-28/200136-government-sets-offshore-drilling-tender-in-motion.ashx#ixzz2GKoVMIVE>

6. SYRIA

- **Time running out of Syria peace deal: Russia**

MOSCOW: Russia's foreign minister told a senior Syrian diplomat on Thursday that the crisis in Syria must be resolved by dialogue rather than force and warned time was running out to reach a peaceful settlement.

Sergei Lavrov emphasised the urgent need to end the 21-month-old conflict during a meeting with Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Makdad, Russia's foreign ministry said.

"The Russian side underscored the lack of an alternative to a peaceful resolution of (Syria's) internal conflict through a broad inter-Syrian dialogue and political process," a statement said. But it made no mention of ways to achieve those goals.

World powers believe Russia, which has given Syrian President Bashar al-Assad military and diplomatic aid to help him weather the uprising against him, has the ear of Syria's government and must be a central player in peace talks.

Lavrov called for robust efforts to hammer out a solution based on an agreement reached by world powers in Geneva in June that called for a political transition.

"Considering what is going on in Syria, the chances of reaching such a solution ... are decreasing. But there is still a chance and we must fight for it," Interfax quoted Lavrov as saying in an interview.

"The alternative to a peaceful solution is bloody chaos. The longer it continues, the broader its scale and the worse (it will be) for everyone."

Moscow has tried to distance itself from Assad in recent months and has said it is not propping him up.

Russia is to host the international envoy seeking a solution to the crisis, Lakhdar Brahimi, on Saturday. Brahimi met Assad during a five-day trip to Damascus that ended on Thursday.

The envoy is trying to broker a peaceful transfer of power in Syria, where more than 44,000 people have been killed in a revolt against four decades of Assad family rule that began with peaceful

protests in March 2011 but has become a civil war.

Past peace efforts have floundered, with world powers divided over what has become an increasingly sectarian struggle between mostly Sunni Muslim rebels and Assad's security forces, drawn primarily from his Shi'ite-rooted Alawite minority.

Syrian and Lebanese sources said Makdad had been sent to Moscow to discuss details of a peace plan proposed by Brahimi.

Makdad gave a detailed report to Russian diplomats about efforts to end the conflict and Brahimi's meetings in Damascus, Russia's foreign ministry said.

At a weekly briefing, foreign ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich played down the idea that a specific new proposal agreed by Moscow and Washington was on the table in Moscow talks. "There has not been and is no such plan," he said.

"In our talks with Mr. Brahimi and with our American colleagues, we are trying to feel a way out of this situation on the

basis of our common plan of action that was agreed in Geneva in June," Lukashevich said.

Although the Kremlin has tried to distance itself from Assad, Lukashevich reiterated its stance that Assad's exit from power could not be a precondition for negotiations.

Setting such a condition, he said, would violate the terms of the agreement reached in Geneva on June 30, which called for a transitional government but left Assad's role unclear. The United States said it sent a clear message that he must quit and Moscow said it did nothing of the kind.



Lukashevich said Russia continued to believe there was "no alternative" to the Geneva agreement and repeated

accusations that the United States has reneged on it.

"Our American colleagues and some others ... have turned sharply from this position, by 180 degrees, supporting the opposition and conducting no dialogue with the government - putting the opposition in the mood for no dialogue with the authorities but for overthrowing the authorities," he said.

"The biggest disagreement ... is that one side thinks Assad should leave at the start of the process - that is the U.S. position, and the other thinks his departure should be a result of the process - that would be the Russian position," said Dmitry Trenin, head of the Carnegie Moscow Center think tank.

But Trenin said battlefield gains made by the Syrian rebels were narrowing the gap between Moscow and Washington.

On Saturday, Lavrov said that neither side would win Syria's civil war and that Assad would not quit even if Russia or China told him to. Another Russian official had earlier acknowledged that Syrian rebels might win.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Dec-27/199983-syrian-deputy-fm-muqdad-begins-talks-in-russia.ashx#ixzz2GKofEu34>

- **Syrian opposition says will accept all solutions without Assad**

The Syrian opposition said it supports a process leading to the creation of a transient government on the condition that it will not include Syrian President Bashar Assad as its head.

They also said that they will accept any political solution that does not include the Assad family or those that caused suffering to the Syrian nation. Otherwise, all options are feasible, said the opposition spokesperson

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/9/61393/World/International/Syrian-opposition-says-will-accept-all-solutions-w.aspx>

- **Syrians take refuge in caves to escape shelling by regime forces**

To talk about news of Syria for two years is one thing and to live the harsh reality on the ground is another.

Al Arabiya correspondent Rima Maktabi managed to enter Syrian territories from the Turkish side. From there, she recounted stories of the revolutions and of civilians suffering under the yoke of war.

After waiting for about half an hour, Al Arabiya's team, which included photographer Murad Masarwa, crossed into Syria from Turkey. From there, they went to Teftanz.

"It is a road laden with danger," said Maktabi. "Anything can happen... missiles, rockets, air strikes. The weather is bad, though, and revolutionaries say that when vision is blurred it is very hard to launch air strikes."

Maktabi said mostly revolutionaries should be afraid of air strikes.

On the way, revolutionaries received reports that a car with armed men loyal to the regime is patrolling the area, said

Maktabi. They stop the car and verify its identity, she added.

Al Arabiya's team spent the night in a cave with Syrian civilians who escaped air raids by regime forces, consistently bombarding them. "People sometimes spend one night after another in caves to protect themselves from regime bombings," Maktabi added.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/26/257240.html>

7. ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE GULF OF BASRA

- **U.S. drone strikes go down in Pakistan, up in Yemen**

U.S. drone strikes against Islamist militants decreased in Pakistan's tribal regions for the second year in a row but intensified in Yemen, according to figures compiled by a Washington think tank.

In Pakistan, 46 strikes were carried out in 2012, compared to 72 in 2011 and 122 in 2010, the New America Foundation said, based on its compilation of reports in international media.



But Yemen saw an equally drastic increase in the clandestine attacks, with strikes against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) militants rising from 18 in 2011 to 53 in 2012.

This “drone war” is officially classified, and the U.S. does not provide any information on the strikes.

President Barack Obama, who has increased the use of drones compared to his predecessor, George W. Bush, only incidentally recognized their existence at the end of January in an online exchange.

The vast majority of the strikes in Pakistan hit in North Waziristan, Qaeda's main sanctuary and a stronghold for Afghan and Pakistani Taliban. Many of the strikes were in and around the regional capital, Miranshah.

These strikes, with Reaper or Predator drones, killed between 189 and 308 militants and at least seven civilians, the New America Foundation said.

According to the Afghan spy agency, the operational leader of the Qaeda-linked Haqqani network, Badruddin Haqqani, son of the group's founder, was killed in an August 21 drone strike -- though the death has not been confirmed by other sources.

Meanwhile, in Yemen, between 397 and 539 militants were killed by drone strikes, according to the New America Foundation, which did not specify the number of civilian victims.

Some of the strikes in Yemen were conducted by US airplanes. The drones used there are operated both by the CIA and by the Joint Special Operations Command.

The intelligence agency has its own fleet of 30-35 devices, according to the Washington Post, while the Pentagon can count on 215 Predator and Reaper drones, according to the Congressional Research Service.

Attacks by unmanned US aircraft remain contentious. They are deeply unpopular in Pakistan, which says they violate its sovereignty and fan anti-U.S. sentiment, but American officials are said to believe they are too important to give up.

Casualty figures are difficult to obtain. A report commissioned by legal lobby group Reprieve in September estimated that between 474 to 881 civilians were among 2,562 to 3,325 people killed by drones in Pakistan between June 2004 and September 2012.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/28/257428.html>

- **GCC moves to implement unified military command**

New structure to be umbrella for land, sea and air forces

Manama: Practical measures to activate the unified Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) unified military command endorsed in Bahrain this week are set to be taken soon, a report has indicated.

The measures will be decided by special committees under the umbrella of the

GCC joint defence agreement, Saudi Arabic daily Okaz reported on Thursday.

The setting up of the unified command for the six GCC member states — Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE — was one of the highlights of the 33rd summit held on Monday and Tuesday in Bahrain.

Officials in the Bahraini capital said that the unified command would be an umbrella for the all existing military forces and that it would not replace or minimise the role of the Peninsula Shield, the military arm of the GCC set up in 1984.

The GCC has a naval force in Bahrain, a land force in Saudi Arabia and an aerial force and the unified command will be the umbrella for all of them, the Saudi daily said.

The Joint Defence Agreement was signed by the GCC leaders at their summit in Manama in 2000.

The Arab Gulf states have been pushing for better and more coordinated joint military defence efforts amid reports of

higher threats and security challenges in the region.

A common security pact was also endorsed at the Bahrain summit this week following amendments to some of its clauses “to bring them in line with requests by some member countries.”

The security agreement reportedly aims to increase Gulf capabilities in the global combat against terrorism risks and threats.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/gcc-moves-to-implement-unified-military-command-1.1124388>

- **Controversy over Saudi children’s channel deepens**

Religious figure threatens to boycott companies advertising on channel with ‘controversial’ content

Manama: A controversy over the call by a Saudi religious man to boycott a children’s television channel over its content has deepened after a prominent media figure joined in the blogosphere dispute.

This week, Shaikh Mohammad Al Arifi lambasted the Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC)’s children entertainment channel MBC3, saying that it broadcast scenes that contained atheism and corruption.

Parents should take care of their children and remove the channel from their homes, Al Arifi, no stranger to controversy, advised on his Twitter account.

The religious figure added that he would boycott all companies and products that advertised on the channel.

However, the channel hit back on Tuesday and charged Al Arifi of posting claims that were “tendentious and remotely detached from reality altogether”.

“Most of those in charge of the channel’s programmes are mothers and experts keen on what their children watch as they are with all children of all ages,” the channel said. “We produce and broadcast a varied host of programmes that highlight the significance of stimulating the potential of young people and of investing in the next generations.”

Hitting back

The channel doubted Al Arifi's right to assess its programmes.

"Isn't he the same person who said that a girl should not remain alone with her father to avoid the possibility that he might develop a sexual tendency towards her?" The channel asked in its statement.

However, on Wednesday, Prince Abdul Aziz Bin Fahad Al Saud, a shareholder in the group, said that he supported Al Arifi and that he had unsuccessfully tried to introduce changes into the channel, local Arabic news site Sabq reported.

"I have grown tired with the current situation and I am concerned about stubbornness," he posted on his Twitter account. "I am trying to work out a solution with some partners that includes setting up a panel for reforms," Prince Abdul Aziz, the son of the late King Fahad, posted.

Most of Sabq online comments sided with Al Arifi and Prince Abdul Aziz, using religion to support their views. In August,

Shaikh Mohammad Saleh Al Minjad, another religious figure, said that parents who allowed their children to watch MBC3 were "committing a sin".

MBC3, part of the MBC Group, broadcasts a mixture of children's education and entertainment programmes.

The MBC group has four TV channels that operate as MBC 1, 2, 3, 4 and several radio stations.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/controversy-over-saudi-children-s-channel-deepens-1.1124566>

- **Kuwait 'used excessive force' in protests — HRW**

Declaring a protest unauthorised does not give the government a right to beat protesters, says official

Kuwait: Kuwaiti security forces appear to have used excessive force to disperse several largely peaceful street protests since October, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said on Thursday, citing activists, protesters and witnesses.

Tens of thousands of Kuwaitis have taken to the streets over the past two months to protest changes to voting rules used in a parliamentary election on December 1 that they said would skew the outcome in favour of pro-government candidates.

The Interior Ministry justified the use of force on the grounds that protesters had blocked traffic, thrown stones at the police, and attacked them, HRW said. But participants said the demonstrations were largely peaceful.

“They said that masked riot police used tear gas and sound bombs without warning to disperse demonstrations and beat protesters while arresting them for participating in ‘unauthorised protests,’” the New York-based rights group said.

Kuwait’s Information Ministry, in reaction to the HRW statement, said authorities were required to maintain law and order when illegal marches and demonstrations took place.

“Kuwait has witnessed several protests in 2012 where streets were blocked and riots took place at residential areas which

endangered civilians and public properties,” the ministry said.

“The right to protest is enshrined in our constitution. However, protesters should be aware of both their rights and responsibilities under the law.”

Although Kuwait, an OPEC member state and ally of the US, tolerates more dissent than other Gulf Arab countries, it has been enforcing a ban on public gatherings of more than 20 people without a permit.

“Kuwait’s rulers need to fully respect the right to assemble peacefully,” Eric Goldstein, deputy Middle East director at HRW said in the statement issued from Beirut. “Declaring a gathering ‘unauthorised’ does not give police license to beat protesters.”

Kuwaiti protesters have been less radical in their demands than demonstrators in other Arab countries, calling for the reinstatement of the old voting system, action against corruption and for an elected government rather than one appointed by the prime minister, who is chosen by the emir.

“The authorities should show they will not tolerate abuses by investigating all allegations of abuse by security forces and punishing those responsible for violating rights,” Goldstein said. HRW also said Kuwait should increase the accountability of police by ending the use of masked anti-riot officers.

“While police agents may have legitimate reasons to mask their identities in limited circumstances, such as when conducting surveillance, policing demonstrations is not one of them.”

Emir Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah, who used emergency powers to change the voting system, said on December 16 he supported freedom of expression and constructive criticism, but recent events had shown “aspects of chaos, breaching of the law and unguided political discourse”.

The momentum of the protests has slowed since the election, with the last rally on December 15 drawing several hundreds of people.

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/kuwait-used-excessive-force-in-protests-hrw-1.1124697>

8. AFGHANISTAN - PAKISTAN

• Taliban militants kill four policemen in southern Afghanistan

Press TV

December 27, 2012

Four Afghan policemen have been killed and four others injured in an attack carried out by Taliban militants in Afghanistan’s southern province of Uruzgan, Press TV reports.

The attack occurred on Wednesday night when assailants, helped by a policeman loyal to the Taliban, stormed a police station in the provincial capital of Trin Kot, a police official said.

Another security source added that the Taliban infiltrator had contributed to the attack while the other policemen were asleep and had fled with the militants.

Abdullah Hemat, a spokesman for the Uruzgan provincial government, confirmed the incident, adding that one gunman had been arrested after being injured during the fighting that followed the attack.

The Taliban militants have not yet claimed responsibility for the attack.

Since the start of 2012, Afghanistan has witnessed a surge in insider attacks, with more than 60 US-led foreign forces and dozens of local soldiers killed by their colleagues.

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 rages on across the country.

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

- **US-led troopers killed, injured in IED attack in Afghanistan: Taliban**

Press TV
December 27, 2012

Two US-led troopers have been killed in an improvised explosive device (IED) attack in Afghanistan's southeastern province of Logar, the Taliban militant group says.

The militants said three foreign soldiers were also injured in the attack on Thursday.

The nationality of the dead soldiers was not declared, and The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has made no comments on the incident.

The Taliban militants mostly use IEDs, including roadside bombs, against Afghan forces, foreign soldiers, and civilians.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001 under the pretext of combating terrorism. The invasion removed the Taliban from power, but insecurity remains across the country despite the presence of thousands of US-led forces.

According to statistics released by the website icasualties.org prior to the Thursday attack, 398 US-led troops have lost their lives in Afghanistan so far in 2012, with 309 of them Americans.

The escalating human cost of the war in Afghanistan is putting a great deal of pressure on NATO member states to withdraw their troops.

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

- **Taliban kill two, kidnap 22 security personnel in NW Pakistan**

Press TV

December 27, 2012

Taliban militants have killed two security personnel and abducted 22 others in an attack on two government paramilitary camps in northwestern Pakistan.

The incident occurred on Thursday when nearly 200 heavily-armed militants stormed the camps, which lie a few kilometers away in a mountainous area outside Peshawar.

A security official also confirmed 22 members of the security personnel were missing from the Kohi Hasankhel and Jona Khawar camps following the one-hour gun battle.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attacks which took place near Pakistan's troubled tribal areas bordering Afghanistan.

Pakistan's northwest has been the scene of intensifying militant attacks over the past months.

The latest instance of major attacks on government troops was in Bajaur tribal district in August, when militants beheaded 15 troops that they had kidnapped during an overnight fighting.

Pakistan has experienced unrelenting bombings and other militant attacks since 2001, after Islamabad joined an alliance with Washington in the so-called war on terror.

Thousands of people have also been displaced by the wave of violence in Pakistan since late 2009.

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

- **Pakistan rejects Taliban truce offer**

ISLAMABAD, Dec. 27 (Xinhua) -- Pakistan on Thursday rejected as unacceptable a conditional truce offer by the Taliban and said the armed militant groups cannot dictate the state, local media reported.

Local media reported that the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan or the TTP has hinted at a cease-fire with the Pakistani government on condition that Pakistan should end participation in the Afghan war, reshape the foreign policy and the country's Constitution in accordance to the Islamic Sharia.

Geo TV reported that a TTP leader Ismatullah Muavia in a letter to its anchor offered the truce.

Pakistan's Interior Minister Rehman Malik on Thursday dismissed the offer and said the Taliban's offer of conditional respite is unacceptable.

"Taliban leader Ismatullah Muavia through his offer of conditional truce has tried to dictate the government, which is totally unacceptable," Malik said to media at Sukkhar airport in Sindh province.

He stated that Muavia was a member of the banned extremist group 'Lashkar-e-Jhangvi,' which is behind series of attacks on security forces and Shiite Muslims.

Malik said the TTP is facing rift and that is why the offer for a truce came from a TTP

leader and not directly from its chief, Hakimullah Mehsud.

He again asked the Afghan government to hand over a Pakistani Taliban leader, Maulvi Fazalullah, who he said is hiding in the border regions of Afghanistan.

In reply to a question, he said no foreign hand is behind all the terrorist activities taking place within the country but Pakistani militants are to be blamed for the attacks.

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

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



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